

A Bond Well Forged:
How Hyde School Began a 40-year-long
Symbiotic Relationship with the City of Ships

“**O**ne of the best things that’s happened in the last century in Bath is that Joe Gauld and Sumner Hawley came here and wanted to found a school. Hyde School has been a great addition to the city, and a good citizen.” So observes **William “Bill” Haggett**, Bath resident and former chief executive officer of Bath Iron Works. Recently, Mr. Haggett, along with fellow former Hyde trustee **Leonard “Red” Mulligan** and Hyde School Founder **Joseph Gauld** had chances to reflect on their various roles in the establishment of that unique educational institution created in Bath exactly 40 years ago.

Haggett continues, “It took something very close to a miracle to get Hyde School going. We’re talking about a time frame, the mid-’60s, when people were not opening new independent schools *anywhere*, let alone in Maine. What happened here was very rare, and an extraordinary accomplishment, given the benefit of hindsight.”

The miracle that Haggett refers to—that, 40 years later Hyde School is recognized nationally (and even internationally) as a leader in the sphere of character-based education—is indeed intertwined with the person of Joe Gauld. But it took the support of several leading Bath businessmen (Haggett and Mulligan among them), and some impeccable timing, for Gauld’s dream to be realized.

The Perfect Setting

In the 1840s, long before Hyde School came into existence, Zina Hyde established his family’s estate on a picturesque 160-acre plot of land in Bath, and called it Elmhurst. His son, Thomas Worcester Hyde, served as a general during the Civil War and later founded Bath Iron Works. But it was the general’s son, John Sedgewick Hyde, who collaborated with renowned architect John Calvin Stevens and landscape architect Carl Rust Parker to design and implement the current mansion, its outbuildings, and surrounding gardens in 1913; at the time, the Hyde mansion was said to be one of the largest and most opulent buildings in the state.¹ And in a remarkable foreshadowing of what was to happen many years later with the founding of Hyde School, John S. Hyde

insisted the city of Bath be part of his ambitious plan. As the *Bath Daily Times* reported on separate occasions:

“[Hyde] was willing, with large sums of money and personal influence, to help anything that promised good for his native city...² Hyde had employed skilled local laborers to build his estate in an effort “to provide work when labor was in need in this city...”³

When Hyde passed away suddenly in 1917, his magnificent estate passed first to his son, and then, eventually, to his three granddaughters, who opted to donate it to the Pine Tree Society for Handicapped Children in 1947. The society made good use of the facilities, even adding a wing to the mansion in 1956—a project made possible through Hill-Burton Funds, a governmental funding source designated specifically for hospital renovations.

But when the Salk vaccine became commonplace in the early 1960s, thus drastically reducing the incidence of polio, the Pine Tree Society realized they no longer needed such a big facility, and opted to pull out of the estate, heading for smaller quarters at Maine Medical Center. By 1965, when educator and Bath-native Sumner Hawley suggested to his friend Joe Gauld that the Hyde estate might be the perfect setting for his new school, the mansion was vacant.

Meanwhile, leaders of the city of Bath were also looking somewhat concernedly at the vacancy, and wondered what to do about it. They tasked the chairmen of the chamber of commerce and the city council—Red Mulligan and Bill Haggett, respectively—to form a task force that would come up with a plan in which the property could be sold and revitalized in a way that would keep the city’s interests at heart. Although the moniker of “urban renewal” is probably an anachronism when applied to what these Bath businessmen were doing at the time, it was nevertheless an accurate depiction of their task. The idea that the conduit for renewal might be education never entered their minds, until it was presented to them personally by Joe Gauld.

Character Development

The family of Joseph M. Gauld had long and deep ties with the state of Maine but none, or so he thought at the time, with the city of Bath. Most notably, Gauld's great-great-uncle, S.D. Warren, founded the mill that bears his name in Westbrook. Gauld's great-grandfather, John Ebenezer Warren, came to work for his uncle after fighting in the civil war. As mill manager, he introduced the idea of a business profit sharing with its employees a century before it became common practice. He turned over the responsibility for the mill to his son—Gauld's grandfather, Joseph Warren—who managed operations until the 1940s.

On the other side of Gauld's family was a great-grandfather named Pottle who had been a minister in Maine. Long after Hyde School was founded, in 1989, Joe happened to be rummaging through an old box of sermons written by this particular sire. Two of the sermons gave him pause: one, dated 1889—exactly 100 years old at the time—was from *Bath, Maine*. Gauld had more than a few chuckles to himself upon realizing he was not, after all, the first of his family to work in Bath! But when he glimpsed the title of another sermon, "*On the Development of Character*," he laughed deeply, but also had a few chills, given that character development was his own mantra—the one to which he had dedicated his life and efforts for the past several years.

