

University of Maine

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Relics of the Past: University Cannon History Can Be Traced Through Correspondence in University Archive

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Relics of the Past:

University Cannon History Can Be Traced Through Correspondence in University Archive

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I hope to secure one or two of the old cannons recently removed from the ship "Constitution" (Old Ironsides) when it was reconditioned, wrote Llewellyn N. Edwards in a January, 1932 letter to University President Harold S. Boardman. Edwards, who graduated from UMaine in 1898 with an engineering degree, was enthusiastic about securing decommissioned items authorized by the United States War and Navy Departments to be distributed as obsolete ordnance material to organizations interested in displaying them for "decorative purposes," including museums, monument associations, and municipalities. If allowed to request four or five cast iron cannon of the Civil War period on behalf of his alma mater, Edwards was willing to secure finances for all transportation charges using his own funding and contributions of fellow, former members of Phi Kappa Sigma. Edwards would also oversee the construction of the concrete foundations where the cannon would be displayed.

Edwards was fairly uniquely qualified to design concrete platforms on which to place displays of cast iron cannon, weighing up to eight tons apiece. Although the earliest work of his career related to railroad and bridge design, including oversight of the design and construction of the nearly mile long

Coteau Bridge over the St. Lawrence River in Quebec, his later work focused on research related to concrete, and he became known for several published technical papers on the topic. His later career was spent primarily in Maryland with the Bureau of Public Roads, but he maintained connections to the university, particularly rekindled when he served as the bridge engineer for the State of Maine from 1920 to 1928.

With the permission of the UMaine Board of Trustees and President Boardman, Edwards began the process to officially request transfer of items stored at the Kittery Naval Yard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and the Charlestown Shipyard in Boston from the Navy Department Bureau of Ordnance. Blueprints were drawn up, discussions began with the State Highway Commission about availability of a heavy load capacity trailer and special permit requirements to transport the oversize load. Maine Governor William Tudor Gardiner was given a chance to weigh in. A flurry of dozens of letters saved by the UMaine Office of the President provide detail on exact plans that followed.

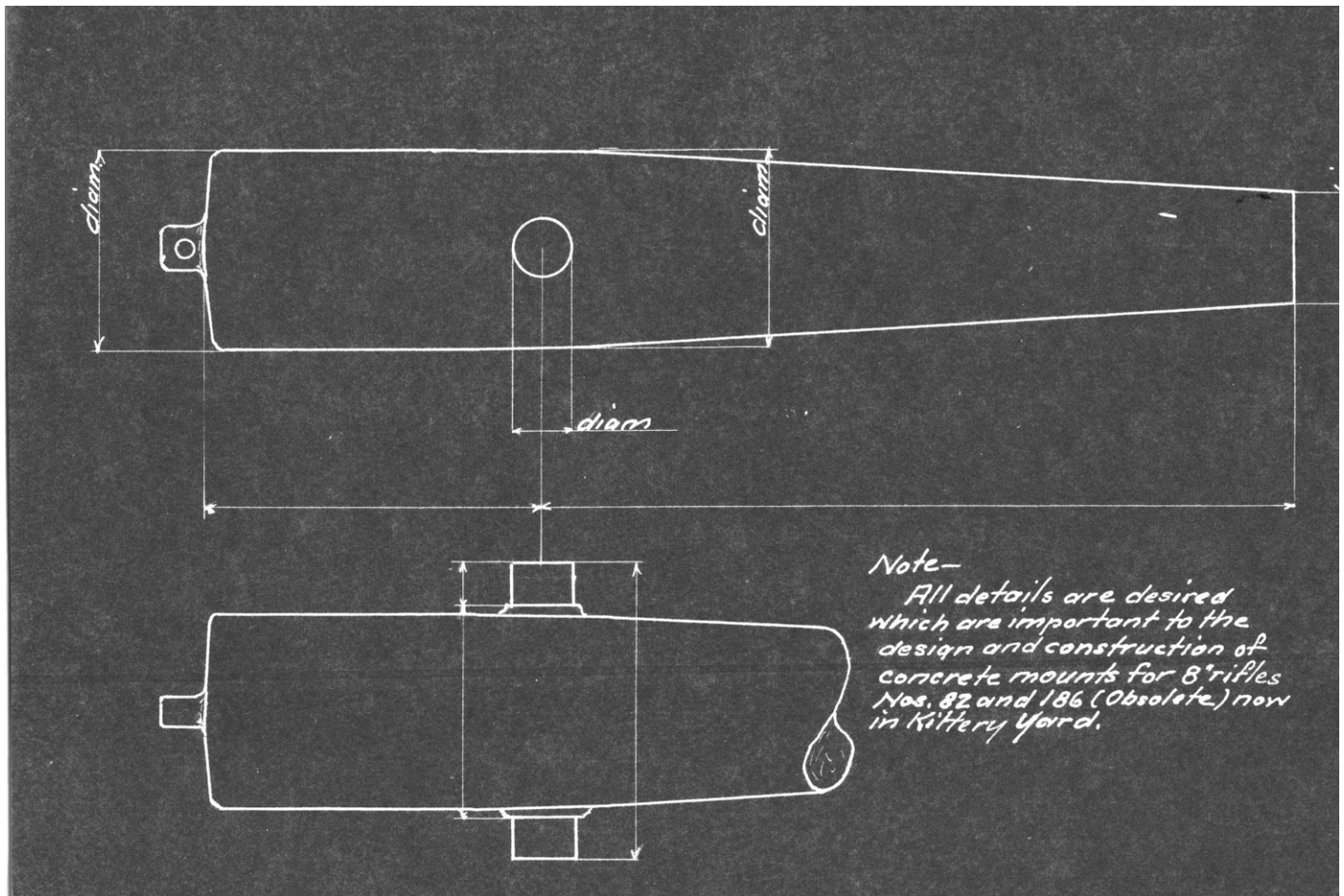
An inventory list includes two guns and their wooden carriages removed from the USS *Constitution*, a ship launched in 1797, and the oldest naval vessel still afloat. The exact age of the guns is unclear, but it appears

