

## Appendix Alumni Lecture 2014

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### SCIENCE

During our lives science has been prominent in shaping our economy and our daily lives. Unlike US politics and international economic issues, this writer today has nothing useful to say about the wonderful and often disruptive developments in science in our time.

What I can offer is an anecdote involving a connection of Grinnell to science and, with a twist, to the humanities and to our cultural heritage.

We at Grinnell take enormous pride in our Robert N. Noyce. As a founder of Fairchild Semi-Conductor and then co-founder of Intel, he was in large measure responsible for the physics breakthroughs and technology innovations which have made our world what it is. The semiconductor is a key to the unfolding of the information revolution which has dominated the past decades.

I was thrilled to be asked by this man to join the Board of Grinnell College, now over 40 years ago, in 1970, the year in which he became Chairman of the Board.

A decade later, in 1980, Noyce suggested to the Board another candidate. Bob said he was a very young, often sharp-edged, but simply brilliant man, by the name of Steve Jobs, whom Bob had come to know in Silicon Valley. On Bob's recommendation, the Board agreed and Steve became a trustee.

He was a smart, not a smooth young man. At the time of his accession to the Board, we were considering an addition to the Burling Library. Steve was at the time deep in the roll out of the first Apple Computers. His vision then as later, was that everything would be digitalized. As the library add-on debate continued over many meetings, Jobs became increasingly critical and dismissive. He said he saw no point in the College investing any more financial resources in books or in a library to house them.

On the Board at the time was George Drake. George had become President in 1979, the year before Steve Jobs joined the Board. George was a scholar who had a

worshipful attitude toward the book. He and others tried to articulate for Steve the multi-dimensional value of books and libraries for learning. To little effect. Jobs left after seven or eight years, likely to mutual relief.

Around this time, the Grinnell Board held its first and only meeting abroad. We attended a lecture on Stuart England by Professor Drake, who was teaching a semester at the Grinnell in London program. I had by now become involved deeply with Oxford University and arranged a meeting with the Vice Chancellor, (Sir) Colin Lucas, who also served as Master of Balliol College.

George arranged a visit by us fellow trustees to the library at Merton College, where George had been a Rhodes Scholar.

Merton is a beautiful, medieval College, located next to the verdant and extensive meadows which reach down to the Thames River. Its library is exquisite. First opened in 1373, it is the oldest continuously functioning library for academics and students in the world.

The books, at least the oldest, are massive, heavy leather bound tomes, which were secured to the shelves by

chains attached to them. The dark stacks rose to a great height, all visible and exuding the smell and the history which they embodied.

I walked behind a couple of other Grinnell trustees, to enter the hushed library atmosphere. Upon taking in this vision of books, manuscripts, antiquity, and calm, one turned to the other, and in a quiet voice said, “At last, I fully understand George Drake’s side of the argument.”