John Ledyard was Dartmouth's first legendary student. He probably traveled farther around the Earth by sea and foot than anyone of that time. His college career lasted less than a year and was a rebellious one at that. He criticized the College's limited academic offerings and discipline before the "Dartmouth Boy" disappeared down the Connecticut River in the spring of 1773 in his fifty-foot-sloop, three-foot-wide dugout canoe. In a parting letter to President Whipple, he bid farewell, dear Dartmouth, may you flourish like the greenbriar tree.

In 1776 Ledyard joined Captain Cook's last voyage and by 1780 he reached unseen places from the Canary Islands to Tasmania, Whitsly, the Bering Sea, the eastern coast of Siberia, and China. During this voyage, Ledyard may have been the first U.S. citizen to reach the west coast of North America.

Ledyard was an entrepreneur, impressed with the wealth of the Pacific fur trade he saw during his voyage with Cook. He was called to Europe to make his fortune, but his journey took a turn with the aid of the U.S. Ambassador to France, Thomas Jefferson. Together they hatched plans for the first North American crossing. Ledyard joyfully set sail in the winter of 1786 to head east through Siberia to catch a Russian ship across the North Pacific to Alaska, and then on to the start of his grand trek across North America. Starting in Sweden, he made it to St. Petersburg and then across most of Russia to Yakutsk, deep in the frozen Siberian wilderness. Before he could continue, Empress Catherine the Great had him arrested as a spy and deported to Poland.

Reaching London, Ledyard was soon hired by Sir Joseph Banks to explore overland routes from Alexandria to the Nile, but he died from illness at the age of forty-eight on January 18, 1789, in Cairo, Egypt.

Today's Dartmouth students "heading to the sea," hiking with the Dartmouth Otting Club, or exploring the wilds, 22 members of the Ledyard Canoe Club are forever indebted to John Ledyard, "Dartmouth Boy" and Dartmouth Legend.