In the early 1960s, in his position as headmaster at Berwick Academy, Gauld had what he terms a "crisis of conscience" in which he realized a fundamental flaw in our educational system. The system fails many children, he maintained, because it is improperly based on achievement instead of effort, and on aptitude rather than attitude. Instead of merely preparing kids for the academic rigor of college, he felt we should be preparing them for the bigger picture—life.

It was clear to Gauld and to his friend and colleague at Berwick, Sumner Hawley, that they would not be able to transform an existing school into the type of educational setting they needed; so, they started looking. When Hawley invited Gauld to look at the vacant Hyde property in 1965, Gauld knew right away it was the right place. "As I stood in the mansion, looking out a window, I started laughing: I could see what the school would be like in the years to come...."

But despite the clarity of his vision, there were still many hurdles to overcome, not the least of which was finding people who could help support his grand idea, both philosophically and financially.

The Pied Piper Meets the Musicians of Bremen

By December of 1965, Gauld's plan to purchase the Hyde property looked in danger of falling through. The Pine Tree Society, at the urging of its attorneys, had raised the purchase price of the property to \$250,000. Several banks told Gauld they would not loan him the needed funds (he had a portion of them, given him by his brothers and Hawley, and some taken from his own savings—but it was not nearly enough). Meanwhile, the federal government was asking an additional \$85,000 for the Hill-Burton-subsidized wing of the mansion. The Pine Tree Society's attorneys had also made it clear that they were skeptical of Gauld's plan, and that they would no longer deal with him. (Admittedly, they had a bad experience with a former potential buyer.) Not wanting the financial liability, nor the possible problems the plan could visit on the city of Bath should it fall through, they turned him down for a third time.

At this point, all but ready to throw in the towel, Sumner Hawley suggested that Gauld contact John Newell, who was newly retired from his position as CEO of Bath Iron Works. It was Newell who, aware that the city had a group of people already thinking about what to do with the Hyde estate, gave Gauld the phone number of Red Mulligan. Shortly afterward, at Mulligan's home on Washington Street, Gauld spelled out his ideas for his new school to the Bath businessmen-cum-urban renewalists—Mulligan, Haggett, Duane "Buzzy" Fitzgerald, and Don Spear.

If there is one event during this process that could capture one's imagination, it is likely this meeting, where the convergence of opposing spheres—education and business—was maneuvered by the raw determination and unyielding drive of four up-and-coming community leaders from a small coastal city in Maine. That these polar opposite forces could be contained in one room without fireworks taking place was unusual enough. Yet, while Gauld pitched his passionate *spiel* that was clearly on a path less tangible than that of the four businessmen, something connected that would make a lasting impression on all of them and the entire community.

As both Mulligan and Haggett candidly note, education was not at the forefront of their concerns. As young businessmen, their motivation was the betterment of their city. None of them had a special interest in advocating private or independent education; they had all gone to public schools, and Haggett had recently served on the Bath school board. However, they viewed the idea of an independent school as something that could be good for Bath and good for the Hyde estate. Haggett recalls, “We agreed to help Joe with his plan because we were concerned about finding a good and proper use for the Hyde estate: we didn’t want a housing development, or a factory; but instead something that would enhance the area and be good for people. And Joe was an incredible salesman, with an equally incredible vision—a real pied piper!” But if Gauld was the piper, the other four men were his accompanying musicians who, like those in the Bremen fairy tale, were each feisty individuals possessing a special talent that came into play for the collective good.

With Haggett, Mulligan, Fitzgerald, and Spear now on his team, which was soon joined by Canal Bank President T. Tarpy Schulten (who became the first chairman of the Hyde Board of Trustees), Gauld was ready to move ahead with plans. The first order of business was to scour up funds to purchase the property.

A Cup of Coffee, a Muffin, and a New School

With his new trustees on board, Gauld was able to obtain the blessing of the Hyde heirs on his project, as well as receive personal financial support from a local bank. Finally, the trustees could approach the Pine Tree Society, *sans* Joe Gauld, to negotiate terms of sale. In the course of discussions, Mulligan astutely pointed out to them that the Hyde heirs had given the property to Pine Tree, so they should not be looking to make money when turning it over to another worthwhile program, such as Hyde School promised to be. They agreed, but felt they should recoup the amount of money they had put into the estate in terms of renovation: \$159,000—far more attainable than their previous request of \$250,000.

The group had scrounged up \$100,000 among their members, (including Joe and Sumner). A lease was placed on the back 40 acres of the Hyde property, which took care of another \$30,000. The balance of \$29,000 was promised in the form of scholarships to crippled children.

