

This Day in History... February 4, 1802

Birth of Mark Hopkins

Mark Hopkins was born on February 4, 1802, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He was the youngest college president in the US and produced many influential writings on religion, education, morality, and more.

Hopkins was the great-nephew of theologian Samuel Hopkins. He attended Williams College, graduating in 1824. From 1825 to 1827, he was a tutor there. Hopkins also attended Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. After graduating in 1830, he became a professor of moral philosophy and rhetoric at Williams College.



Hopkins stamp from the Famous American Educators Issue



Many of Hopkins's lessons, lectures, and writings were influenced by his religious convictions.

Hopkins was asked to be the president of Williams College in 1836 and remained in that position until 1872. When he began his tenure, he was the youngest man to head a college in the US. Williams was a small college where young men could gain an education from teachers who knew their students. Hopkins was loved and respected as a teacher, known for his humor, compassion, and true care for his students.

Though he had no formal training in theology, Hopkins was made a Congregationalist minister in 1836. His teachings were greatly influenced by his religious convictions, encouraging piety and moral values as just as, if not more, important than intellectual accomplishments. Throughout his life, Hopkins was a supporter of Christian missions. From 1857 until his death, he served as president of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

In January 1844, Hopkins delivered a series of lectures at the Lowell Institute. Two years later, these lectures were collected as *Evidences of Christianity*. This became an important and influential textbook that was reprinted several times until 1909. Hopkins had an interest in law, despite no legal training. He used several legal metaphors in *Evidences*.

Hopkins produced many other writings during his life, many of which were based on his lectures and sermons. Some of the most notable were *Lectures on Moral Science* (1862), *The Law of Love and Love as a Law* (1869), *An Outline Study of Man* (1873), *The Scriptural Idea of Man* (1883), and *Teachings and Counsels* (1884).

Future president James Garfield attended Williams College in the 1850s under Hopkins's leadership. At an alumni dinner at the White House the day after his inauguration in 1871, Garfield honored Hopkins. "I am not willing that this discussion should close without mention of the value of a true teacher. Give me a log hut, with only a simple bench, Mark Hopkins on one end and I on the other, and you may have all the buildings, apparatus, and libraries without him."



Garfield studied under Hopkins and praised his teaching methods.



Hopkins was the youngest college president in the US at the time.

W.E.B. Du Bois later referred to Garfield's statement in "The Talented Tenth," saying "There was a time when the American people believed pretty devoutly that a log of wood with a boy at one end and Mark Hopkins at the other, represented the highest ideal of human training. But in these eager days it would seem that we have changed all that and think it necessary to add a couple of saw-mills and a hammer to this outfit, and, at a pinch, to dispense with the services of Mark Hopkins."

Hopkins resigned from Williams College in 1872 and spent his final years lecturing, teaching, and writing. He died on June 17, 1887.

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