

Mac HONORING THE MAN AND THE LEGACY Bristol

By Donald Challenger

FOR A MAN WHOSE CONVERSATIONS WERE KNOWN TO SPIKE A SEISMOGRAPH NEEDLE ON OCCASION, MAC BRISTOL'S MARK ON HAMILTON'S public record began quietly enough. He surfaced in the *Alumni Review* for the first time in the January 1941 issue, earning two perfunctory sentences in an account of the Nov. 16, 1940, Hamilton-Union football game, won 13-0 by the Continentals. After the first score, "Bristol place-kicked the point." Following the second, "Bristol missed the placement by inches." He lettered for the first time that season, along with a classmate and promising running back named Milt Jannone and 20 others.

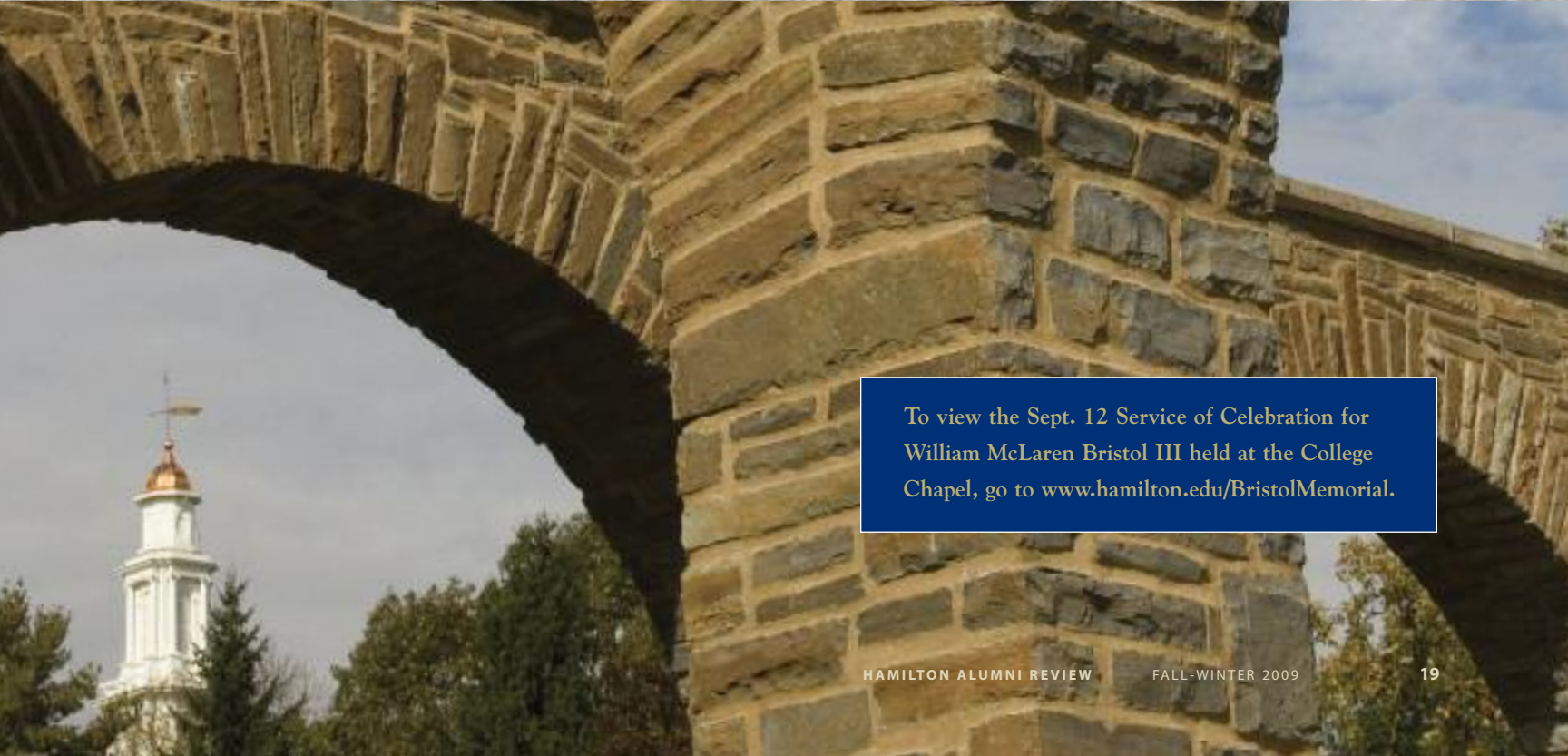
From that moment, Mac's scores far outnumbered his misses. He was elected to Was Los and then to Pentagon. As a lineman he was chosen to co-captain the football team with Jannone, leveling legions of defenders to clear the way for the record-setting "Mercury

