

The Lowells of Boston and the Founding of University Extension at Harvard

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Since this year marks the centennial of University Extension at Harvard, as dean I thought this was an opportune time, after years of extensive research, to document how this unique educational institution came into being and why it became associated with Harvard University. I began my research on this subject more than a quarter century ago, when John Lowell, trustee of the Lowell Institute, kindly gave me permission to have access to the Lowell Institute archives housed in the Boston Athenaeum. In the past year, mindful of the approaching centennial, I set to work diligently on the manuscript of the history that was published recently as *"The Gates Unbarred": A History of University Extension at Harvard, 1910-2009*.

The title of the history, *"The Gates Unbarred,"* derives from Seamus Heaney's memorable "Villanelle for an Anniversary," which he composed to celebrate the sesquicentennial of Harvard University in the fall of 1986. The final stanza reads:

Begin again where frost and tests were hard.
Find yourself or founder. Here. Imagine
A spirit moves, John Harvard walks the yard,
The books stand open and the gates unbarred.

I had initially planned to title my history *Harvard After Dark*, with perhaps an appropriately suggestive and lurid cover to make the book a sensational and scandalous best seller, but, happily, my Extension School

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senior colleagues dissuaded me from my fantasy and I settled on “*The Gates Unbarred*” as the distinctive feature of the ready access to Harvard Yard by the community as characteristic of our remarkable evening academic program. Moreover, my former Harvard English Department friend and colleague Seamus Heaney gave his blessing to my use of his poem in the Harvard Extension School history.

The Lowell family has played a prominent role in the history of Boston, and they are often regarded as synonymous with the phrase “Boston Brahmin,” a term coined, incidentally, by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., who in 1860 wrote an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine on “The Brahmin Caste of New England” to characterize the region’s social and cultural elite whose sons attended Harvard. Soon Boston Brahmin gained currency as a shorthand expression for Yankee families of great wealth and prestige, if not also social exclusivity, as in the popular poem by John Collins Bossidy “A Boston Toast”:

And this is good old Boston,
The home of the bean and the cod,
Where the Lowells talk only to the Cabots
And the Cabots talk only to God.

In his *Atlantic Monthly* article, Dr. Holmes defined “the Brahmin caste of New England” as an “aristocracy” that “by the repetition of the same influences, generation after generation, has acquired a distinct organization and physiognomy.”

In tracing the origin of University Extension at Harvard, one ultimately is led to John Lowell, Jr., who was born to Francis Cabot Lowell and Hannah Jackson in 1799 in Boston. John, Jr., as he was called, had been named for his grandfather, the patriarch John Lowell (1743-1802) who had married Susanna Cabot (1754-1777). His father, Francis Cabot Lowell, had graduated from Harvard College in 1793 and at the age of 36 traveled to England for several years to study first hand the textile industry and to memorize, clandestinely, the details of the British power looms. He returned to Boston in 1813 and soon established in Waltham the first textile mill in the United States that combined all the operations of converting raw cotton into finished cloth in one mill building, a revolutionary process of technology that became a prototype of the American factory system and soon made a vast fortune for the Lowells, including the naming of the city of Lowell in their honor.

Like the Lowell men before him and after him, John, Jr. matriculated at Harvard, but poor health and depression forced him to leave Harvard after two years. His inheritance from his father enabled Lowell to become a merchant and he soon made his own fortune in the textile industry. He married a cousin, Georgina Amory, when he was 25, and he had two daughters. His happiness was blighted in 1830 when his wife died of scarlet fever and within two years his daughters, aged five and two, also died.

Despite the demands of his business and the domestic tragedies he endured, John Lowell, Jr. was infused, like his fellow Boston Brahmins, with a sense of *noblesse oblige*. He was a founding member of the Boston Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1830, an initiative in adult education that had Daniel Webster as its first president.

In 1833 John Lowell, Jr. made his cousin and best friend, John Amory Lowell, executor of his estate and trustee of his businesses as he set sail from New York on a trip around the world to recover from his family tragedy. Before setting sail, however, he drafted a will that in the event of his death, one half of his estate be given to the Boston Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to subsidize their public lectures for the benefit of the citizens of Boston.

