

B.M.C. DURFEE HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION 1876-2026

co-authors

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Dedication: To the men and women of Fall River who built a city, created a public school system, and left an endowment for future generations to support and maintain educational scholarships.

1849-1850: Fall River High School

A public high school

Before tax-supported public high schools, the town of Fall River offered elementary education to the youngest students and grammar school education to older students.

Schools were funded by both the town of Fall River and the state of Massachusetts. High school education was limited to students who paid tuition to private academies.

By the 1840s, Fall River grew in population and industry and began its ascendancy as an important textile manufacturing center. Education beyond the grammar school level was becoming a necessity.

Concurrently, in 1848, Massachusetts passed Senate Bill 0069. This legislation, known as the Report of the Committee on Education, was a pivotal moment in the history of American education. It laid out the groundwork for the Common School Movement led by Horace Mann.

Mann, a lawyer and legislator, often called the Father of the Common School, was elected as Secretary of the newly created Massachusetts Board of Education. Holding that position from 1837 until 1848, he enacted major educational reforms to ensure a basic education for every child.

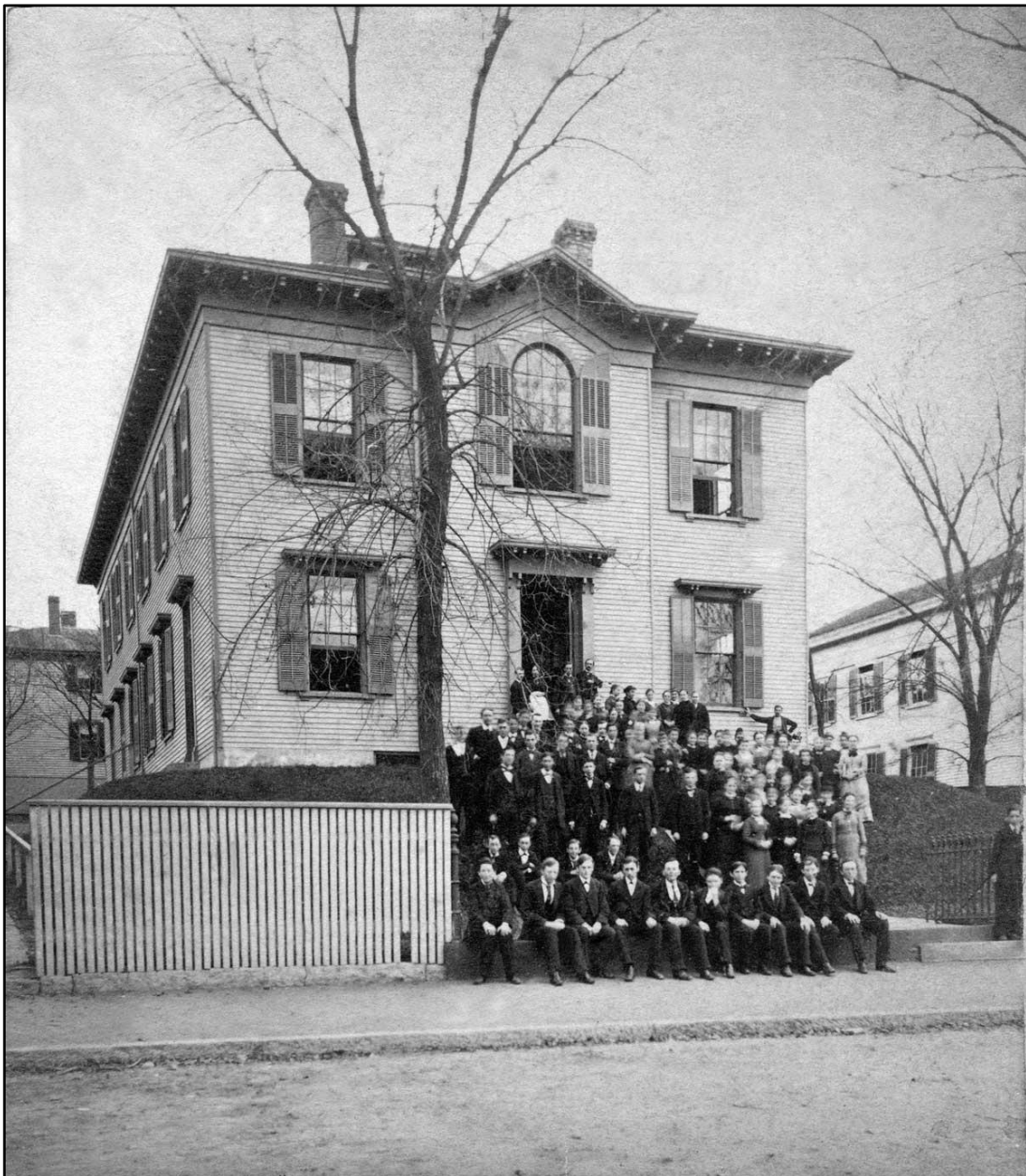
The Common School Movement soon spread beyond Massachusetts as more states adopted the idea of universal education.

