

Address by
Rear-Admiral Edward Simpson, U. S. N.
President of the Association

Brother Graduates: - It has been suggested that an association should be formed of the graduates of the Naval Academy. We are assembled in accordance with a call issued for the purpose of carrying this suggestion into effect, and, as the senior living graduate, it has devolved upon me to preside at this meeting.

The formation of an association such as we now propose seems to be a natural consequence to the establishment and development of our institution of learning. We are but following a custom which obtains in the case of graduates of all colleges of distinction. The object is to promote kindly feeling and social intercourse among the members, and to foster the memories of the alma mater.

It seems to me that the universality of this practice shows that it springs from a sentiment that must be common to all men; from one of the attributes with which everything human is endowed; and, passing these in review, I select as the instinctive compelling agent the love of home.

We carry with us through life the home of our childhood as the dearest memory of our hearts, which are ever filled with gratitude for the tender care that we recall. It was there we looked for nourishment of our body; it was there we received our first rules of guidance for our actions; it was our haven to which we were happy to return from our daily wanderings, feeling that, though interested and amused elsewhere, it was pleasant to go back to a place of which we formed a part, with which we were identified. It was at this home that our bodies were fed and our affections nourished; lessons in self-control were taught and generous impulses fostered. It was here that we were physically developed, and were imbued with those principles which were to form the base on which our character was to be built.



In close sympathy with his sentiment – a reproduction of it – is the love and reverence that a graduate of an institution of learning has for it – his alma mater – his fostering mother – that mother who took his intellect into training, aided his feeble efforts as he essayed to mount the first steps of the ladder of learning, prepared his mind to reason, and then stored it with heavier weights of knowledge, until, her work being completed, the educated man, fitted for his profession, is sent forth equipped for his struggle for eminence. She has done for the mind what the mother in the flesh has done for the body. The body is incomplete without the mind, the mind without the body. Both must be healthy, developed and well trained, and the work of one mother must be supplemented by that of the other before the elements can be so fitly combined as to produce that type of well-balanced manhood, the mens sana in corpore sano.

This idea is embodied in the word “alumni,” which is our title as graduates. The definition of the word implies the nourishment of the pupil, and is a constant reminder of the debt of gratitude we owe our Academy for that aliment which nourished our intellects and fed our minds.

With such thoughts as these at the root of our action, it is eminently proper that we should form an association in which they may be fostered, keeping green the memory of our obligation and inciting us to repay it; while, at the same time, unconstrained reunions will promote social intercourse and the fraternal sentiment that should exist in the members of this one family, having a common mother. As the senior graduate I bid you all welcome, and it is with a feeling of intense earnestness that I say I rejoice to see this day. The act we are about to perform will put the capstone on the monument we have all helped to rear, will show our devotion to it, and prove our interest in future welfare.

The establishment of the Naval Academy is due to the Hon. Geo. Bancroft, whose name is always gratefully associated with it by graduates. Mr. Bancroft was a scholar and a statesman. His scholarly habits disclosed to him the necessity of education, and his statesmanship enabled him to recognize the benefit that would accrue to the country from the possession of a Navy officered by men whose ideas and capacity could keep pace with progress. He saw that the training given to midshipmen at the time to which I refer was not such as was calculated to keep the

Navy in line with other professions, and, as a conscientious officer of the Government, he set himself to remedy the defect. In 1845, being the Secretary of the Navy, he decided to establish a Naval School. No act of Congress was necessary. The power was in his hands, and he exercised it. Fort Severn had ceased to be of value as an Army post, and it was readily transferred by the War Department, and in October, 1845, the Navy School was established under the superintendency of Commander Franklin Buchanan, to whose executive ability is due the success that so promptly crowned this effort. The other officers were well selected: the list including Lieutenant James H. Ward, Surgeon J. L. Lockwood, Professor H. H. Lockwood, Professor Girault, Chaplain George Jones, Passed Midshipman Samuel Marcy, and the last, not least, Professor William Chauvenet, who, though a genius in his profession, possessed the power of imparting knowledge to a degree attainable but by few, and whose administrative ability shaped the course of instruction.

