A BRIEF HISTORY

Lafayette College was founded in 1826 and operated in a rented farmhouse south of Easton until 1834. The 7.3 acres on Mt. Washington served as the starting point for today’s campus.

Mt. Washington was soon renamed Mt. Lafayette in honor of the College but the area atop the escarpment soon became known simply as “College Hill”.

By 1841, land purchases had added the Quad, the site of Pardee Hall and the area between Sullivan Lane and College Avenue. While much of the acreage was rented to local farmers for cultivation, the College reserved space to raise vegetables for the dining hall and allowed faculty members to graze their livestock.

The early years of the College generated little money to invest in horticultural plans and the campus was described by historian David Bishop Skillman as a “rough, unkempt property … without lawns, shrubbery, practically without trees, just a few buildings set down in fields on the edge of a rocky cliff …”

Through the generosity of Lafayette College students and alumni, the landscape began to improve in the late 1840’s when graduating classes established a tradition of planting a tree as part of the graduation day observance.

Work commenced in 1899 and continued until history halted progress with the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930’s and World War II. The Quad was used as a drill field for army units stationed at the College during the war. The postwar Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (better known as the GI Bill) provided temporary housing for veterans on Campus.

While satisfying these needs was seen as a citizen’s duty by the institution, the uses did result in a “grossly neglected” campus as observed by historian Albert W. Gendebien.

In 1963, improvement of the campus landscaping became a priority and the College employed Kermit Graffius as Supervisor of Grounds, charging him to develop a new campus landscape design. His crew’s efforts and those of successive Grounds employees transformed the Lafayette College campus into one of the most beautiful and well-maintained in the country. Generous alumni created endowments specific to supporting the improvement of the campus landscape.

Stately trees planted by prior generations provide human scale, a sense of place, cooling shade and tranquility to students, faculty, staff and visitors.