Spurred by leadership at the state level, Fall River held a town meeting in April 1849 and voted to establish a public high school. The sum of \$1,500 was appropriated to finance the project.

One month later, Fall River High School was opened on May 10 in the private school building of George B. Stone. It was located on the south side of Franklin Street.

Not long after, a permanent building opened on June Street. The School Committee appointed George B. Stone as Principal. The Franklin Street building later became a grammar school.

The first academic year of Fall River High School ended in June of 1850 with an enrollment of 50 students.



Fall River High School, June Street, 1850-1887

1850-1900: A City and a Legacy

The town of Fall River was incorporated as a city in April of 1854. The first city election was held on May 6. During the next fifty years, Fall River forged an identity based on manufacturing, a dedicated and diverse workforce, and a commitment to education.

The Spindle City

By the late 1800s, the city was home to over one hundred textile mills, making it the largest textile-producing center in the United States. By 1880, half a million spindles (the unit of textile measurement) created half of all the print cloth production in the world, earning Fall River the epithet: "The Spindle City".

Demand for Labor

The industrial boom attracted a large immigrant work force, consisting of the Irish, Germans, Scots, French Canadians, Polish, Italians, Lebanese, Azorean Portuguese, and Russian Jews.

Between 1860 and 1900, the city grew nearly eightfold, from 14,000 to nearly 110,000. By the turn of the century, Fall River was the third-largest city in Massachusetts, exceeded only by Boston and Worcester.

Commitment to Education

The rapid growth of the city necessitated the construction of new schoolhouses to accommodate the increased number of pupils. Fifteen new buildings were erected between 1868 and 1879 to meet the demand.

James F. Davenport, the newly elected Mayor of Fall River, in his inaugural address of January 5, 1874, urged the Board of Aldermen to think about the need to build a new and larger high school.

"The rapid increase of our school population within a few years, and the prospect of future growth, makes it necessary that a more commodious building should be provided for our High School. The present one is insufficient to meet the wants of such a school, either in size or arrangements. This matter is worthy of your careful consideration".

A high school alumni association

The graduates of Fall River High School, now twenty-five years strong, noted how the increase in the number of graduates was affecting class spirit, friendships, and attendance at the annual alumni meetings.

The first high school assembly, the precursor of annual meetings, was held in 1849. Miss Mary L. Holmes, Secretary of Classes 1849 to 1852, documented the event in an alumni publication called *The Nucleus*.

“In the first part of July, the scholars (students) held their first annual gathering. A grove near the Bear's Den, (a popular picnic area, south of Laurel Street), was selected as the place of the meeting”.

To re-establish a high school association, class officers reached out to graduates by publishing an open invitation in the *Fall River Daily Evening News* of June 30, 1876.