John Lowell kept a detailed journal during his world tour and he also hired a Swiss artist, Charles Gabriel Gleyre, to accompany him and to record highlights of their travels by his sketches, water colors, and oils. On the first of April 1835, Lowell was ill with fever and in a weakened condition when he sat on the ruins of a palace on the banks of the Nile River in Luxor, Egypt, to write at length to his cousin John Amory Lowell his revised will that would become the endowment for the Lowell Institute of Boston.

He stipulated in his detailed will that half of his wealth be put in trust so that the income be used for the following:

The maintenance and support of Public Lectures to be delivered in said Boston upon philosophy, natural history, and the arts and sciences ... for the promotion of the moral and intellectual and physical instruction or education of the citizens of the said city of Boston. ... It is also provided that the said trustee or trustees shall appoint the persons by whom and the subjects on which the said lectures shall be delivered.

In drafting his final will Lowell was influenced by his membership in the Boston Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge five years earlier, and

he wanted the public lecture courses to be free for those of meager means and of minimal expense (“the value of two bushels of wheat”) to those who could afford it for the “abstruse” or “erudite” longer courses.

“On the appointment and duties of the trustee,” he was concerned that there be an established line of succession, so that “each trustee shall appoint his own successor within a week after his accession to his office,” and “in selecting a successor the trustee shall always choose in preference to all others, some male descendant of my Grandfather John Lowell.” The income of the trust would provide the trustee with a “reasonable sum” as compensation “to be paid annually” as approved “by the trustees of the Boston Athenaeum,” and the trustee would keep a complete record of lecturers, subjects taught, salaries paid, and other activities connected with the trust and deliver it on the first day of January to the trustees of the Boston Athenaeum.

What was truly remarkable about John Lowell, Jr.’s final will was the clarity of his vision in establishing the trust with half of his estate and the detailed blueprint he drew for the lecturers, the subjects of the lectures, the role of the trustee, and the dedication to promoting “the prosperity of [his] native land, New England” through public education. Although in ill health and depressed, he could sit in the Palace of Luxor and envision how his benefactions would have an enduring effect on the life of Boston. Toward the end of his will he wrote:

The trustee shall require of every person attending the lectures to be neatly dressed and of an orderly behavior. The popular courses always, and the others when practicable, are designed for females as well as males.

In an age when women were denied educational opportunities, John Lowell, Jr., on the banks of the Nile River in 1835, made certain that they were included in his prescient vision of adult education in the city of Boston.

After drafting his historic last will and testament, and mailing it off to his cousin John Amory Lowell, John Lowell, Jr. would have less than a year to live. His travels eventually took him to India, but he was fatally ill when his British steamer landed in Bombay on February 10, 1836. He died within three weeks of reaching shore on March 4, but news of his death did not reach the Lowell family in Boston until July. He died just two months shy of his thirty-seventh birthday, yet his letter establishing a lecture series in perpetuity for the citizens of Boston assured him a measure of immortality.

According to John Lowell, Jr.'s eulogist, Edward Everett, in a speech delivered at the official inauguration of the Lowell Institute at the Odeon on December 31, 1839, the munificent sum of \$250,000 "generously set apart by him for this purpose ... is, with the exception of the bequest of the late Mr. Girard of Philadelphia, the largest, if I mistake not, which has ever been appropriated in this country, by a private individual, for the endowment of any literary institution."

The first trustee of the Lowell Institute, John Amory Lowell, was something of a prodigy, entering Harvard College in 1811 at the age of 13 and spending his freshman year rooming in the home of President Kirkland, with Edward Everett as his tutor. Everett would go on to become governor of Massachusetts and eventually president of Harvard (1846–49). Lowell's sophomore roommate was John P. Bigelow, later to become mayor of Boston. After graduating from Harvard, Lowell became a highly successful businessman, establishing a reputation as a banker, treasurer of several cotton mills, a member of the Harvard Corporation, and, of course, the first trustee of the Lowell Institute.

After settling the estate of John Lowell, Jr., John Amory Lowell had a quarter of a million dollars for the Lowell Institute, which provided him with an annual budget of \$18,000. In 1840, the first full year of operation, the Lowell Institute sponsored three public lecture series on science and on religion. The public interest in these initial lecture series is evident from the following contemporary account of one of the lecturers:

So great was his popularity, that on the giving out of tickets for his second course, on chemistry, the following season, the eager crowd filled adjacent streets and crushed in the windows of the "Old Corner Book Store," the place of distribution, so that provision for this had to be made elsewhere. To such a degree did the enthusiasm of the public reach at that time in its desire to attend these lectures, that it was found necessary to open books in advance to serve the names of subscribers, the number of tickets being distributed by lot. Sometimes the number of applicants for a single course was eight to ten thousand.