TO this body, I, as a member of the pioneer date of 1840, was introduced on the 10th of October, 1845, and under their able and earnest instruction we remained until graduated in 1846. Our position as students was a novel one. We were men ranging from twenty-one to twenty-six years of age, had been in active service as officers for five years, accustomed to discipline afloat, but, like sailors, prone to relaxation on shore, and it required effort to accustom ourselves to the new and unexpected order of things; and it is very certain that all did not recognize the advantages nor the benefit that was to follow. Attempts were made to kick over the traces, but there was a strong hand at the helm, and discretion was found to be advisable. This was demonstrated early in the course, and I doubt if any set of men, placed in the circumstances we were, could have shown a better record on the whole.

Apart from the restraints of study and an academic routine, we were subjected to many privations due to inadequate and imperfect accommodation. The extent of the ground was included in the fort walls, one of which ran from near the site of the lower gate to the harbor, the other from the same point to the river. The Superintendent and the professors were accommodated in the old officers' quarters; the soldiers' quarters were assigned to the midshipmen students.

Extending from a point near the quarters of the Superintendent to a point about equally distant from where the recitation-hall now stands, there was a building, two stories high, divided into two large barracks. The lower story consisted of two large rooms, divided by the hall through the center of the building. The second stories were divided into two and three division each. The lower floor of one barrack was our mess-room; the lower floor of the other was the kitchen. The rooms on the second floor were the recitation-rooms.

Along the site of what is now the old quarters for cadets, there was located a long wooden building with a peaked roof, one story high, divided into four rooms. Each room was provided with a window and door on each side. This arrangement assisted ventilation, and for the same object, no doubt, the window-frames were given an abundance of play, and the distance between the bottoms of the frail doors and the floor was such as to admit the rain and snow. The rain was rather the most objectionable of the two, as the temperature we were able to sustain during the winter with one grate fire was not sufficiently high to melt the snow. We were packed four to a room under this roof, which we named "Apollo Row." I was an Apollo. My address was No. 3 Apollo Row, where, despite discomforts, I passed a term of earnest study of which I have felt the benefit.

Farther along the walk, in the direction of the old fort, there stood a more pretentious and capacious building, which was called "Rowdy Row," in which a larger number of midshipmen were quartered; and beyond this again, and nearer to the river, there was a small brick outhouse, which was taken possession of by a band of midshipmen who had made a cruise around the Horn in the old frigate Brandywine, who christened their abode "Brandywine Cottage"; and often would be heard from this retired nook the old refrain:

Brandywine, Brandywine,
Brandywine, Brandywine,
The roaring Brandy-wy-i-ine,
Brandywine, Brandywine,
Brandywine, Brandywine,
The roaring Brandywine,

The chorus to the song written in honor of the old ship by Lieutenant Robbins, of the Marine Corps, who had a pretty poetical and musical talent, wrote and sung his own songs, and filled a rôle of marine officer to perfection. He was a Rhode Island man.

In the neighborhood of the site where for many years the bandsmen's quarters were located there was a two-storied building affording quarters to a certain number. This house was known as the "gas-House," from the rather inflated tendency of one of its occupants, now dead and gone.

The last-to-be-mentioned building, which served to provide shelter for midshipmen during my year of student-life at the school was situated half-way of the wall leading from the gate to the river. It was a modest edifice, consisting passage; the back rested against the wall bounding the Government territory. From its isolated position, and in keeping, it was supposed, with the pious character of its occupants, this abode was styled "The Abbey. Its character was orderly to a marked degree. No noisy choruses were heard issuing from its doors or windows. The windows showed no lights after hours. The officer of the day would omit it during his inspections. The sanctity of its name seemed to impress a hermit character on the occupants. It may have been that the excessive propriety that obtained in these quarters was considered abnormal, thereby arousing suspicion and inducing a more careful scrutiny. At all events, the fact is that the Abbey, after enjoying a season of enviable reputation, fell from grace. The quiet seclusion of the site had afforded opportunity for practice in tunneling, a hole had been made in the wall at the back of the house which afforded ready egress for French leave and ingress for contraband articles. So the Abbey ceased to be regarded as immaculate and fell into line with the other quarters, its occupants having to descend to the level of "every-day young men."

