

Remembering our Great Beginnings

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WITH FOUNDERS DAY JUST AHEAD OF US,

I have been reflecting on the women and men whose foresight and dedication paved the way for Connecticut College to become the institution it is today — and how much they have in common with today's trustees, alumni, parents and friends.

As this magazine goes to press, the College is preparing a March 1 reception in downtown New London to honor the people of this city for 100 years of support. I look forward to having Mayor Martin T. Olsen Jr. '95 by my side as I recount the story of Connecticut College's founding. It's a story I'll tell with pride.

More than 100 years ago, Wesleyan University's decision to stop admitting women after 1909 left the state with few options for women to pursue higher education in Connecticut. Elizabeth Wright, a Hartford schoolteacher and Wesleyan alumna, convinced members of the Hartford College Club to explore the idea of founding a college in Connecticut. Towns across the state recognized the cultural and economic benefit a college would bring to their communities and began offering sites and supporting funds for the new college.

A beautiful hilltop site was offered in New London, a city already acutely aware of the need for a women's college because local high school Principal Colin S. Buell had been seeking such an institution for years. In early 1911, the site committee unanimously recommended the hilltop in New London and the city began a fundraising drive to raise \$100,000 in support of a college. Within 10 days, New Londoners had raised \$135,000.

When the state legislature issued the new college's charter, our founders again went into action, retaining distinguished Connecticut citizens to act as incorporators and taking on key roles themselves. Colin Buell headed across the state to seek financial support, Elizabeth Wright moved to New London to set up an office and act as its secretary, and local businessman Morton Plant offered \$1 million for an endowment.

In those days a \$1 million bank transfer required a



personal visit to the bank. Plant's chauffeur, William Farnan, drove Plant and his New London bankers to Hartford where they withdrew cash and securities and emerged from the bank with it all packed into a small bag. On the drive home, the group stopped at a restaurant for dinner, and the chauffeur waited in the car with the bag. According to later accounts by the chauffeur, it was the longest meal ever, especially as he waited outside with the future of the College in that little bag!

Today, the future of the College is in the hands of many, including trustees, alumni, parents, faculty, staff, students and other friends of the College. Much has changed in 100 years, but the commitment by those who believe in the College remains just as strong. With his \$1 million gift, Morton Plant provided the foundation for a century of philanthropic support that continues. By securing the first scholarships for Connecticut College, Colin Buell began a tradition of providing deserving students access to a world-class liberal arts education through financial aid. And Elizabeth Wright, in her campaign to give women equal opportunity for higher education, set the stage for the College's continued commitment to diversity.

We appreciate the spirit of our founding story as we continue to invest in this education and the beginning of our next 100 years. ■