With the ink on the deal still drying, the trustees repaired to nearby Hilltop Market for *one* cup of coffee and *one* muffin. Mulligan and Haggett laugh when they think back on it: “We had just signed a deal worth thousands of dollars, but didn’t have enough money to buy ourselves each a muffin and cup of coffee—we had to share!”

Shortly after, the group members each approached a different local Bath bank to ask for loans needed (totaling \$84,000) to renovate and equip the school. They met with success, fortunately, as the dynamic Gauld was already at work, spending the money.

The Pied Piper Strikes Again

While the Bath businessmen were busy securing money, Gauld and Hawley had already gone to work on the educational piece of the puzzle. They needed instructors, and they needed students.

In the case of finding educators, they had great luck. Gauld and Hawley recruited a few of their friends, and Haggett enlisted a couple more (namely, Bud Warren and Doug Vollmer). The faculty was small, but they were a diverse group with much to offer students: most notably their various perspectives and love of learning, combined with a somewhat rare ability to appreciate and work with Joe Gauld. Staff was also hired, including Dorothy “Dot” McKenna and Frances Murray, two longtime Hyde fixtures. (Murray still works for the school.)

To find students, Gauld realized he would have to take a unique approach. How many people, after all, would want to send their child to an unproven school, he realized. While his family sent out pamphlets to guidance offices all over the northeastern United States, Gauld pounded the pavement, visiting school guidance offices with his pitch: “Send me the kid whom you know has potential, but whom you are not reaching.” Gauld laughs when reflecting upon it, because Hyde has long never really shaken the notion that it is a school primarily for “rebels.” But he adds, “You know if someone is rebelling, there’s a real source of energy there that you can work with.”

By early April of 1966, Hyde had enrolled its first student, Paul Hurd, who has worked for his alma mater for many years. Forty other students joined Hurd for Hyde’s first summer program and, in the fall, the number of enrolled students for the first school year had climbed to 57. Gauld’s message was obviously reaching some people. It was a

fabulous start, especially considering that less than a year earlier things had looked so hopeless.

In addition to students and faculty, the school needed more trustees, preferably ones with slightly deeper pockets than the townsmen who were already gamely serving. As Mulligan—who served as the first treasurer and financial officer for Hyde—notes, “I was holding on to this little pot of gold, but it definitely had a leak in the bottom of it.” Prominent Maine businessman Bob Porteous soon joined them, as did Senator Edmund Muskie, and highly regarded Boston-based portrait photographer L. Fabian Bachrach. Senator Muskie’s influence proved invaluable in taking care of yet another detail: the Hill-Burton wing of the school, for which they still owed the government money. The cost to pay off the debt on the wing was significantly reduced to an amount that Treasurer Mulligan and the others could handle. Aided by Spear and Fitzgerald, he hand-delivered a check in the agreed-upon amount to the appropriate government official in Washington, one Mr. Stewart, who had, earlier in the day, been beaten at golf by Senator Muskie and had decided he wanted little or nothing else to do with Maine people. Upon seeing Mulligan and company, he sorely grabbed the check and instructed the group to head Down East with all due speed.

Taking Leave

Hyde continued to grow throughout the next decade, and in that time, each of the original trustees—the Bath urban renewal team—eventually parted ways with the school, but all on good terms. “It was fun,” recalls Haggett, “We had a lot of arguments, but we had a lot of fun!” They had overseen the school’s addition of dorms and a gymnasium, and the student body continued to grow, attracting students from all over the country and, in some cases, outside of it. The Bath trustees thought it right and fitting to pass the reins over to new people, many of them interested parents from various regions of the country, who had a vested interest in what was happening at this unique independent school in Bath, Maine.

Today, the Hyde School network has grown to include a second boarding campus in Woodstock, CT (founded in 1996); several public school initiatives (Washington, DC; New Haven, CT; and one to open in Bronx, NY, in September of this year); parenting workshops; and wilderness experiences.

Although the world of Hyde can, at times, look insular and exclusive, it is most definitely a part of the Bath community, and could not exist without that community's support, and gratitude. Haggett sums it up most eloquently: "If some of us had been multi-millionaires and had gone out looking for someone like Joe Gauld to run our school, it probably wouldn't have been that much of a surprise—but that's not the way it happened. The way it happened was that this guy showed up with this tremendous vision and a dynamic work ethic, focused as anyone ever could be, and he became the pied piper. Some of us were drawn to trying to help him, and the results, I think, have been very gratifying... better than I ever would have envisioned it 40 years ago."

¹ Mattor, Theresa. "Italianate Remnants of the Hyde Estate Documented during Maine-wide Survey."

² "Hyde Heirs Give Elmhurst to Pine Tree Society." *Bath Daily Times*, March 1, 1947.

³ *Bath Daily Times*, March 19, 1917, p.6.