The lectures were presented at the Odeon until 1846, when they migrated to the Tremont Temple, then to Marlboro Chapel, and eventually to Huntington Hall at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Lowell Institute had established a remarkable record of providing educational opportunities for an eager public in Greater Boston: more than 430 lecture series or 4,400 free lectures on science, religion, literature, and art by the leading authorities in these fields. The list of lecturers reads like a *Who's Who*, with names like Charles Lyell in geology, Henry Adams and Jared Sparks in American history, Asa Gray in botany, Mark Hopkins in religion, Louis Agassiz in the sciences, Cornelius C. Felton in classical civilization, William Dean Howells and James Russell Lowell in literature, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. in medicine, William James in psychology, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and A. Lawrence Lowell in government.

When Harriette Knight Smith was preparing her *History of the Lowell Institute* at the end of the nineteenth century, she asked Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, shortly before his death, "How do you estimate the influence which the Lowell Institute has had upon the intellectual life of the country?" He replied, "When you have said every enthusiastic thing that you may, you will not have half filled the measure of its importance to Boston—New England—the country at large." He concluded, "No nobler or more helpful institution exists in America than Boston's Lowell Institute."

John Amory Lowell died November 13, 1881, but before his death he received many honors for his distinguished career, including an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Harvard University, election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, presidency of the Boston Athenaeum, and major roles in the administration of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Massachusetts Historical Society. But the service that was closest to his heart, and that he discharged with dedication and determination, was his historic role as the first trustee of the Lowell Institute for 42 eventful and productive years.

Augustus Lowell became trustee of the Lowell Institute upon his father's death. He had attended Boston Latin School and Harvard College but was an indifferent student. He did excel, however, in business, directing banks and heading cotton textile companies to create a family fortune far in excess of his father's. Unlike his father and several generations of Lowells before him, Augustus did not become a member of the Harvard Corporation; he became a member of the MIT Corporation in 1873 and served faithfully in that capacity for nearly 25 years.

As the second trustee of the Lowell Institute, Augustus Lowell continued the practice established by his father of selecting the ablest Lowell

lecturers he could find. He was not constrained by family modesty, however, to invite his two sons to deliver series of lectures: Percival Lowell, an astronomer and the eldest, in 1894 gave six lectures in a series titled "Japanese Occultism," and in 1895 another series, "The Planet Mars." Abbott Lawrence Lowell, a lecturer in the department of government at Harvard, gave a course of lectures titled "The Governments of Central Europe." In choosing his successor, Augustus sensed that Percival would be too involved in his scientific work to serve effectively as trustee, and he accordingly decided that his second son, a lawyer and an academic, would be the more appropriate choice, a decision he set down in writing as early as 1881.

Augustus Lowell served ably as the second trustee for 19 years, acting as a transitional figure between John Amory Lowell and A. Lawrence Lowell. His great success lay in the world of business where he was able to amass a vast fortune estimated at seven times the worth of his father's. He had five children, two sons and three daughters. He impressed upon his sons a Boston Brahmin sense of *noblesse oblige*. They were independently wealthy, he informed them, and therefore they "must work at something that is worthwhile, and do it very hard," as Lawrence Lowell later recalled. Augustus Lowell's youngest daughter, Amy, was to achieve national recognition as a poet and critic, matching the eminence of her two brothers. Augustus Lowell's success as a paterfamilias complemented his success in business. The early success of MIT owed much to the vision, money, and administrative acumen of Augustus Lowell as well.

In 1900 Augustus Lowell died and his son Lawrence succeeded him as the third trustee of the Lowell Institute at the age of forty-four. He had graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Law School before embarking on his legal practice, but eventually he shifted his interest to the study of government and began writing books on the subject: *Essays on Government* (1889), and *Governments and Parties of Continental Europe* (1896). His writings attracted the attention of President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, and in 1900 he extended to Lowell an appointment as professor of the science of government. Lowell abandoned his law career and devoted himself to his academic career, teaching *Government 1* to hundreds of Harvard students and writing *The Government of England*, which established his reputation as a scholar.

