

This Day in History... November 26, 1607

Birth of John Harvard

Clergyman John Harvard is believed to have been born on November 26, 1607, in Southward, Surrey, England. Upon his death, Harvard donated half his fortune and his entire library to the school that was then named in his honor.

Harvard's exact birth date is unknown, but it is often considered to be November 26, a few days before he was christened on November 29. Harvard was the fourth of nine children, and his grandfather was reportedly an associate of Shakespeare's father. The bubonic plague later claimed the lives of most of Harvard's family, leaving just him, a brother, and his mother. Harvard went on to attend the University of Cambridge and Emmanuel College where he earned a BA and MA and was eventually ordained a dissenting minister (English Dissenters were Protestants who had separated from the Church of England because they opposed government interference in religious matters). Harvard was married in 1636, and the following year moved with his wife to New England.



Stamp pictures part of the John Harvard statue by Daniel Chester French at Harvard Yard.



The college that would become Harvard was established by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636.

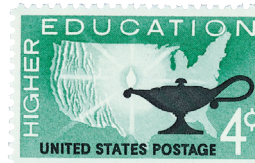
The Harvards settled in Charlestown, the oldest neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts, and Harvard became a teaching elder of the First Church and an assistant preacher. Also while in Charlestown, Harvard was made part of a committee "to consider of some things tending toward a body of laws." He had a home with 120 acres that he intended to use to raise cattle. However, Harvard would not get a chance to carry out this plan. He died of consumption, now known as tuberculosis, on September 14, 1638.

Two years before Harvard died, the Massachusetts Bay Colony established a college in what was then called Newtowne (later Cambridge) to "advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity: dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."

Over his lifetime, Harvard had inherited a significant amount of money following the deaths of his parents and brother. Having no children, he told his wife on his deathbed that he wished to donate half of his estate (£780 – worth over \$165,000 today) to the young school, and she would receive the other half. Harvard's donation to the school nearly equaled the Massachusetts Bay Colony's annual tax receipts. Harvard also bequeathed his 400-volume library to the school. Unfortunately, all but one of these books was destroyed in a fire in 1764.

Although Harvard wasn't instrumental in founding the college, his bequests of half his estate and his 400-volume library nearly doubled the school's resources. In recognition of Harvard's significant contribution to the school, it was renamed in his honor in 1639.

In 1884, sculptor Daniel Chester French unveiled a seated statue of Harvard that resides at Harvard Yard, the oldest part of the campus. There were no images of Harvard to base it on, so French modeled the statue's face after Harvard student Sherman Hoar, a descendant of one of the school's early presidents. There's an interesting custom surrounding the statue. Visitors and graduating students rub the toe of Harvard's left shoe for luck. As a result, that part of the statue is brighter than the rest. There's also a John Harvard library in Southward Lindon, a Harvard Bridge connecting Boston to Cambridge, and Harvard Chapel in Southward Cathedral.



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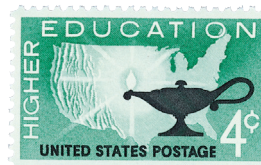


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