JOHN EDWARD SAWYER

John E. Sawyer, former president of both Williams College and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, died February 7, 1995, at his home in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. He was a champion of liberal arts education and an innovator in philanthropy for the sciences and the humanities.

Born in Worcester May 5, 1917, the son of William H. and Dorothy (Winslow) Sawyer, he attended the Bancroft School and Worcester Academy in his home town before going to Deerfield Academy. There he edited the school paper and served as class president. Admitted to Williams with the class of '39 he graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. At commencement he won the Dewey Prize for best oration.

James Phinney Baxter, then president of Williams, urged Jack (the sole student in Baxter's honors course) to select Harvard for graduate studies rather than to return to Worcester to help manage the family lumber business. Baxter reported his enthusiasm for his pupil to President Conant at Harvard. Conant met the young graduate student at a Cambridge reception and told him that Baxter expected him to become president of Williams some day.

In 1941 he received his masters degree in history from Harvard. The requirements for his Ph.D., except for his dissertation, were completed before World War II intervened. He spent the war years as a naval officer with the Office of Strategic Services in North Africa and France. For his efforts he won the Bronze Star. Following the war he served in Paris and in Washington with the office of intelligence at the State Department.

He returned to Harvard in 1946 where he spent three years as a junior fellow in the Society of Fellows. From 1949 to 1953 he was an assistant professor of general education and economics. The next eight years he taught history at Yale.

When Williams sought a successor to Baxter, Sawyer, at the relatively tender age of forty-three, was the unanimous choice to become its eleventh president. By this time he had been a trustee

of the college for nine years, and he knew that an era of significant change was at hand. His twelve years in Williamstown were challenging from the beginning.

Frederick Rudolph, a Williams historian, assessed the Sawyer years: 'In turning the College around, President Sawyer did not wear shining armor nor did he ride a white horse. In eliminating fraternities, doubling the size of the college and greatly increasing its financial resources, abolishing compulsory chapel, accelerating the diversification of the student body, and introducing coeducation, he presided over the end of an era in the history of higher education as it was being experienced at one of the oldest and best of the liberal arts colleges. His style was not that of the righteous reformer but of the patient conservative who understood where history had placed him and what his options were.'

Jack initiated the Center for Environmental Studies and, in collaboration with the Clark Art Institute, the graduate program in art history. His handling of student unrest during the Vietnam war was a model for other institutions.

John Chandler, who succeeded Sawyer as president of Williams, spoke of Jack's leadership style. 'About three years after he became President, Jack invited me to have lunch with him alone at the President's house. I was stunned when he asked me to serve as acting provost while the incumbent was on leave. I told Jack I didn't think I'd be very good at that, and reluctantly said no. As Jack and I came out of the dining room and headed toward the front door . . . Anne (Jack' s wife) was going up the stairs. She stopped and turned and said to me, "I hope you're going to help Jack." Immediately I was stricken with guilt. After agonizing for a couple of days I called Jack and told him that if he hadn't lined up someone else and still thought I could do the job, I was willing to try. Knowing how Jack worked, I've always wondered if Anne had been planted at the bottom of the stairs to reinforce his message.' Chandler quoted Jack on the qualifications for a college president: 'This job requires a combination of high principle and low cunning.'

In 1973 Sawyer retired from Williams. He became vice president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, succeeding Nathan Pusey as president the following year. Here he was able to be effective on a broad scale, influencing the course of many institutions. William G. Bowen, Jack's successor at the Mellon Foundation, speaking at the memorial service in Williamstown, claimed Jack was 'a man full of ideas . . . he was consistently ahead of the proverbial wave.' Bowen treasured the memos received from Sawyer on such topics as: Appalachian colleges, digital imaging, what it means to be a trustee, the virtues of liberal education, the 'dangers of domination by the opinionated few,' the MIT antitrust case, the importance of Turkey in the modern world, the risks of 'sliding into swamps of loose generalizations,' and prospects for independent research libraries. Sawyer had an abiding concern for research libraries, recognizing that 'new technologies offered great promise . . . and that libraries could realize their full potential through cooperative activity.' Warren J. Haas, President of the Council on Library Resources, Inc., wrote appreciatively in his 1988 annual report that 'Mellon leadership not only kept CLR alive and well but also stimulated effective collaboration among research libraries, promoted automation activities, and pressed the cause of preservation.'

Jack Sawyer's broad understanding of the importance of education of the young was stressed in one of his annual reports for the Foundation: 'If a nation's attitude toward education is indeed a key to its future, American elementary and secondary education must receive sharply increased attention. The more we move into an information-based, high-technology economy, the more critical become the skills and the educational qualifications—and the need for access to them—that the society requires. To remain "one nation indivisible," we must recognize as major unfinished business the necessity of providing ladders of educational opportunity for sectors of our society that will otherwise be left farther and farther behind.'

Among his many commitments he particularly enjoyed serving

on the board of the Clark Art Institute, where he helped mold the graduate program with Williams. He made substantial contributions as a trustee of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. At various times he served on the Harvard and MIT Visiting Committees, as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as a Councillor of the American Philosophical Society, as a director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, as a member of the American Economic History Association, and as a trustee of the National Humanities Center. The National Academy of Sciences recognized him with its Public Welfare Medal in 1988, and he won the Phi Beta Kappa Award for Distinguished Service to the Humanities in 1990. Thirteen colleges and universities awarded him honorary degrees.

Elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in April 1966, he attended only five meetings, but he was of immense help in more material ways. He helped secure a $300,000 grant to establish the Andrew W. Mellon Fund at AAS. Initially the income was used to pay for the new fellowship program. With additional funds AAS endowed the position of curator of prints and maps. A subsequent grant of $182,000 aided AAS in completing the editing and publishing of the Early American Imprints as a microfilm series, and another $100,000 gift helped develop an education program to increase the scholarly use of our library. Mellon help came again in 1979, assisting AAS in matching an NEH grant for the North American Imprints Program. With the launching of the Isaiah Thomas Fund, Mellon under Sawyer's leadership offered $250,000 to be devoted to conservation at the Society. A final contribution to the NAIP of $150,000 came in 1983. In 1986 $400,000 was given by the Mellon to endowment, the income to be used to strengthen access to the collection by increasing the capacity to catalogue materials. In a letter to the then president, Sawyer notified him that he was giving some stock in a Worcester bank to provide 1% of the matching funds required by one of the Mellon grants.

Jack Sawyer was happily married to Anne Whitin Swift for

fifty-three years. Again quoting John Chandler's remarks at the memorial service: 'It is impossible to think about Jack Sawyer without thinking of Anne. The depth and extent of the partnership of Jack and Anne was evident in many obvious ways.' Jack was the fond father of four children: Katharine Stover, John, Stephen W., and William Kent. He took pride in them and his nine grandchildren. During his busy life he made time for his family with summers at Woods Hole and sailing with family and friends.

Throughout his life Jack Sawyer strove to do his best. He succeeded by applying his intelligence to the challenges that he faced, he was always willing to listen, he had a marvelous sense of humor that often eased his way, and he was courageous in taking on anything that came across his path. His loss will be felt by many individuals and institutions, including the American Antiquarian Society and its many members who knew him and appreciated his generous spirit.

Henry B. Dewey