Well before he became president of Harvard, Lowell's annual reports on behalf of the Lowell Institute reveal his evolving vision for "University Extension." In his annual report for 1906-07 he stated:

I am also planning to give, in co-operation with Harvard University, a number of systematic courses on subjects of liberal education. . . . The plans for these are not complete, and it may not be possible to begin next year; but if they do succeed they will open a new avenue of usefulness of the kind intended by John Lowell, Jr., whose plan was really what is now known as University Extension.

This plan so intrigued Lowell that he succeeded in implementing it on schedule. His annual report for the following year, in 1907-08, revealed that he managed to persuade some Harvard senior faculty colleagues to teach their regular courses again in the evening for the Lowell Institute:

The plan of conducting, in cooperation with Harvard University, a somewhat new kind of University Extension, was put into operation last year. The plan consists of giving as far as possible to the public, without charge, some of the general courses given at Harvard, especially those open to freshmen. During the past year the general course in History, known as History I in the college, was given this way; and a course in English Literature and Composition corresponding in part to different courses in college was given the same way. In both of them there were two lectures a week. The class being divided into sections which met an instructor for a third hour each week. All the persons who applied for the Literature courses could not be admitted because the largest lecture hall in the Medical School can seat only three hundred persons.

The experiment will be an interesting one, although it may be too early as yet to predict its value to the community.

Lowell's "experiment" was received with unprecedented enthusiasm by the community, for the collegiate courses sponsored by the Lowell Institute in cooperation with Harvard University were attracting record enrollments, as Lowell noted in his annual report.

Much of the popularity of the Lowell Institute collegiate courses was owing to a combination of the outstanding quality of the Harvard faculty members and the inherent interest in their subject matter. In his annual report for 1908-09, Lowell listed the following faculty, topics, and enrollments for the collegiate courses offered:

Charles T. Copeland's course in *English Literature and Composition* registered 790; 150 received certificates.

Josiah Royce's course *General Problems in Philosophy* registered 300; 58 received certificates.

A. Lawrence Lowell's course *Modern Constitutional Government* registered 152; 33 received certificates.

George Palmer's *History of Ancient Philosophy* course registered 372; 89 received certificates.

According to the account of one student, described as "a well known president of a representative women's club" in Boston, that was printed in the Boston Evening Transcript on June 15, 1910, we have a first-hand report on the diverse and highly motivated students eager to learn from Professor George Herbert Palmer of the Harvard philosophy department:

At the stroke of eight every lecture evening notebooks were spread and until nine o'clock not a glance wandered to the clock nor was there any sign of wavering interest. The students were all voluntary seekers of knowledge who elected philosophy as an aid in constructive thinking. Young and old, black and white, artisans and teachers, men and women—who had questioned the meaning of life, and the universe, were eager to compare their thoughts with the questioners of all time. It was an audience to challenge any professor's attention and respect, as it did that of Professor Palmer.

The appeal of teaching such a mixed, mature, and motivated student population was obviously instrumental in attracting leading members of the Harvard faculty, first to the collegiate courses and soon after to the regular courses offered by the Commission on Extension Courses.

Impressive as Palmer was in teaching ancient philosophy, and as solid as Royce and Lowell himself were in teaching moral philosophy and government, respectively, the star platform performer clearly was Copeland, who in time would become the legendary "Copey of Harvard." In 1905 he began teaching *English 12* in Harvard College and soon it became the most famous writing course in the country, boasting among its students such eminent writers as T. S. Eliot, Robert Benchley, Walter Lippmann, Conrad Aiken, John Dos Passos, Brooks Atkinson, and John Reed. On January 17,

1927, he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and became a national figure whose reputation rested solely on his prowess as a teacher and public reader. His classes in University Extension—and at Harvard Summer School, as at Harvard College—were invariably among the most heavily subscribed and the most memorable for students of all ages. Copey loved a large and appreciative audience, which helped to explain why he regularly taught Extension courses at Harvard. He retired from Harvard in 1932 as the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory.

