

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 19-8-2016

## **Legacy of the man behind the vision of AUB A tribute to Daniel Bliss on the centennial of his passing**

One hundred years ago, founder of the American University of Beirut (AUB), Dr. Daniel Bliss, completed 60 years of service to education in Lebanon and the region when he passed away in 1916. Today's leading University was once a vision by Daniel Bliss who pursued it until he founded what has become the American University of Beirut.

Bliss was born on August 17, 1823. He had to drop out of school when his father could not afford his education but continued at 23, funding his education with scholarships, tutoring, and farming. He graduated from Amherst College and spent two years at Andover Theological Seminary where he became ordained minister in 1855. He joined the Foreign Mission and, with a vision to create a better world through mission service, travelled to Syria with his new wife, Abby Wood, to teach as part of the Congregational American Mission at the American Academy of 'Abeih, and later at Souk el Gharb.

In 1862, he returned to New York to meet with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions with the idea of establishing a college, and as one of the prime movers, he was selected to be in charge of the project. Devoting his time to the college, he resigned from the mission and formed the Board of Trustees with the help of the Hon. William E. Dodge. A certificate of incorporation was drafted on April 18, 1863, and on April 24 that year a charter for establishing the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) was granted by the legislature of the State of New York. Daniel Bliss was unanimously voted to organize the future college and serve as its President.

Bliss then spent two years on a long tour in the US and UK to raise the funds needed to start the college and returned with his wife to Beirut on March 2, 1866.

### **Setting the mission of the College**

The Syrian Protestant College (SPC) opened its doors on the 3rd of December, 1866. It was a modest beginning with Daniel Bliss both president and teacher. The “prospectus and program of the Syrian Protestant College Institute, Beirut” asserted two explicit objectives:

First, to enable native youth to obtain, in the country, the literary, scientific, and professional education which the exigencies of the community demand; and second, to make the institution indigenous, self-governing, and self-sustaining. (Missionary Herald, 1863, vol. LIX:37).

Bliss favored a system at SPC whereby “greater effort was made to educate the students rather than simply to instruct them,” as he wrote in his book, *The Reminiscences of Daniel Bliss*. He expressed in his 1902 farewell address the view that “facts are the seeds of thought and, like seeds in the vegetable world, are of little value garnered up; but under the power of reason, will, and conscience are made into ideals and laws that govern matter and minds.”

Bliss called on his students to discipline their minds to reason for themselves already accepted truths and believed that new ideas and theories constantly bombarded the students of that era.

He did not want SPC to serve as a theological seminary focusing solely on religious training; rather, he saw literary and scientific studies as compatible with Christian principles as they helped in discerning good from bad. The departments of study added to Christian literature comprised Arabic Language and Literature; Mathematics; Astronomy and Engineering; Chemistry, Botany, and Natural Science; Modern Languages; and Medicine. The program was later extended to include Philosophy; Economics; Social Science; Commerce; and others, and as the school developed during the first decade, Bliss and some of the faculty members decided that special topics should be taught in English rather than Arabic.

During the time he supervised the construction of the first College buildings, he wrote to his wife and four children in the US about the importance of pursuing the vision and described his toil. “There is no time for the president of this college to rest. He must work seven days in the week,” he wrote in his *Letters from a New Campus*. He strongly believed in the importance of learning. “To fit one for the weighty duties of life, much time is spent in constant application of the mind to study.” He persevered with passion and patience and was reassured by his faith that the SPC “will yet shape by its power the Orient,” and that history was in the making as the College will be “the most powerful instrument in this land to breakdown superstition” and “will continue to take hold of the country more and more.” Preparing the first program for SPC, Daniel Bliss wrote to W. W. Tyler, his former Amherst professor, that he expected the college to be “the Amherst – or the Yale of the Orient.”

In his most famous speech at the laying of the cornerstone of College Hall on December 7, 1871, and despite his missionary background and the era he lived in, he set the guiding principle of the institution by declaring, “This College is for all conditions and classes of men without regard to color, nationality, race, or religion. A man, white, black, or yellow, Christian, Jew, Mohammedan, or heathen, may enter and enjoy all the advantages of this institution for three, four, or eight years; and go out believing in one God, in many gods, or in no God.”

The legacy of Daniel Bliss lives on. “One thing has not changed since Daniel Bliss founded AUB in 1866: we are determined to make an impact – on knowledge, and on society,” said AUB President Fadlo R. Khuri in his inauguration speech in January 2016.

As professor, treasurer, and administrator, Bliss guided the growing college for thirty-six years until he retired in 1902 at the age of 81. His son Howard became president. He remained living on campus until his death at the age of 92 and was buried in the same country that he spent most of his life serving, Lebanon.

ENDS

**For more information please contact:**

Simon Kachar  
Director of News and Media Relations  
Mobile: 03427024 Office: 01374374 Ext: 2676  
Email: [sk158@aub.edu.lb](mailto:sk158@aub.edu.lb)

**Note to Editors**

**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

**Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:**

Website: [www.aub.edu.lb](http://www.aub.edu.lb)  
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>  
Twitter: [http://twitter.com/AUB\\_Lebanon](http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon)