

THE FUND FOR CLASSICAL EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

*“America is a young country with an old soul.”
George Santayana*

26 July, 2010

Several years ago, it was my privilege to lead a wonderful Latin school on New York’s Upper East Side. Then, as now, the door to my office was generally open. There was in that school a mother who, knowing the challenges we faced, would stick her head in the door and say,

“Remember, Head Master, inch by inch everything’s a cinch—yard by yard it gets real hard.”

That bit of wisdom continues to nurture and instruct. It is true. Even the greatest work can be accomplished through one small act of obedience after another. That is how the Pyramids were built. That is how Chartres Cathedral rose from the wheat fields southwest of Paris—one stone and one shard of glass at a time.

You may ask why I use the word “obedience.” Allow me to explain. It is the vision that justifies the action. Each small exertion becomes *worthy* precisely to the degree that it conforms to a great design. Even the most talented carpenter, stone cutter or glazer is of no value unless every blow of the hammer and cut of the chisel is dictated by the blueprint. Great artisans do not freelance.

The founders of our country were not confused. Informed by both classical and Christian sources, they invented a country based on an idea. Rooted in Athens and Rome, they were grounded by Jerusalem and Geneva. Drawing on both sage and saint, they designed and built a “*Novus Ordo Seclorum*.” [New Order of the Ages]

In his all important *Farewell Address*, Washington made it clear that republican government would depend on morality, and morality on religion and religion on general education. Declaring that “reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle,” and that “virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government,” our first President went on to urge his countrymen to, “Promote *then*, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge.”

In 1787, heeding his advice, Congress passed the *Northwest Ordinance*—at that time the single most important piece of legislation passed since the *Declaration of Independence*. It established the process by which the United States would expand westward across North America. Article 3 stated: “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

Seminal educators like Noah Webster, William McGuffey and Horace Mann worked from the Federalist blueprint. Town by town, county by county, state by state, from Maine to California, they built a system of local common schools that, according to historian Paul Ford, “taught millions to read, and not one to sin.” They planned their work and they worked their plan.

In stark contrast, the flailing “reforms” of today’s educational bureaucrats represent a classic example of building without a blueprint. No amount of good intention, no level of professional competency, no emptying of the public treasury can ever compensate for the willful rejection of a worthy design.

THE FUND FOR CLASSICAL EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

This is our moment. The re-opening of Alexandria Academy requires no genius—just hard work. Our task is not to design anything, but to dust off the discarded blueprints, roll up our sleeves, and build. Our mission is not to re-interpret the American dream. It is to restore it. We are not social engineers hawking some novel utopian scheme. We are citizens of the United States, intent on conveying to yet one more generation the wisdom of our fathers—and mothers.

Inch by hard won inch, we are getting there. We now have around thirty exceptional students enrolled, and expect that number to climb to about forty. As George Washington intended, several of those students are “free scholars” whose demonstrated personal promise is not matched by their family’s ability to pay.

We have a brilliant faculty drawn from Cambridge University, Rutgers, Harvard College & the University of Virginia. The Latin based curriculum they will be teaching represents higher general graduation requirements than any school in the region—public or private.

We just accepted two more students today! We are now looking for homes where young scholars from around the Commonwealth and across the world can board. The Torpedo Factory Arts Center has joined Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens, The National Archives of the United States and The Folger-Shakespeare Library as our fourth instructional partner.

All state licenses, city permits and regulatory approvals are in place or on track. This past week we ordered the furniture and scheduled contractors to create new classrooms. The extraordinary summer start-up costs are a significant and necessary investment in our kids.

- The math & science labs cost \$49,447.88
- The Harkness Classrooms for Classics and English Literature cost \$37,373.74
- The handsome Main Hall Library costs \$14,895.00
- The furnishings in Main Hall cost \$10,100.00
- The refurbished Campagna Center Hallway/Lobby costs \$3,739.60.

We need your help. Those who purchase a classroom will have that classroom named after them. A word-class New York City artist, who is a friend of the school, is poised to accept a commission to create an oil-on-canvas likeness of any individual who patronizes the Academy in this way.

The great work in which we are engaged is not the work of a day, or a month or a season. Re-establishing the tried and true template for universal education in the United States is the work of a generation. We invite your active participation, even as we humbly solicit your prayers. I remain,

Your obed servt



T. Robinson Ahlstrom
Chairman