“It has ever been a source of regret to many of the graduates of our High School that the association known as the High School Alumni, once a flourishing, live society, has for many years past, been unheard of”.

“The members of the class who are graduating today propose with the assistance of the graduates of last year to revive the association”.

“The books, in which all persons that have graduated from the school may register their names and become a member of the new association, will be opened at the annual High School sociable this Friday evening”.

“A constitution and by-laws will be adopted; elections of officers will follow.”

The newly established association was more than a social gathering. Its objective was to cement the friendships of former pupils and to create relationships between past and current scholars. An alumni association would benefit the city by fostering a sense of community and pride.

Building a city

The 1880s was a memorable one for the city, not only for the great advances in manufacturing, wealth, and increased population, but also for the creation of a modern municipal infrastructure.

The infrastructure that would serve the city for over 100 years was comprised of the water works, the U.S. Post Office and Custom House, the New Bedford railroad, the Slade's Ferry Bridge, the erection of new public buildings for schools, fire and police, and the beginning of sewer works.

Fall River's textile industry had a long history of mill fires. On September 19, 1874, the deadliest fire in the city's history occurred at the Granite Mill complex. The fire was a tragic event that resulted in the loss of 23 lives, mostly children. The disaster made national headlines and led to significant reforms in mill design, including the requirement for fire escapes and multiple exits.

Labor disputes in Fall River were part of a broader movement of labor unrest in the United States. The strikes of 1870, 1875, and 1879 sort to address the grievances of workers and improve their working conditions.

Durfee High School 1

The city, school committee, and alumni association continued to debate the need for a new high school. The high school on June Street became so crowded that for several years freshmen classes were held in the Davenport grammar school building located on Branch Street.

The effort to build and fund a new high school was at an impasse. Mrs. Mary B. Young (nee Mary Brayton Durfee), on February 5, 1883, addressed the dilemma in a written presentation to the Fall River City Council.

Heir to the Brayton and Durfee textile fortunes, Mrs. Young offered to erect and furnish at her expense, a building suitable for a high school. The school was to be in memory of her son, Bradford Mathew Chaloner (B.M.C.) Durfee, who was born on June 15, 1843, and died on September 13, 1872, at the age of 29.