Milt" and lettering a total of nine times in baseball, basketball and football, the sport that would become his lifelong love. He joined the Marines a year into World War II, pushing himself through an accelerated course schedule to graduate in January 1943. On the day of the College's 131st Commencement, his father, William M. Bristol, Jr. '17, was handed Mac's diploma; Mac was long gone, already at Parris Island, training to serve as a lieutenant and bound eventually for Iwo Jima.

In many ways, it turned out to be that kind of life. From the start, Mac was usually found not in the spotlight, but out ahead of it, upfield, in still-uncharted territory. He was a man who was most comfortable in the background but who nevertheless kept ending up in front — asked to lead the way, to throw the key block, to take charge when things hung in the balance.

Again and again, he did.





To view the Sept. 12 Service of Celebration for William McLaren Bristol III held at the College Chapel, go to www.hamilton.edu/BristolMemorial.

Some major developments during Mac Bristol's tenure as chairman of Hamilton's Board of Trustees, 1977-90:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merger and integration of Hamilton and Kirkland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two major capital campaigns completed, raising \$54 million, and Project \$200 Million launched 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60-percent-plus growth in student body and faculty size, along with admission applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major new facilities (Schambach Center, Bristol Pool) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A near-quadrupling of College endowment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded and restructured curriculum
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The death of William McLaren Bristol III '43 on Aug. 18, after 70 years as a member of the Hamilton community and more than four decades as one of its most impassioned, resolute and generous leaders, stilled what President Joan Hinde Stewart called “our College’s heart and soul.” It will take the Hill time to fathom exactly what that might mean; after all, life without Mac is something only a scattering of living Hamiltonians have ever experienced. Student, athlete, active alumnus, trustee, chairman of the Board of Trustees, Hamilton’s largest single benefactor, visionary, lifelong fan and formidable presence — his passing is not one loss, but a host of them.

Yet what Mac and his wife Mary Jayne Comey shared with the Hill — like what so many generations of Bristols have bequeathed — is so deep that it will continue to nurture Hamilton for decades to come. If, as Stewart told the community, it is difficult to imagine life without Mac, that is in part because his signature is etched deeply into the very character and identity of the modern College. His decisions and positions were not always popular ones in their time, but in retrospect they have a kind of prescience. From the physical plant and resources to financial aid, from academic excellence to athletic programs, from the endowment to the Annual Fund, he played a crucial role in the 20th-century transformation of Hamilton from a tiny, largely regional men’s college to a vibrant, selective institution that draws superior students and teachers, women and men, from the nation and world.

“Mac was Hamilton’s greatest champion, and he retires from the fray undefeated,” Chairman Emeritus Kevin Kennedy '70 says. “He leaves us with his faith in the College’s greatness and his optimism that there is no obstacle Hamilton will not overcome.” That eulogy echoes a message of Mac’s own, delivered to the College in 1982. “We’ve set our sights on the stars, as it were — we must if we’re to survive into the next century,” he said then. “We shall succeed.”

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TO THINK ABOUT WHAT MAC AND HIS FAMILY HAVE MEANT TO HAMILTON — and what Hamilton has meant to them — there’s no better place to start than a framed document on the wall of the Buttrick Hall office of President Stewart. It’s a humble, handwritten ledger sheet (see cover), pinched and mottled with age, titled “The Original Subscription for the Establishment of Hamilton-Oneida Academy in the year 1793.” Among the first signatories are brothers Joel and Eli Bristol, transplants from New England who had established prosperous farms near the Hill. They each pledged one pound sterling, several hundred feet of timber and 20 days’ labor toward the creation of what would become Samuel Kirkland’s Academy and then Hamilton College.