they are nowhere near original artifacts. The historic vessel underwent significant restoration in 1906, and several replicas were created based on Louis de Tousard's *American Artillerist's Companion*, a widely regarded book first published in 1809. When it was later discovered that the design would not have been accurate for those originally aboard the *Constitution*, they were removed. The other pair of cannon bore the identification numbers 82 and 186, and several letters refer to them as being used during the Civil War.

Edwards knew that the timing of the project would be critical to avoid complications related to weather. After six months of coordination efforts, he became increasingly frustrated that the university administration would not confirm the exact locations for the displays. The university had recently commissioned the Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects from Massachusetts, to revisit the campus

The initial response from the UMaine community was mixed. An article appeared in *The Maine Campus* on September 29 with the title, "Grim Reminders," noting, *They are relics of WAR... Let these cannon serve to inspire us to study and take interest in foreign affairs, so that in the future international dispute will be solved with a pen and a smile, rather than a cannon and a scar.* President Boardman wrote in a letter to an alum expressing similar concerns that, *the alumnus who presented these cannons did so on account of the historical significance and not for any war-like propaganda... I am sure the alumnus felt that he was doing a real service in giving to the Institution relics of the past.*

By 1964, it appears that students had grown rather protective of the monuments. University administration had already moved and remodeled one set during summer session, and had plans to move the location of other pair. The plans were "vigorously protested," creating a "spring furor" on the part of the students, according to an October 8,



design as they had several times since the original plans were prepared by Olmsted and Vaux in 1867. The Olmsted Brothers wrote in a June letter that they had many aspects of the campus to consider and did not want to feel pressed into making a decision on any given location prematurely. Coordinating all details and having all decisions approved by administration presented additional challenges, but the installation was finished by late September.

1964 *Campus* article. Despite student concern, they were moved to their present location and the surrounding display of artillery changed. Their new configuration seems to have been accepted over time without further resentment. Several photographs in the department's photo archive show students resting on or near the cannon while engaging in conversation, sunbathing, and studying on the adjacent lawns overlooking the serenity of the Stillwater River.