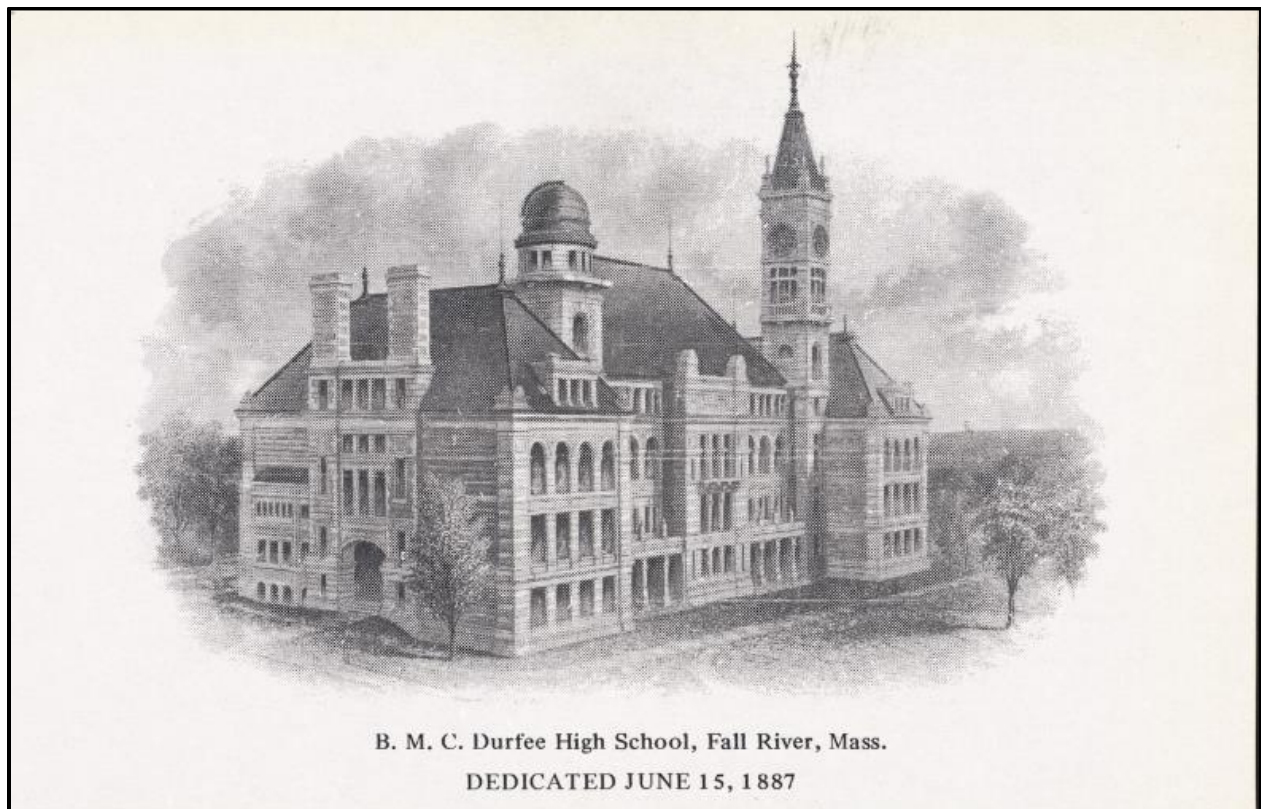
The Fall River City Council quickly accepted the generous proposal. The entire process of establishing and accepting a new high school took place between February 8, 1883, and July 2, 1883. Groundbreaking for the new school was held on August 13, 1883.

Prior to his death, B.M.C. Durfee had stated his desire that a portion of his estate be devoted to the advancement of higher education, and that the youth of Fall River have the opportunity to be instructed in the chemical, physical, and mechanical sciences that were an important part of the industries of Fall River.

The high school was constructed at a cost of nearly one million dollars. The doors opened to pupils on September 7, 1887. The deed was dated Wednesday, June 15,

1887. The day was the anniversary of B.M.C. Durfee's birth.

From that date to the present, B.M.C. Durfee High School has played an important role in providing secondary education to the youth of Fall River and has become an iconic symbol of Fall River's textile past and commitment to its future.



A full account of the building and completion of B.M.C. Durfee High School is available at: <https://www.sailsinc.org/durfee/bmcdurfee.pdf>

A second building

The city's population continued to grow. The increase was clearly reflected in school enrollment figures and was especially apparent in the demand for secondary education.

B.M.C. Durfee High School was becoming increasingly crowded. The building, when completed, was considered the finest high school in the United States.

The curriculum was designed to meet the definition of a comprehensive high school. Durfee offered a college preparatory program, foreign languages, and scientific or vocational programs.

There was ample room for the four hundred pupils enrolled. Durfee High School was supposed to last for years to come.

However, as early as 1904, newspaper records show that there was a need for another building. Principal George F. Pope, in his reports to the School Committee, suggested a solution would be to build a building adjacent to the Durfee building to include the shops, laboratories, gymnasium, and drawing rooms currently housed in the Durfee building.

Another decade would pass before a new structure was built. In the fall of 1913, the Technical Building was opened to relieve the overcrowding at Durfee. It was located opposite the Durfee building on the west side of Rock Street.

The curriculum was planned to offer a four-year plan of study in the following areas. Technical for Boys, Technical for Girls, and Clerical and Business. By 1918, the School Committee decided to unify both buildings. Both structures became B.M.C. Durfee High School.

In addition, a new college for vocational and secondary schools greatly expanded the industrial education that was available in Fall River.

Bradford Durfee College of Technology, opened in 1904, as a textile school. It was named after Major Bradford Durfee (1788-1843), an early Fall River industrialist and father of B.M.C. Durfee.