Our mess was run by Darius King, generally call King Darius, who had enjoyed a good reputation as a wardroom steward in the Navy, but whose capacity was hardly equal to mastering the difficulties of the position he here undertook. We seldom had a feast, but on those occasions King Darius would show himself in the mess-hall at mealtimes and smilingly exchange remarks with captains of crews; but when dinner was below par he avoided showing himself, having had one or two experiences of being pelted with heavy bread and uncooked duff. Though not fed on the fat of the land, nor with the delicacies of the seasons, we managed to survive King Darius's assaults on our digestive powers; and on parting with him we enjoyed a vindictive pleasure in wishing that he might "live forever," feeling that if the wish were granted, we would have the satisfaction of knowing that we would be followed by other who would suffer as we had done, thus demonstrating a trait of character very human, though perhaps not commendable.

Our course of instruction was sound and practical. As much as possible was crowded into a term, and the certificate of graduation testified to efficiency in many branches. It required steady work during the week to "hold your own" in sections, but we had learned to feel that we were on our mettle, and we worked for and sustained the reputation of our date. This year's course of instruction was the inception of nearly all that had been developed in succeeding years. Natural Philosophy, chemistry, the study of French and English, instruction in gunnery and steam, were introduced, and were additional to such studies as previous dates were required to be familiar with when presenting themselves for examination for promotion to passed midshipman. Seamanship and practical navigation alone would no longer answer the requirements. The new era had dawned, and the date of 1840 had the honor to inaugurate it.

I think I can also claim the introduction of infantry drill – I won't say tactics – for the date of 1840, for we formed a volunteer company of which I was elected the Captain, and with the aid of Scott's "Tactics" we made quite an advance in the use of the musket.

Although worked hard all the week, we managed to get a short holiday on Saturday evenings, when those not under quarantine might put their names down for liberty. We had our clubs. I belonged to the "Spirits Club." The duty of the members was to meet at supper in town on Saturday nights at a certain hour, discuss oysters and punch, listen to the "Song of the Spirits," sung by the Grand Master, and to return in a body on time. I was the Grand Master, and besides singing the song it was my duty to mix the punch and to give the order to "rise" from the supper-table and to march to the school. I am afraid I am presenting myself in a very depraved light, but the truth of history demands revelations. The club consisted of nine members. We drew the line at the number of the Muses. They were generally punctual; but one member, having fallen into a bad condition of "spoons," frequently required howlings and cat-calls under the window of his fair ladye to rouse him to his duty to the club. While in the way of revelations, I may as well state a problem which is to me in a doubtful state of solution, involving the peculiar effects that "spoons" exerts on the

mind. This victim to the disease was possessed of an insane desire to climb all the lamp-posts on the way down, to remove the oil lamps and carry them as trophies to be piled up outside the gate. I could never decide whether this idiotic procedure was the result of punch or a vagary of "spoons."

We did not neglect to do what we could to restore and to revive a taste for the legitimate drama in Annapolis. Before, the world has passed by the old city, leaving it to its own resources, it had occupied a prominent position, and it is remarkable for proceedings of the greatest interest that were enacted in it; but it had to remain satisfied with what it received in the past, and but for the advent of the Naval School it might now have ceased to exist. In its pristine days, a temple had been erected to the Dramatic Muse; this had been long deserted; no worshipers had presented themselves for many years. Some paraphernalia used in the ancient rites were still in existence, and, in the spirit of true crusaders, we essayed to restore the temple to its ancient worship. A working gang was detailed to remove the dust of ages, and to select from the old scenery a drawing room, a wood, a cottage, and an inn; sailor's ingenuity was applied to arranging lights, repairing purchases for hoisting the old curtain and supporting the flies; the theatrical company was formed, and Bulwer's "Lady of Lyons" was put in rehearsal. When the call was made for men to fill the parts, we found we were well supplied with talent. We were favored by a late regulation of the Navy Department which required all young men on receipt of their appointments as assistant midshipmen to spend their first year in the service at the Academy; this provided us with some beardless youths from whom we could select for female parts. We found among these youngsters a handsome boy of great refinement who made as graceful and attractive a Pauline as I have ever seen. Being stage manager, I had my hands full in regulating the *dramatis personae*; but having once agreed to obey orders, they followed their instructions pretty well, and we presented the play two nights to crowded houses, and were the recipients of unbounded applause. We found the old religion was not dead – it was only sleeping – and the temple was again restored to its ancient worship.