With the chartering of the College in 1812, Joel — Mac’s great-great-great-grandfather — became a member of the original Board of Trustees; his son George, Class of 1815, was one of Hamilton’s first students. Through eight generations, Bristols have served and attended Hamilton ever since — the only family to be so closely associated with the College since its origin. William M. Bristol, Class of 1882 — grandson of George and son of Henry Platt Bristol, Class of 1846 — partnered with John R. Myers, Class of 1887, in a physicians’ supply firm at the bottom of the Hill, the Clinton Pharmaceutical Co. Incorporated in 1900 as Bristol-Myers and expanded through a 1989 merger, the modern Bristol-Myers Squibb, headquartered in New York City, is a national corporate leader and one of the world’s largest pharmaceutical companies, manufacturing prescription and over-the-counter drugs, nutritional products, toiletries and household products.

Still very much a family enterprise in the early 20th century, though, Bristol-Myers was joined by William’s three sons as the company grew and prospered. The youngest, William M. Bristol, Jr., Class of 1917 — known in his days on the Hill as “the Ragtime Kid” — would see action with the Army and the American Field Service in

Also during service on Board of Trustees, 1965-1990:

- Hamilton's rise in the top tier of liberal arts colleges

- Construction of Margaret Bundy Scott Field House, Bundy residence complex, Burke Library and Bristol Campus Center