On October 26, 1908, President Eliot of Harvard submitted his resignation, and it was agreed that it take effect on May 9, 1909, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of his election to the office. The choice of a successor to Eliot proved an easy matter, as A. Lawrence Lowell was elected by the Harvard Corporation on January 13, 1909, and confirmed by the Board of Overseers. Lowell's interest in education stemmed from his duties as trustee of the Lowell Institute on the one hand, and from his commitment to Harvard as a professor of the science of government and as an appointed member of academic committees on the other. In being called to the presidency of Harvard he was in a position of leadership to effect his plans for educational reform.

When A. Lawrence Lowell became president of Harvard University in May 1909, he was 52 years old and for nearly a decade had managed the affairs of the Lowell Institute. He resolved to retain his role of trustee, but he wisely delegated the task of overseeing the endowment of the Lowell Institute to Augustus P. Loring, as he recorded in his report of July 1909 to the Boston Athenaeum. In his dual role he could use the resources of the Lowell Institute and of Harvard University to envision an expanded role for popular and adult education for the citizens of Boston.

As his early annual reports as president of Harvard reveal, his first major undertaking, before embarking on the ambitious program for reforming undergraduate education at Harvard College, was to put into effect his already formulated scheme from the Lowell Institute for a program of University Extension. In his first annual report as president he considered it noteworthy to write:

As the various directions in which the University extends its instruction to persons not enrolled among its regular students have not, apart from the Summer School, fallen within the province of any single department in the University, it may be well to refer to them here. They are, in fact, more numerous than is commonly supposed.

Lowell then proceeded to describe the range and variety of these educational efforts at Harvard, including one in particular:

The Lowell Institute Collegiate Courses mark an interesting experiment, that of substantially repeating for the benefit of the public courses given to students in college, under conditions which require the same amount of work and the same examinations.

The public demand and potential for popular education had impressed Lowell both in his role as trustee of the Lowell Institute and in his personal experience the preceding year in teaching the collegiate course *Modern Constitutional Government* to more than 150 adult men and women. He now sought to set forth in his annual report the sort of systematic instruction that was essential to meet the needs of the adult community:

The time when the public can gain a great deal from mere lectures is passing away, and it would seem to be important that any popular education at the present day should be systematic—as carefully organized and as thoroughly tested as instruction given in the University itself. What is needed now is not so much stimulation of popular interest in intellectual affairs, as well-ordered instruction, with a rigorous training of the mind; and the experiment of these Collegiate Courses would appear to show that there are many people in our community, who have not been to college, but who have the desire and the aptitude to profit by so much of a college education as, amid the work of earning their living, they are able to obtain.

It would seem to be the duty of every institution of learning in this country to use its resources for the benefit of the surrounding community, so far as that can be done without impairing its more immediate work; but in doing this the institutions in the neighborhood ought by cooperation to avoid waste of effort. If all the universities and colleges in the vicinity of Boston would combine on a common plan to provide systematic popular education the aggregate amount of instruction offered might be very large without over-burdening any one of them. Since the time covered by this report a conference looking to that end has held several meetings, and is preparing plans for systematic cooperation of a most useful kind.

The *pro bono publico* spirit of popular education articulated by Lowell indicated that he believed part of his mission as an educator was to make available the resources of Harvard for the benefit of Boston just as the Lowell Institute, founded by his ancestor, had been doing for more than 70 years.

As President Lowell settled into his new office and his new role of leadership, he continued to conduct the affairs of the Lowell Institute. But as his annual reports for both institutions in 1909-10 clearly show, the symbiosis of the two posts in furthering his designs for University Extension was ideal. In his annual report for the Lowell Institute he noted that the collegiate courses, "conducted in co-operation with Harvard University," included Charles Townsend Copeland's *Lives, Characters, and Times of Men of Letters, English and American*; Arthur Bushnell Hart's *Constitutional and Political History of the United States, 1789-1895*; and Charles J. Bullock's *Public Finance*. But the popularity of the collegiate courses only convinced Lowell that a more comprehensive and systematic scheme would do the work required, and he accordingly arranged for meetings with the heads of the other major institutions of higher education in Greater Boston to create a consortium.

