

OFFICE OF
LIBRARY COLLEGE

RA 6

49-56

article on _____
ious to know to _____

4-9-56

Red uppus

1. What have
2. Reasons.
3. Connections:

f. comm. plans

April 13, 1936

Mr. R. L. Duffus
227 Kings Highway
Westport, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Duffus,

I have your letter inquiring about plans for the first Commencement at Bennington College and I am glad to tell you what is being arranged. Last fall when we realized that we would be graduating a first class this June a committee of seniors and faculty met to decide on a program for such exercises as would seem desirable. There were two meetings at which the senior class discussed the matter at great length and one in which the faculty discussed plans presented by the committee. Out of all this discussion emerged the decision to make some public recognition of the fact that the seniors were graduating and having it as simple and inexpensive as possible. It was thought, especially by the seniors, that since the College was giving the B.A. degree it should recognize publicly and formally its connection with, rather than apartness from, the academic world at the time of Commencement.

The specific plans are as follows: In the first place the seniors will graduate on June 5th and 6th which is two weeks before the actual closing of the College for the other students. This is to avoid the last minute excitement which is a feature of other commencements, and to enable all of the student body to participate in what Commencement activities there are. There is to be no Commencement speaker or speech, no baccalaureate or class day activities. The students who graduate are inviting their parents here to arrive on the afternoon of June 5th. There will be an informal tea where the members of the faculty and students will entertain the visitors. That evening the College will give the third and final production of its drama and music workshop which is previously presented as a part of the regular series of the local Theatre Guild which combines town and College membership. The next day at noon there will be a simple ceremony at which the Trustees will publicly vote the degree to the students. There is to be no speech making other than the formal presentation of the student for the degree and the awarding by the Trustees, and some music

written for the occasion. The President of the Board of Trustees and I will take part in these exercises in the regular academic costume. The seniors have designed a form of academic gown in color and an academic cape which is more becoming than the much travestied gown which seems to have become stylized in America through the activities of the college academic outfitters. This gown is used not only for Commencement but by the Bennington College chorus in its appearances in the local churches and elsewhere. The purpose of this uniform dress which is becoming as well as appropriate to academic activities, is to avoid the problem of expensive and special dresses as well as a great variety of dresses in the public appearance of the girls in the group. The gowns themselves are bought by and are the property of the College. For Commencement the girls will wear the bachelor's hood which will be their distinguishing mark for this occasion. There will be no regular Commencement procession and no band or flowers. A simple diploma made in our print shop will be given the students as a certificate of their B.A. degree.

None of the elements in this very simple graduation are costly and such cost as exists is borne by the College directly. The twenty-minute exercises to be held Saturday noon are to be followed by a luncheon for everybody and then Commencement will be over. The whole affair will last only about a day. There is no attempt either to imitate other existing academic forms nor to deviate from them. It seemed, however, that all of us wanted to give some public recognition to the graduation of the seniors and to do it in a simple and inexpensive and, we hope, a dignified manner.

I have always regretted that you visited the Bennington College campus when I was out of town. I hope you come to see us again when I am here.

Sincerely yours,

Robert D. Leigh
President

RL