- Renovation and modernization of Saunders Chemistry Building

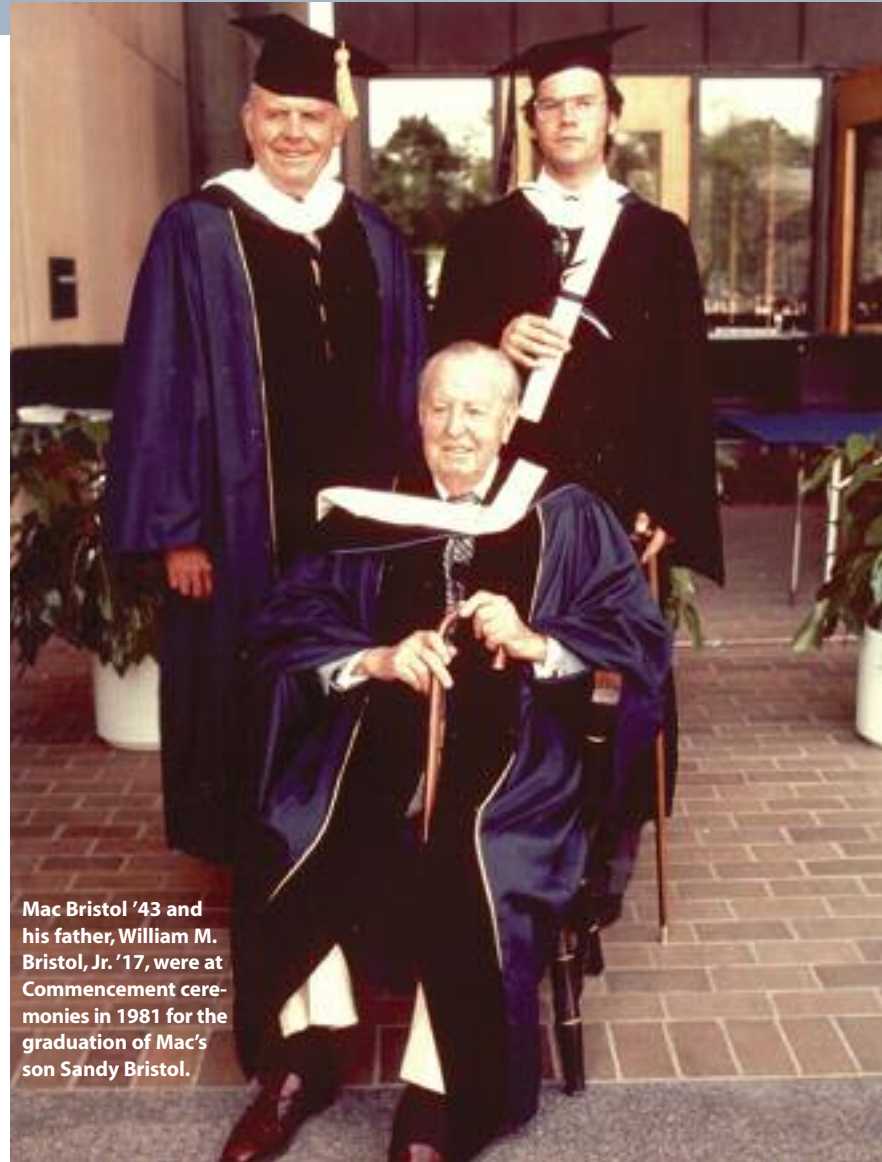
- Creation of Kirkland College

- \$16 million Priorities for Hamilton campaign

World War I before serving Bristol-Myers as an executive vice president and director acclaimed for his innovations in production, packaging and diversification. With brothers Henry Bristol, Class of 1910, and Lee Bristol, Class of 1914, Bill brought the same skills and spirit of innovation back to the Hill. Finding the College and community mired in the Great Depression in the 1930s, Bill took on the formidable task of chairing the Gymnasium Fund Committee in order to replace the antiquated Soper Gym (now Kirkland Residence Hall) and revitalize the College's athletics and physical education programs. When the new Alumni Gymnasium was dedicated on Nov. 9, 1940 — just a week before that Hamilton-Union football game where son Mac would make his first mark — Bill sounded what has become a kind of refrain regarding the Bristols' work on campus through the decades. The new building, he noted, was "something more than steel, stone and an architectural idea"; it also represented "certain intangibles — love, loyalty, a feeling of indebtedness."

As a trustee beginning in 1938, Bill helped create the modern Alumni (now Annual) Fund. With brother Lee and son Mac, he was the force behind, and largest contributor to, the 1965 creation of the Bristol Campus Center in memory of his father. His lifetime of service to Hamilton was honored with a Doctor of Laws degree in 1968 and, in 1988, with the dedication of the William M. Bristol, Jr. Swimming Pool. At the ceremony, the 92-year-old Bristol — ever the Ragtime Kid — playfully feigned a dive into the water.

"OUR NEW CHAIRMAN, MAC BRISTOL, IS AS GOOD A FRIEND AS HAMILTON has anywhere in the country," retiring Chairman Coleman Burke '34 said in announcing his successor in 1977. "Mac is experienced, able and of proven talent. The best thing I did as chairman, in fact, was appoint him vice chairman in 1973 and then persuade him this year to step up to chairman himself." Off the record, Burke was even more effusive, says Joe Anderson '44, who "got to know Mac pretty well" as a student during the war years, then returned to the College after a long career at Dictaphone Corp. to serve as vice president of communications and development (1974-92) and become a life trustee. "Coley told me he was retiring because he wanted Mac to have that job — he said, 'He's the ideal chairman,'" Anderson recalls. "And in my view and the view of a lot of other people, there is no doubt that Mac is not



Mac Bristol '43 and his father, William M. Bristol, Jr. '17, were at Commencement ceremonies in 1981 for the graduation of Mac's son Sandy Bristol.

only the greatest chairman the College has ever had, he's the greatest alumnus the College has ever had. That's a pretty strong statement, but I think it's true."

Given what at the time of his graduation was already a 150-year family legacy on the Hill, it was no great surprise that Mac Bristol quickly positioned himself not only to serve but to lead. "He wasn't a hired gun. He had a real passion for the College, and it was ingrained in him," Anderson says, echoing countless others. Mac is one of many



Mac Bristol and his wife Mary Jayne Comey at the 2004 kickoff of Excelsior: The Campaign for Hamilton at the New York Historical Society (left); Mac at the rededication of the Saunders Hall of Chemistry in 1978 (above), presenting Distinguished Hamilton Awards to Lawrence Darken '30, former professor of mineral science at Penn State, and Edward Taylor '46, then chairman of the Chemistry Department at Princeton.



members of the extended Bristol family who have dedicated themselves to Hamilton in the modern era. His cousin, Lee Bristol, Jr. '45, served on the Board of Trustees and chaired the groundbreaking Priorities for Hamilton campaign from 1976 until his death in 1979. Indeed, Burke once noted, "I don't think there was a time when a Bristol *wasn't* on the board."