In his Lowell Institute report he recorded:

A plan was agreed upon whereby Harvard University, Boston University, Boston College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Simmons College, Tufts College, Wellesley College, and the Museum of Fine Arts should offer courses under the control of a joint committee that should provide a program each year, affording large opportunities for popular education without excessive burden on any one of the institutions. The Collegiate Courses, hitherto given by the Lowell Institute ... are incorporated in the plan. [The consortium has] established a combined system of University Extension on a considerable scale, while the standard is maintained by the fact that the courses must be approved by the joint committee, and count towards a university degree. For this purpose Harvard, Tufts, and Wellesley have agreed to give a new degree of Associate in Arts, which will require no entrance examination, and no college residence, but of which the requirements will be substantially equivalent to the bachelor's degree

This provision will put a college degree within the reach of school teachers to whom it opens a chance of promotion in their profession, and to everyone who attends the courses it means an inducement to follow a more systematic plan of study.

Whereas the Lowell Institute had for years only provided series of lectures for the public on assorted topics, now it had aligned itself with Boston's foremost institutions to provide courses leading to a college degree that was "substantially equivalent" to a bachelor's degree from Harvard or Tufts or Wellesley. Lowell saw this "new plan" as a conscious attempt to "carry out more completely than ever the idea of John Lowell, Jr."

The authorities of Harvard University, Tufts College, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston College, Boston University, the Museum of Fine Arts, Wellesley College, and Simmons College had now completed their plans for University Extension courses in Boston for the year 1910-11. The courses were designed to benefit students who could not attend college and corresponded as closely as possible with courses regularly given in the various institutions involved. They were conducted in the same manner and those taking a course were required to do the same amount of work required of a regular college student. One great advantage was that the courses were to be given by regular professors and instructors of the various institutions interested and no instructors were employed who were not thoroughly competent teachers.

In his second annual report as president (1909-10), Lowell regarded the developments in University Extension of sufficient significance to the Harvard community that he devoted a considerable portion of his text to that topic and readers were referred to a report of "the new Dean for University Extension," which became a regular feature of annual reports from that year forward. Unlike his annual report for 1909-10 for the Lowell Institute, President Lowell seized this occasion to distinguish between the traditional curriculum at Harvard, which offered many regular courses of instruction for undergraduates and graduate students, and the nontraditional curriculum of popular education, which was perforce more limited because "there are no highly advanced students in specialized fields," and since Extension students "are almost always hard at work" and not in residence, "they can take only one or two courses at a time." Therefore, it was important to the Extension curriculum that courses not necessarily be numerous, "but that they should be of the best quality and should change a good deal from year to year."

Lowell consistently stressed the need for quality in Extension courses and thought this could best be guaranteed if each of the leading institutions in Greater Boston was persuaded to join in a common effort to provide such instruction. The formation of a "permanent Commission on Extension Courses," with representatives from these institutions under the administrative control of Harvard, was the solution Lowell sought and succeeded in creating in January 1910:

The Commission arranges with instructors in these institutions for courses which are equivalent to, and usually identical with, courses offered to their own students, and which are followed by examinations of the same character and standard.

These courses, according to Lowell, were to be supported in part by low tuition fees paid by the students and in part by subventions from the Lowell Institute and from the Boston Chamber of Commerce.

To ensure the success of this venture, President Lowell appointed James Hardy Ropes '89, Hollis Professor of Divinity, as the first dean of University Extension, and created an administrative board for University Extension with the new dean as its chairman. As Lowell observed:

The existence of a Dean and Administrative Board lends dignity and stability to the work, and promotes permanence and the maintenance of a high standard both for the winter courses and the Summer School.

Dean Ropes would assume administrative control over University Extension, the Summer School, and Special Students at Harvard.

Lowell realized that the Extension courses fell under the purview of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and since these courses could be counted toward a Harvard or Radcliffe degree, he felt he needed to distinguish between the regular Harvard and Radcliffe Bachelor of Arts and the new Extension degree of Associate in Arts, the only difference being the absence of a residence requirement or an entrance examination. He wanted the new degree to be of comparable quality:

The new degree will be obtained chiefly by school teachers and is of interest mainly to them. It is of consequence for them, because in some of the large cities study that counts towards a college degree is demanded for any promotion, and the attainment of such a degree is a prerequisite for teaching in high schools. Now the degree

of Associate of Arts, which suffices for admission to our Graduate School, has been accepted by the School Board of Boston for both of these purposes, and hence fulfills the objects that the teachers have in view. No doubt the degree will be attained from Harvard by few men, and probably not by many women from Radcliffe, but that is no measure of its importance, and still less of the value of the extension courses to the great numbers of people who take less than seventeen of them. The very fact that they count for a degree lays on the Faculty a responsibility, and furnishes to the public a guarantee, that their standard shall be maintained.