Very Reverend Dom John Hugh Diman, a Benedictine monk, who saw education as social service, recognized the need for quality education for the sons of the working-class. In 1912, he began the program that would evolve into the modern-day Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School.

Building an educational endowment

The idea of scholarships was first introduced by the alumni association in 1883 at an annual meeting when four members of the association pulled together \$8.50 among themselves. The following year, fourteen leading businessmen in the city presented \$1,400 to the alumni association to help scholars achieve their educational goals.

After a few years, the alumni association selected seven members as trustees of the scholarship fund. Contributions started to come in from class reunions, class anniversaries, private contributions, and memorial gifts.

There was one completed scholarship fund. One scholarship was offered once every four years. It was intended to have four funds allowing the awarding of one scholarship each year.

The first scholarship was offered by the trustees to Miss Lillian M. Wing of the class of 1894. Four years later, the second recipient was David Reuben Radovsky of the class of 1898.

First Scholarship Recipient

Lillian May Wing (1877-1959), Class of 1894

Source: *Fall River Globe*, Saturday, June 2, 1894

From: P.J. Hurley, School Committee, 1883-1889

**To: V.W. Haughwout, Fall River High School Graduate,
Chairman of the Trustees of the Fall River High School Alumni Scholarship Program,
Alderman, 1884, 1886, and eminent cotton broker**

Dear Sir:

“A few friends of the Alumni recognizing the worthy nature of the undertaking have subscribed to the scholarship funds.... I have the honor of presenting these (sums) payable on demand”.

Mr. Haughwout: “We now have \$1,936.45 in the scholarship fund.... This scholarship fund has now become operative. The committee met today and awarded the scholarship to a young lady of the Class of 1894, to be devoted by her to a four-year course in the higher education given in the Harvard annex (Radcliffe College). We had assured her an income of \$50 each year. We now assure her an income of \$100 each year. The young lady is Miss Lillian M. Wing of the Class of 1894”.

Note: Fifty percent of Miss Wing’s tuition was funded by the Scholarship Program. Tuition at Harvard/Radcliffe in 1894 was \$200.00 per year.



Newspaper sketch, *Fall River Globe*, June 29, 1894

Lillian May Wing was born in Fall River, MA, on 28 June 1877. She was the daughter of William Osney Wing and Phebe Carpenter Mathewson.

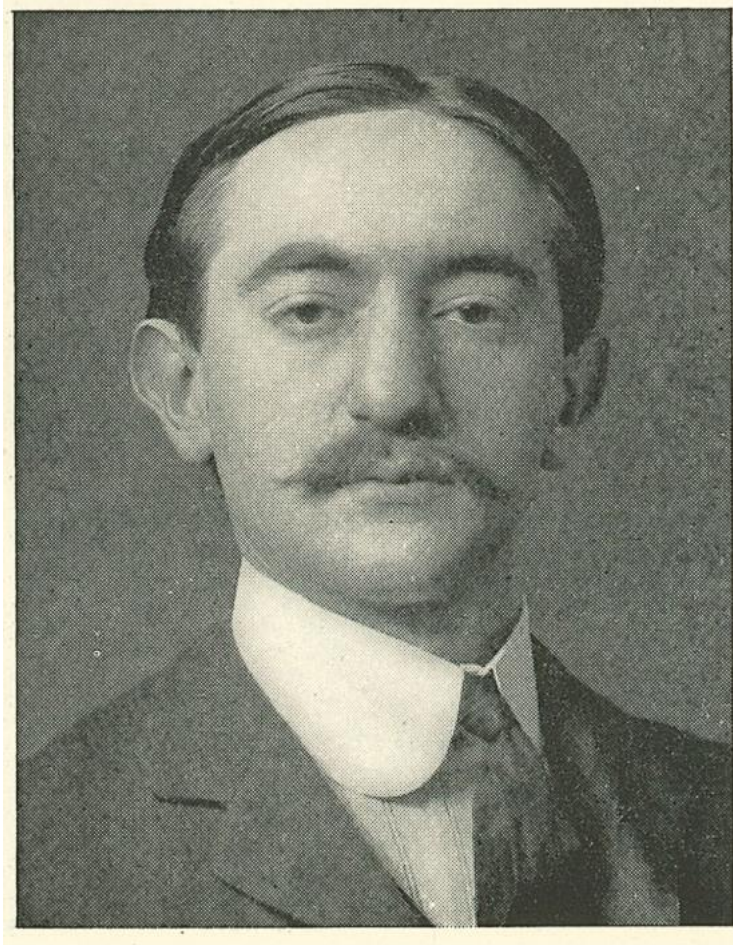
Lillian started a long and successful teaching career after graduating from Ratcliffe College in 1898. She married Willis Estabrook Smith in Cambridge, MA on 28 June 1904.