What particularly distinguished Mac was the simultaneous breadth and depth of his vision, his ability to inspire and sustain support, and his talent for melding a hard-nosed financial realism with an expectant and progressive view of the future. As a member of the Board of Trustees beginning in 1965, then as chairman for 13 years, he thought deeply about the modern transformation of the campus, directing the board's planning committee to study long-range needs as well as incremental changes in resources and physical plant. "By looking back we may get an idea of what may be ahead," he said in 1981, noting that buildings had served successive generations in different ways. "Rest assured that every effort will be made to renovate buildings and re-equip them rather than take down and rebuild.

Hopefully this beautiful campus's exterior will not change, but the interior has to be flexible."

On another front, Mac's experience at Bristol-Myers — particularly in the success of Bufferin — made him "a very good advertising man, marketer and promoter," Anderson says. He understood the College's need for a dynamic image and public identity. "When I got there, we immediately started to address that, and Mac applauded it." Life Trustee Howard Schneider '60 also sees that corporate training as a key to Mac's accomplishments on the Hill. When a series of moves and acquisitions at Bristol-Myers took Mac off the track toward CEO, Schneider says, he was able to transfer his skills and energies fully to Hamilton. "He took that as his mission," Schneider says. "Not as now, where so many chairmen have other demanding jobs — when he was chairman, he did it full time."

His legacy is also enhanced, Life Trustee Elizabeth McCormack notes, by what he *didn't* do: "He never interfered with the role of the faculty, the dean and the president in academic matters," she says. The former dean and president of Manhattanville College notes that trustees who believe that their role "is to be highly influential in academic matters" are usually making a mistake, and Mac steered clear of such issues as long as academic quality was encouraged and improved. "I think that probably Mac's strongest point was that he supported the administration," McCormack says. "He was never afraid to question the positions of the administration in a very hard-nosed way at board meetings and in private conversations, but he publicly supported the administration."



Mac Bristol at Commencement with Coleman Burke '34 (left) and President J. Martin Carovano in 1977, the year Mac succeeded Burke as chairman of the Board of Trustees. At right, Mac watches the 1981 Old Rocking Chair Classic football game at Middlebury College with longtime Middlebury coach Duke Nelson (blue jacket), Middlebury trustee Jack Kirk (behind Nelson) and Joe Anderson '44, Hamilton's vice president of communications and development (in dark glasses). The Rocking Chair Classic was initiated by Mac and Kirk a year earlier.

His own gifts to the College were often focused on student aid — “He always led from the front,” Kennedy notes — and he kept the issue of need-blind assistance in front of the board and administration long before it became a popular cause. He foresaw the shifting ground in technology at the same time. “We must remember, with the incredible expansion of knowledge now under way in the world, that the teaching requirements change rapidly, too,” he said nearly 30 years ago. “We haven’t seen the world of video on the campus as yet to any extent, but we already know that its effect will be substantial.”

The College was able to prepare for such changes, though, not simply because Mac and others saw them coming, but because he understood their intimate relationship to the financial ledger — just as Joel and Eli Bristol had nearly two centuries earlier, if on a vastly different scale. A new model of higher education would require a new, long-term funding plan and a new level of commitment. He was less than two years into his chairmanship when he unveiled Project \$200 Million — a monumental but detailed prospectus for more than tripling the \$41 million endowment and raising \$50 million each for capital improvements and the Annual Fund over a 20-year period. He later recalled, “In 1979 that was a staggering goal for a college with about 7,500 alumni and a smattering of friends, friendly foundations and other sources of potential gifts.”