In his annual report to the Boston Athenaeum in 1911, he reinterpreted the will of John Lowell, Jr. to conform to his own vision:

John Lowell, Jr. was ahead of his day. His conception was what would now be called University Extension. He intended the lecturers to teach throughout the year, giving one popular and one advanced course But he failed to perceive that University Extension can hardly be successful without a connection with a large institution of higher learning; and in fact it had been found from the outset impossible to offer the advanced instruction he directed without some connection of that kind.

The effect of the newly established Commission on Extension Courses in the Harvard and Boston communities was reflected in the press. In March, 1910, the *Harvard Bulletin* applauded this cooperative venture in university extension as "of great importance," concluding that the "association ... of the various colleges and universities in this vicinity shows that they are rivals only in the sense that each is trying to do all it can for the benefit of the public."

The next few years saw a gradual increase in the number of courses offered from the original sixteen in 1910-11 to twenty in 1912-13 and twenty-four in 1915-16. Although each member institution in the commission was represented by its faculty, Harvard contributed by far the most instructors each year, with names like Copeland, Greenough, and Osterhout being complemented in these early years by George Pierce Baker in dramatic literature, George Howard Parker in zoology, and Josiah Royce in philosophy. In the year 1912-13, for example, nearly half the courses were taught by Harvard faculty, as more than a thousand students enrolled.

From 1910 to the present, University Extension at Harvard has provided collegiate or graduate instruction to an estimated half-million women and men, and nearly 13,000 have graduated and become alumni and alumnae of the university. Yet, paradoxically, the historians of Harvard in the twentieth century have totally overlooked the role of President Lowell in founding University Extension at Harvard in the first place and they have also neglected to mention the significance of University Extension in the evolution of Harvard University in its century of service.

For example, when I consulted Samuel Eliot Morison's official history of 1936, *Three Centuries of Harvard*, I found no mention of University Extension or the Commission on Extension Courses in his chapter "The Lowell Administration," even though President Lowell established both entities in his first year, 1909-10. Similarly, in 1948 Lowell's official biographer, Henry A. Yeomans, to whom he left his papers, produced a 550-page opus titled *Abbott Lawrence Lowell* that discussed in detail Lowell's great educational reforms: the undergraduate concentration and distribution system, the tutorial system, the reading period (self-education), the undergraduate House system, and the Society of Fellows, but, surprisingly, there was no mention or discussion of Lowell's major role in the creation of the Commission on Extension Courses in Greater Boston or the establishment of University Extension at Harvard under the deanship of James Hardy Ropes in 1910. Even the lengthy memorial minute written after his death in 1943 by a blue-ribbon committee, consisting of Alfred North Whitehead, Julian L. Coolidge, Henry A. Yeomans, Archibald T. Davison, Harold H. Burbank, and A. Chester Hanford, chairman, for the records of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences neglected to mention his role as the founder of University Extension.

More recent historians of Harvard, such as Richard Norton Smith (*The Harvard Century*, 1986), John T. Bethell (*Harvard Observed*, 1998), and Morton and Phyllis Keller (*Making Harvard Modern*, 2001), all neglect the role of University Extension in the history of Harvard in the twentieth century. Upon reflection, this neglect of University Extension seems neither benign nor malign; it was just that this academic program was nontraditional and it operated at night.

It is surely a supreme irony that University Extension at Harvard would never have been founded in the twentieth century had any other person than A. Lawrence Lowell been chosen president of Harvard in 1909. It was Lowell's experience for nearly a decade as trustee of the Lowell Institute

that prompted him to establish University Extension as his first major initiative as president, and he did this as a way of implementing and updating the original vision of John Lowell, Jr. in drafting his revised will in 1835 at Luxor, Egypt that created the Lowell Institute.

One compelling reason I had to write my history of University Extension, *“The Gates Unbarred,”* was to correct this egregious oversight and to present the full story of what it has meant to Harvard University, the Boston community, the Lowell Institute, and the hundreds of thousands of women and men who over the years availed themselves of the access to Harvard Yard in the evening, where, thanks to President Lowell, “the books stand open and the gates unbarred.” 📖

Originally written for delivery as the keynote address at the annual convocation of the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement on September 10, 2009, Loeb Drama Center, Harvard University.