



TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

The evolution of Salem State College over the last 150 years reflects and contributes to the history of the nation, the Commonwealth, and the local community. The College is witness to the dualities of obstacles and successes. Constant to the values of its founders, it has adapted to the changing needs of society as well. Although the mission of the College has expanded vastly, its philosophy of education remains remarkably steadfast.

Salem Normal School welcomed its first class of “young ladies who wish to prepare themselves for teaching” on September 14, 1854. The fourth such institution in Massachusetts and tenth in America, the school was born of the humanitarian endeavors of Horace Mann. Mann was determined to convince politically conservative leaders in the local communities that proper teacher-training was requisite to the improvement of public education for all children. Although the normal school system was approved conditionally by the General Court in 1838, and a campus opened in Lexington in 1839, opposition was pervasive. Nevertheless, Salem welcomed its own school and generously endowed the first site on Broad Street.

These beginnings established several enduring traditions. City and school quickly recognized a mutually beneficial dependence. Gifted administrators and teachers converted critics by the example of the graduates trained. By the end of the Civil War, these graduates were instilling the values learned at Salem Normal in schools throughout Massachusetts, and the country, and even as far abroad as Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Charlotte Forten, class of 1856 and the school's first black graduate, was among the many Salem alumnae who journeyed to newly constructed black schools in the deep south.

During the Gilded Age, Salem Normal prospered. By the 1890's it had a worthy facility in South Salem, now the main campus. In 1896, the Normal School moved into its new facilities on the present Main Campus. Idyllic, turn-of-the-century student annals depict a charming environment of social, theatrical, and sporting activities.

The school soon confronted a massive, organized effort to severely curtail its mission and aspirations. As courses were eliminated, enrollment declined to that of the Civil War years and morale slumped. Out of this crisis, however emerged a determination to use vicissitude to effect beneficial change. The student body went coeducational in 1898. Many male students later served in World War I and returned to participate in the introduction of a model program for the teaching of commercial subjects. Justified by changes in the secondary schools, the commercial curriculum became the first program of its kind in American public education.

Soon, Salem Normal School resumed its academic leadership. In 1921, the course of study was lengthened to four years. In 1932, much to the consternation of some alumni who cherished their traditions, the Normal School became Salem Teachers College. At the end of World War II, however, enrollment had yet to exceed 500.



The era of enormous expansion began in the mid 1950's. The Division of Graduate and Continuing Education, added in 1955, proved to be greatly successful. New buildings accommodated burgeoning enrollment. By the late 1960's, 3,500 students were instructed by a faculty of over 200. A variety of new programs including the liberal arts were offered. The first residence halls opened in 1966. Renamed Salem State College in 1968, new programs in Business Administration and Nursing led to the acquisition of the South Campus in 1972.

Salem State College's evolution into a respected multi-purpose institution of public higher education, serving some 10,000 students in graduate and undergraduate programs, owes its success to the foundation of administrative and faculty vision, the mutual goals of community and College, and the accomplishments and loyalties of alumnae worldwide. One hundred and fifty years later, Salem State College continues to promote and promise the tradition of excellence envisioned by its founders.