In fact, Project \$200 Million — which eventually included the 175th Anniversary Campaign, the Campaign for the '90s and the New Century Campaign as well as the burgeoning Annual Fund — hit its mark with room to spare. By 1999 both the Annual Fund and total

annual gifts to the College had roughly quintupled; the endowment had expanded more than 800 percent, to \$340 million. The project “helped inspire a new level of philanthropy to this College at a critical point in our history,” then-President Eugene Tobin noted. “We who live and work on this Hill are fortunate each day to see the direct impact of Mac Bristol’s vision and personal leadership, as well as the extraordinary generosity that he has helped inspire among our many alumni and friends.”

Jeff Little '71 shares many of Mac’s priorities. A trustee since 1993, Little has chaired Hamilton’s two most recent and successful capital campaigns, the New Century Campaign and Excelsior, as well as the Annual Fund, and he has made campus facilities a particular interest.

In measuring Mac’s legacy, he says, “the physical spaces are easy to quantify. The Bristol Center, the Bristol Pool, Martin’s Way — so many physical improvements to campus came at his initiative and from his generosity. But even more important was the way he inspired the rest of us to give and serve the College. Mac would wake

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up every day and his first thought was, “What can I do for Hamilton College?” He came up with many creative ideas, whether it was to boost the Annual Fund or to encourage those who gave to give at a higher level. And, of course, he always led by example.”

DESPITE THE LONG LIST OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS, THE COLLEGE INEVITABLY woke up to a number of difficult days during Mac Bristol’s tenure, as did so many colleges and universities of the era. He assumed control



Mac sailing off Martha's Vineyard this year.

of the board on the eve of the rapid and, to its critics, premature merging of the fledgling Kirkland College into Hamilton in 1978, and he argued that as with all planning for the Hill's future, that move was ultimately governed by the need for sound finances in the face of Kirkland's slight endowment.

McCormack, who joined the Kirkland board in 1975, recalls, "It was clear to me very quickly that a merger would take place, because Kirkland had not raised the money and *could* not raise the money to remain an independent institution. So Hamilton was meeting the financial shortfall of Kirkland on an annual basis. And that could not continue. Mac and the board of Hamilton went through that difficult period realizing both the inevitability and the difficulty of that merger."

On a personal level, he recognized the need not only to combine the schools, but also to forge a new campus culture that integrated the strengths of both. "I am convinced that reasonable and rational people will recognize that we did not have any choice but to do as we did," he wrote to an angry correspondent just a few weeks after assuming the chair. "Above all we must not have a Hamilton College

which takes in women, but rather a Hamilton College whose student body consists of men *and* women."

"I think he saw that Hamilton was a better place for having women students and fortunate to receive from Kirkland a female student body, so it didn't have to be done a few students at a time, as most of our comparable male institutions did," McCormack says. "Not only did we receive women students, but a whole fine arts curriculum: Kirkland was known for the arts, and that was not Hamilton's strong point."

In later years, those who knew him recalled, Mac would frequently prod the College and the board to move ahead with an important act of symbolism that reflected that new culture. "When observations about there being two sides to the campus became dogma," Kennedy notes, "Mac fought for over a decade to create Martin's Way, a boulevard across the glen that made the College even more beautiful and tied the community together." That path between the centers of the Kirkland and Hamilton campuses was crucial to the identity of the modern College.

On another front, the College was beset in the mid-1980s by a series of escalating protests over apartheid in South Africa. The demonstrators — faculty members as well as students — wanted the College to divest itself of all securities holdings in corporations doing business there. They built shanties at several sites on campus and on a couple of occasions held sit-ins.

On one point there was universal agreement: Apartheid was a profoundly evil system, one that the College should not support. But tensions had grown over how and to what degree that policy should be enacted. The Board of Trustees' Committee on Investments had for several years reviewed Hamilton's holdings in adherence to the so-called Sullivan principles, a corporate code of conduct that called for the holding of securities in no financial institution continuing to make new loans to the South African government, nor in any company whose activities in South Africa were a significant portion of its total business activities. (The College at that point owned \$13.3 million in stock — about 15 percent of its total endowment — in seven companies doing business in South Africa, all of them Sullivan signatories.)