While planning a continuance of this style of education for the people, having actually cast "London Assurance," we were startled with the news that our effort to instruct by holding the mirror up to nature on the stage had roused the indignation of many good residents, who did not consider the stage as the proper source of instruction for the community. These had been debating for some time on the propriety of demolishing the old theatre and erecting a church on the site; our heathenish rites introduced energy into the councils of this body, and thus was founded the Presbyterian Church on Duke of Gloucester Street, on the site of the old theatre. The congregation may thank the date of 1840 privileges they now enjoy, and the Academy may claim credit for having spread religious influences in the community.

Nor did we forget the dance. Show me the sailor who can't dance and you point to a man who is not up in all branches of his profession. The suppleness and grace acquired in the dance make his sea legs natural when the ship rolls or pitches. The dance is a necessary part of his education; it helps to fit him for confidence in himself on deck, it helps to beguile unoccupied hours on board ship, it makes his company agreeable to foreign ladies with whom he may be able to speak no other language, and is, I believe, one of the virtues, so well developed in our Navy, which produce much of the favor with which we are received by foreign belles. It was through the dance that the establishment of the Naval School was first known and recognized by the good people of our own country, for the widespread circulation of the invitations to the first "Midshipman Ball" produced a flutter among the fair sex that their less sympathetic guardians could not help but notice. These flocked from all quarters; the Eastern Shore and all Maryland, Washington, Baltimore, New York and more distant regions, sent their fair representation. The old barrack-building was transformed into a temple of Terpsichore, where the votaries danced in the recitation-room and fed in the mess-hall, and all went merry as a marriage-bell. The dance, thus inaugurated, has been perpetuated by those who followed us; and though they may have bettered our instruction, we do not yield one jot or tittle of the spirit which prompted our hospitalities. We, like all who have come after us, were all the better for these episodes of gayety; the temporary relaxation was a healthy relief, and we returned to work invigorated and improved. We are proud of our Academy as a site of learning and order; we are also proud of it as a furnisher of gentlemanly accomplishments which lend a polish to manner and address and fit us for society. The chief instructor in this branch is woman; but, in admitting this element into the crucible of learning, we must watch carefully that the proportion be not too large; like all powerful stimulants, it is dangerous if taken in excess, and at the early age it may prove a poison instead of a help. Academic restraint must bring the too susceptible back to reason, and must break to the hope what fancy held, too early, as promise to the ear. If woman desires to aid us, she should temper her victories with mercy and consideration.

I hope these reminiscences, lightly sketched, will not seem out of place. I have referred to the past that we may the better draw the contrast with the present. The small beginnings have been glanced at; the result of intervening years is before us in this thoroughly organized institution, within whose walls we are assembled for the purpose of ratifying the work that has been done, and to prove our sanction and endorsement by joining together, irrespective of rank, in one common brotherhood, uniting the alumni of the Naval Academy in an association of graduates. During these years the solidity of the foundation on which it is constructed has been well tried. It has been put to severe tests; it has been assailed by prejudice, by the demon of tradition, by contracted thought, by blindness to progress, by assaults of enemies and by errors of friends. At one period its very existence was put in peril, depending almost on the turning of a die; but it has withstood all. It is founded on the rock of education, which makes it what it is, and which keeps it in accord with all other institutions and professions in the country. We do not depend on our own partial judgment to decide on the merit of the fruits it has produced: they are testified to by others. Professional men of all nations acknowledge the proficiency of the graduates and approve the curriculum; many, if they could control their home government, would adopt our methods, which continue to be a subject of attention to them. The position to which we have advanced must make us jealous to preserve the standard now established, and our present action is one calculated to give encouragement to those who, for the time, have the direction of affairs.