Second Scholarship Recipient

David Reuben Radovsky (1880-1931), Esq., Class of 1898

Source: *Harvard Class of 1902's 25th anniversary report*

Archives call number: HUD 302.25



David R. Radovsky was born in Russia on April 2, 1880, a son of Bernard and Bessie (Feuerhaltz) Radovsky. He immigrated to the United States with his family in 1885.

He received his BA and MA degrees from Harvard College in 1902 and 1903, and his Bachelor of Laws degree from Harvard Law School in 1905. At Harvard he was handball champion for three years. He played basketball and baseball and won scholarships for high scholastic standing.

He married Minnie Ester Simon of Fall River in 1909. They had 11 children.

Source: See *Fall River Herald News*, Tuesday, May 26, 1931 (obituary), for further information about Mr. Radovsky's professional, social, political, and religious life.

1900-2026: The Fortunes of a City

The same textile industry that brought such prosperity to Fall River also led to the city's decline. New England textile mills faced serious competition from their southern counterparts due to lower labor and transportation costs, as well as the South's investment in new machinery and equipment.

Fall River faced the first wave of mill closures in 1923. The city's economy was devastated by more mill closures combined with a catastrophic fire in 1928 that destroyed much of the downtown area. These problems were only exacerbated by the stock market crash by the end of the decade.

With the demise of the textile industry, many of the city's mills were occupied by various smaller companies. By 1940, the garment industry, traditionally based in the New York City area, employed nearly one-fifth of Fall River's workforce.

Since the 1990s, the garment industry also faced significant decline as the U.S. clothing manufacturing sector shifted from U.S. brands and retailers to global outsourcing.

Durfee High School 2

Throughout these economic upturns and downturns, Fall River was sustained by its educational foundation and the intellectual and religious vitality of the city. History shows that the beloved Durfee High School through the years weathered wars, depressions, and economic change.

However, as the years passed, it became evident that the historic Rock Street Durfee would not be able to support the needs of today's students. The Englehardt Report, written by the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, required that Fall River build a more modern high school.

In 1978, B.M.C. Durfee High School, Durfee 2, opened on Elsbree Street. The new building was designed as four interlocking buildings, separated into wings according to subjects taught. This marked the beginning of a new era for Durfee's history.



B.M.C. Durfee High School, Elsbree Street, Durfee 2

A full account of the building of Durfee 2 is available at:

<https://www.durfeealumniassociation.com/about>

Durfee High School 3

Past and present

Source: *The Chimes*, 2022, Page 9

The new B.M.C. Durfee High School, Durfee 3, opened in September 2021. “We have a world-class facility for the students of Fall River for many generations to come,” said Principal Matt Desmarais. “The spirit that is in this building already, the natural light, the energy, is really going to transform our school’s culture.”

Desmarais said that, unlike Durfee 2, every classroom in the new Durfee had windows that let in natural light. The ground floor was mostly shops and classrooms for the school’s career and vocational tech program and fine arts classes.

