

## **A HISTORY OF BOARDING SCHOOLS**

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In considering a boarding school for your son or daughter, know that you enter into an educational realm that had its genesis well before the Revolutionary War. Though it is not within the scope or purpose of this writing to develop a lengthy history, a brief overview of the evolution of such schools might well provide basic information which will be useful as you conduct a school search.

### **THE COLONIAL ERA**

At its earliest stage, education in colonial days was seldom thought of as being either formal or structured. In fact, the burden of educating youth in the fledgling colonies was placed squarely on the shoulders of the family, the church, and, when possible, the community. Gradually, the "old field schools" came into existence in agrarian areas. Seasonal in nature, this early attempt at education operated around an agrarian schedule, finding small groups of students in session only when not engaged in planting, harvesting or tending to other farm related duties.

### **LATIN GRAMMAR SCHOOLS**

These early schools were followed by the elite "Latin Grammar Schools." Here, the focus was on classical studies, with a curriculum emphasizing the study of classical works by Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Homer, Socrates, and Hesiod. Strictly constructed and preparing the vast majority of their graduates for the clergy or positions in teaching, the Latin Grammar Schools performed the important function of college preparation for a limited number of students during the first two-thirds of 17th century America.

With the continued growth of the colonies and the increased influence of European nations, small, one-teacher schools emerged, offering a broader curriculum and subjects which included: mathematics, modern languages, geography, rhetoric, accounting, logic, and English grammar. Private by nature and by operation, these "English Grammar Schools" could be supported only in areas where there was an adequate populace. Further, they were usually the enterprise of a single individual who alone served as headmaster, faculty, and trustee. Their permanence was ephemeral and rested solely upon the ability of the school to remain solvent. For all practical purposes, the scattered English Grammar Schools were continually clouded by financial instability. Therefore, they gradually gave way to the more successful "Academy movement," which represented a compromise between the more practical education of the English Grammar School and the more traditional and classical education of the Latin Grammar School.

## ACADEMIES

Academies in America varied in mission and scope. Depending on the institution, they offered curricula that would allow an individual to enter directly into college or, having completed one's formal schooling, to go directly into an occupation. The first academy to enroll students from both nearby and distant locations opened in 1763, more than a century before the public school movement began in America. Students were generally housed with faculty masters or townspeople who would take in boarders. Thus, the earliest academies were without dormitories as we know them today. Further, the sense of *in loco parentis* was embraced by the host teacher or host family, rather than the school itself. Educator John P. McLeod finds this arrangement quite in keeping with today's educational imperative, and comments:

"In a way, the early academy form encapsulated three influences which educators today argue are critical ingredients of a successful education – a source of formal knowledge (the academy proper), the family tradition (parental values), and society at large (the community and local family). Certainly, within the society at that time, the academy education represented a remarkable degree of exposure and potential for learning."

Over time, these schools became well established on the American educational scene and succeeded for myriad reasons. In some cases, they were the product, not of academic zeal but rather, of religious furtherance with puritanical leanings. Essentially, it was hoped by those such as Samuel Phillips, Jr., that the academies might well provide an educational solution to many of the social ills that he, and others, felt present. As America's cities grew and urban centers became more complex, internally corrupt, and dangerous, many urban dwellers sought a means for their children to escape the city, reside in a healthy (if not somewhat isolated) atmosphere, and be influenced by strong educational figures who would mold their moral, intellectual and physical characters.

## MODERN BOARDING SCHOOLS

I submit that boarding schools today provide that same advantage as it pertains to safety, strong adult figures, and an ethos built upon timeless values. Though much has changed since the founding of such schools, one must agree that boarding schools have maintained a singular and ruggedly independent niche in the nation's educational sphere. But enough about history. What about these schools as they might serve the needs of your loved ones?

It goes without saying that your child's education is central to your search for the school which will best serve his or her needs. I ask you to always keep before you the fact that education should be one in the broadest sense. The mission of a boarding school emanates outward from the classroom. Challenging course work, intellectual rigor, critical thinking, and clarity in both the spoken and written word are all critical elements. Central to these objectives are dedicated teachers; teachers who know their students and know them well; teachers who are excited by and masters of their academic subject! You will find that these schools will have superb facilities, small class sizes, advanced levels of study and opportunities for individualized instruction. You should expect thorough preparation scholastically for your child ... but you should expect much more.