I ask your attention to a fact which, it seems to me, makes our present act particularly timely. From the period of the establishment of this seat of learning, the lists to which the graduates are eligible have been made up partly of those of the old school, partly by those of the new; as time has passed, the old who have survived have been relegated to their well-earned retirement, and the entire list of line officers is now filled with the graduates of the Academy. It is desirable that the entire active list, which is recruited from the Academy, should have the option of being members of this association; but this was not even partially possible until now: to have moved in this direction anterior to the present time would have given an exclusive character to the association which cannot now be changed. I feel that my position is quite remarkable; it is almost changed. I have completed my course; I am on the retired list; I am the last of the old, the first of the new; I stand as a daysman between the past and the present; I speed the parting while I welcome the coming guest. It will be my lot to bear the Association of Graduates across the gap which separates the active from the retired list, so hereafter both lists may be unified in a common brotherhood.

Another reason why the formation of the association is timely is that we are demonstrating our continued interest in the Academy just at a time when it is put on trial. The lists are full of graduates: they constitute the Navy; all influences that now operate have emanated from the Academy: its tone pervades the service, its system is adopted, its methods are paramount, its grade of learning is the standard of the profession, into hands of its representatives has fallen the direction of all naval affairs. The Academy is thoroughly on trial; and just at this juncture we see the movement which marks the rehabilitation of the Navy. The lessons here taught are to be put to a practical test; the Academy is called upon to show its fitness and capacity to develop in practical form what was born here in theory and thought. The new Navy is to be built and furnished in all its details by those who represent the advanced ideas of the service, and on them rests the responsibility of sustaining the character of the profession, under the new condition of things, at a height equal to that which it occupied in the past under the different circumstances that then obtained. That they are competent for the work, that they will succeed, we have no doubt; our meeting at this time may emphasize the responsibility and encourage to effort.

One word more in conclusion. Our interest in our Academy is not limited, as in the case of graduates of a civil college. With them the representative character is complete in their identification with their college; it goes no farther. In our case the Academy identifies us with the Government, and we become representatives of our country. Our institution is national, and its graduates have the proud distinction of being considered worthy to serve their country. This thought enhances the value of our diplomas, and binds our affections with hooks of steel to the medium through which we have reached such honors and responsibilities. In our character as representatives of our country, we feel that we have its honor in our keeping. This proud consciousness is early developed, and it exercises a restraining and impelling influence upon the officer, restraining from acts unworthy of his high calling, and impelling to effort for the credit and honor of the country which he represents. All this is reflected upon the Academy; thus, in working for one, the credit of the other is subserved, and the honor of one becomes instinctive with the character of the other. There is no nobler or stronger sentiment than that which fills the heart of the patriot; and when we appreciate the close connection between our country and the school that fitted us for its service, it seems but logical that the earnestness of the patriot's love should be found in our attachment to our alma mater. Herein lies that store of energy which enables us to outbid in devotion the alumni of civil colleges; our devotion is magnified by its association with love of country.

And what influence does this exert upon our personal relationship? We do not separate to pursue different callings: we remain united in one profession; thus is the family relationship preserved. This teaches us to be forbearing and considerate in our treatment and in our judgment of each other, having in mind the common origin from which we spring. This binds us by that bond of charity which is the highest type of brotherhood.

Is it not the working of this sentiment that has brought us together to-day? As we look into our hearts, cannot we recognize a feeling such as is experienced at a family reunion? Is not this classic spot a home to us all? There is not one of us who has not some association connected with this place that makes it dear to him, and this common sympathy brings us closer to each other. The establishment of the Association of Graduates augurs well for the continuance of peace and good-will among the members; it shows their watchfulness of and interest in the Academy, and will tend to ensure the preservation of the high tone which has ever pervaded the Navy.