The school’s culinary arts restaurant, rebranded as the Granite Grille, and the salon run by cosmetology students are next to a main entrance, meant to encourage

community members to engage with students' work.

The new school has several highly specialized spaces, such as a TV studio with all-new equipment for students learning TV production, and a planetarium with movie theater seats based on the design of the theater found in Boston's Museum of Science.

Each room is equipped with a Promethean board, an interactive screen that functions as a massive computer monitor, allowing teachers to display images from their desk computers. The library features soaring ceilings and natural wood.

The bright new building has details that tie it to the past, including reclaimed wooden beams and stair treads from the King Philip (cotton) Mill complex.

The observatory at the top of the building houses a historic telescope crafted in the 1880s that has been in the school's possession for more than one hundred years.

There is also the belfry where massive bronze bells that date back to the original Durfee building on Rock Street, supplemented with a few newly forged bells, create a full carillon.



B.M.C. Durfee High School, Elsbree Street, Durfee 3

**A complete account of the building of Durfee 3 is available at:
Source: *The Chimes*, 2023, Page 4**

The Alumni and Scholarship Organizations Today 150 Years Strong

The Legacy Endures

The Durfee High School Alumni Association (DAA) is dedicated to keeping graduates connected, celebrating the shared history of classmates, and supporting the school's future. Through events, networking, and community initiatives, alumni stay engaged and give back to Durfee High School.

The Trustees (the Trustees) of Fall River High School Alumni Scholarships, founded at the behest of the DAA, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization which allows for tax-deductible donations. The organization focuses on supporting the educational goals of deserving Durfee students as they pursue higher education.

Scholarship Awards

Each year, the Trustees award significant financial assistance to graduating seniors. These awards are typically renewable for each year of the student's undergraduate studies, provided they maintain satisfactory academic performance.

The Trustees generate an income through investments that allow the scholarships to continue in perpetuity. They review the applicants' academic and extra-curricular achievements and interview each candidate. Both merit and need are considered.

Approximately 25 students receive scholarships every year. The scholarships awarded are not merely for the student's first year of college but are given for each of the four years of the student's undergraduate studies.

The yearly distribution for the four revolving classes, at present, is more than \$250,000.00.

Students obtain applications from the guidance department at Durfee High School. The scholarships, named after various contributing individuals and organizations, reflect the community's commitment to education.

Donating to the Scholarship Fund

While the fund is financially sound, the needs of graduates, facing ever sky-rocketing tuition bills, have never been greater. Tuition and living expenses at most private universities exceed \$70,000 per year.

For public universities, the cost of attendance, with room and board, can easily place college out of reach for talented graduates. Many qualified students are deterred from applying to their first college choice due to these staggering and daunting figures.

Gifts to the scholarship fund in any amount are welcomed. A minimum donation of \$5,000 is required to establish a named fund. Often, several named scholarships are granted to a single student to provide that student with a larger award.

The Application Process

The Trustees begin the selection process each spring. They review the applicants' academic and extra-curricular achievements and interview each candidate. Both merit and need are impartially considered.

Each recipient must report their grades to the president of the trustees at the end of every semester to demonstrate that they have maintained a satisfactory grade point average. Failure to report one's grades or maintain one's grades may result in the forfeiture of the scholarship.

Recipients are announced at the DAA's annual meeting held in May. The program reflects not only the list of scholarships being awarded in that particular year, but also the list of scholarships still being paid to those moving on to their sophomore, junior, and senior years in college.

The Annual Program (2025), website, provides more information:

[1614b5_992e4548699f408dbfed7716691e32db.pdf](#)

To add to the distinguished list of donors by establishing a scholarship, contact:

Claudine A. Cloutier, President of the Fall River High School Scholarship Fund,
at claudinecloutier34@gmail.com.

Tax-deductible donations can be made payable to The Trustees of the Fall River High School Scholarship Fund and mailed to:

Office of the President
P.O. Box 2519,
Fall River, MA 02722

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