But by 1986 some regarded the Sullivan code as too riddled with loopholes to be economically effective or ethically sound. On a bitter cold March 8 of that year, Bristol stood without overcoat on the steps of Buttrick Hall and addressed about 80 demonstrators, articulating a Board of Trustees policy statement written largely by his own hand and defending the College's belief that its policy discouraged apartheid.

What such tumultuous moments had in common with Mac Bristol's successes was his conviction that the personal mattered in

institutional decisions and how they were received. It didn't drive them, but it could inspire them, shape them, explain them. The impetus for his Project \$200 Million, as he reminded alumni on a regular basis, was not an abstract concern about Hamilton's financial stability, but the birth of his first grandchild, Nicholas Kuckel, in 1979. That event brought "my realization that the then-current trends would mean a first-class college education for him and his peers would cost at least \$100,000," he told alumni a short time later. "That's for the Class of '00. After that, costs will definitely not concern me."



Mac in the mid-'80s with daughter Pam Bristol P'05, '07, and grandchildren Nicholas Kuckel and Monica Odening '05.

BUT THEY DID, OF COURSE. HE NEVER FORGOT COSTS. WELL INTO THE NEW millennium and long a chairman emeritus who might have been resting on his laurels, Mac Bristol worked page after page of figures for College trustees and administrators, suggesting campaign ideas, juggling and projecting numbers, still re-imagining the future Hamilton. He was driven in part by his business acumen for the bottom line, his certain knowledge that Hamilton's success was built on a painstaking dollar-by-dollar approach. A 1982 message to alumni began bluntly: "Looking ahead, there are two major problems. Both involve numbers." Nearly two decades later, he wrote in a campaign proposal: "In order to set before you what we need and how we can achieve our need, I must resort to the use of lots of numbers." Colleagues knew that when Mac warmed up on the topic of projected finances, everyone needed to settle in — it might take a while.

But his penchant for doing the math also revealed his love of analytical reasoning, an impulse so strong that it even crept into his nostalgic accounts of the College he held close for his entire life. Asked in his 50th Reunion Yearbook for his "reflections on Hamilton's influence on his personal philosophy," he wrote not of great professors and moments of inspiration, but of the value of a summer semester during the war years ("I've striven to get the College to re-adapt to this schedule but my pleas fall on deaf ears") and "the proper use of a library."

And in a letter to a classmate in 1992, he sketched out several reminiscences from his student days. Some of them could have come from any nostalgic alum — "Red" the mailman and his old wooden station wagon," or "tying Butch Petronio our baseball catcher in the bus baggage rack en route to a game at Swarthmore." But then the analyst in him surfaced once more: "A trip home or to NYC," he recalled fondly, "was \$10.00 by rail: \$6 for the fare, \$4 would buy 4 beers with tip in the Club Car. Trip lasted about the time it took to nurse 4 beers, i.e., 4½ hours."

Above all, those who knew Mac say, his pride in Hamilton and family was balanced by a personal humility, modesty and thoughtfulness that belied his superficial gruffness. "He did things very quietly," says Schneider, who attended every New York Jets and Giants home game with Mac for many years. "He suffered through every game — he was an avid football fan." When Mac and Mary Jayne would visit, they'd typically have several gifts in hand — "then he'd see what I didn't have, and later we'd get in the mail anything from a bread crisper to a wine opener to an American elm." After every visit, Schneider and his wife Sandy would receive "a long, warm, articulate thank-you note."

Says Little: "I don't think he ever felt comfortable taking credit for things. I think he was in some ways a rather shy man, and there was a dichotomy between that and the gruff appearance." But Little recalls a story that also suggests there was more to Mac's modesty than mere personal style. It came during a New York City gathering at the end of a campaign that Little had chaired. Little had just come down from the podium after publicly thanking Mac for his inspiration. Mac took him aside and told him quietly, "What you should do is thank the guys who didn't make it off the beach at Iwo Jima with me."

"That still leaves me quite emotional," Little says. "I think his war experience was part of the reason he was so uncomfortable accepting thanks and praise. He understood what sacrifice was." ■

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