Because of their very composition and purpose, boarding schools are places where the world comes to learn. Within the roughly 300 members of The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) one will find student bodies of a truly global composition. Education in America, it seems, is one of our most sought after commodities, at least in the private preparatory, college/university and graduate school levels. In a world becoming more interdependent, the advantage of building friendship, trust and respect for others, seems more important than ever. There can be no doubt as to the increasing need for respect and understanding among the peoples and the nations of the world. By learning, living and striving together during years of vast importance developmentally, young people establish bonds that remain with them for a lifetime.

Though students enter boarding schools to focus upon academic development, they quickly learn that the quality of life at their school is impacted by the residential experience equally, if not far more graphically. The enterprise of living together brings to the fore personal preferences, varied habits, cultural differences and frankly, one's ability to work toward agreement on conflicts that, at first, seem unsolvable. In a fascinating way, one discovers that the twin virtues of compassion and a developing sense of justice evolve from the residential experience, as they never could in another setting.

The emphasis on the development of the personal qualities of each student is at a premium. Integrity, self discipline, generosity, patience, and perseverance are qualities that surface and remain with many students in boarding schools. The atmosphere on campus directly reflects the responsibility given to the young men and women who make up the citizenry of these scholarly communities. Respect for others and respect for themselves is generated by overcoming the challenges faced; and doing so as a result of determination, continued effort, and group cooperation.

You will find great differences in America's boarding schools. Some might best be described as "traditional" with such trappings as dress codes, formal dinners, Saturday morning classes, mandatory athletics, structured study hours, etc. Others will be of a different ilk entirely and will have clear strengths echoed in their mission and their program of study. One needs only to consider those schools in this very publication to understand the variety of possibilities.

A common thread, however, seen in the descriptions offered by these various institutions centers upon the development of both intellect and character. I would be so bold as to say that if these young people are to eventually make their mark on this world that intellect must be guided inextricably by character. Further, leadership, in all forms of human enterprise, stands upon those dual foundations of quality of mind and character. In the mind of this writer, it is "character" and character building that has been so much a part of boarding schools...lessons of character that augment the intellectual development, more singularly pursued. Our forebears understood, full well, that the demands imposed upon those in positions of leadership are made not so much upon the intellect as they are challenges to character. Decades ago, an Oxford philosopher spoke of character thusly:

"Character is in essence, resolution, determination, a matter of pursuing purposes without being distracted by passing impulses. It is something that is measured in terms of strength. Its strength, indeed, is its existence, for the weaker it is, the closer it comes to non-existence..... its qualities (prudence, justice, courage, and moderation) are all dispositions to resist the immediate solicitations of impulse."

Understand that I am not placing before you the notion that those who study at American boarding institutions are "schooled" in character, or, for that matter, leadership, in ways which can be measured. What I am clearly stating is that the atmosphere at these schools provides for opportunities in which character and leadership may develop through the examples set by faculty masters and the challenges experienced in an intimate and purposeful residential setting.

It can be clearly stated that meaning is given to many of the young lives of burgeoning students by way of a formal curriculum. Here certain values are introduced by way of history's events and figures, literature's exposure to the human dilemma, the many levels of science, and the integration of linguistic and cultural concerns in foreign languages. But, more importantly, it is the actions of the adults in the community that express life's values --- how do they respond to good or bad conduct? What is expected of both faculty and students?

How do school rules and regulations reflect the sense of community?  
How are compassion and caring incorporated in the rules? What are the moral parameters under which the community lives each day? What is the ethical climate in which learning and growing takes place?

Therefore, I urge you to consider the history, the formal curriculum, and the less visible, but equally important, "second curriculum" when you consider schools for your son or daughter.

Henry E. Flanagan, Jr.  
Former Headmaster  
Western Reserve Academy  
Hudson OH 44236