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'Field of Dreams' Explored at University Museum

By [Jennifer Vento](#)
UNH News Bureau

March 19, 2001

DURHAM, N.H. -- A small dirt circle was the only marker of Newmarket Road's intersection with Main Street in 1896. Students rode bicycles with wooden rims around town, which consisted of a few houses and a church.

But when the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and the Mechanical Arts arrived, the small farming village of Durham was on the verge of becoming a university.

Such is the creation story of the University of New Hampshire told through costumes, artifacts, photographs and text in the University Museum's latest exhibition, "Field of Dreams: UNH in the Formative Years."

The exhibition, which runs through July 13, explores the early development of UNH before it was in Durham and before it was incorporated as a university.

My linda Woodward, co-curator of the exhibit, says this piece of the school's past is an important one to understanding its mission and development.

In July of 1866, N.H. Gov. Frederick Smyth signed a bill providing for the incorporation of the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts. This college was created under The Morrill Act of 1862, which called for the federal government to provide each state with a grant of land for an agricultural college. But none of the money could be used for buildings. Hence, the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts was established in Hanover and shared the resources at Dartmouth College.

"We were in Hanover for 25 years," Woodward says.
"People don't know that."

Each institution had its own identity and remained separate. The co-existence worked while it had to, Woodward explains, but the schools' missions were too separate to continue. In 1893, the University of New Hampshire opened in Durham on the estate of the former Benjamin Thompson, a wealthy farmer and businessman who left his property for such a purpose.

"People wanted this (university)," Woodward says.
"The sons and daughters of working class people wanted more training either to improve their father's farms or improve their own careers."

The exhibition traces this journey of the formation of an agricultural college to the beginning of its growth into a larger university. It includes photographs of what is now the UNH campus as well as artifacts such as students' attire, farming equipment and a bicycle with wooden rims.

Museum Curator Dale Valena says what fascinates her about the exhibit is creating a college twice.

"The early documents (and research) really expose how much went in to creating two campuses," Valena says. " (The UNH founders) dropped what they had created in Hanover and moved to something more appropriate. It's fun to think about what it would have been like to be back then and be watching this happen."

The University Museum is located on the first floor of Dimond Library and is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 1 to 5 p.m. when classes are in session. For information, "Field of Dreams" runs in conjunction with "From Pen to Print: The Art of William B. Ewert, Publisher." For information, call (603) 862-1081.

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