

# Reader's Guide

For more than 100 years, the mission of Simmons College has been to provide an education that combines “intellectual leadership with professional preparation.” None of this would be possible without John Simmons, a man of humble origin, whose hard work and vision led to the establishment of Simmons. Every year on Founder's Day, the community honors John Simmons, and in so doing, also honors his history, including the time-honored principle of social responsibility, which John Simmons, in his frock coat and cravat, embodies.

## *Chapter One: First Fortune*

In this chapter, we learn about John Simmons' ancestors.

- Do you have a story about your ancestors?
- Where did your family originally come from?
- Why did they (or you) come to this country?
- What do you know about your ancestors—their faith, education, occupations?

## *Chapter Two: Opportunity Knocks*

This chapter provides background for John Simmons' career as he moved from Little Compton, Rhode Island to Boston, Massachusetts.

- What was your first job?
- What was the economy like when you first starting working?
- How has the class structure changed since John's day?

## *Chapter Three: Production Costs*

The tailoring trade and attitudes about dress are discussed in this chapter.

- Describe how you dressed when you first began working.
- How has your attitude toward clothes changed over the years?
- Do clothes still “make the man?”

## *Chapter Four: Times and Treasures*

As John Simmons' business grew, his position in the social pyramid changed. This chapter describes the cultural expectations that come with affluence.

- Discuss the changes you have noticed in consumption of goods and services from your youth to the present day.
- Describe the effect of these changes on personal happiness.

## *Chapter Five: Ducats and Daughters*

This section reports on the options and restrictions on women in the mid-nineteenth century.

- What do you recall or have you learned about the Women's Movement of the 1970s and beyond?
- In what specific ways have women's lives improved? Can you cite specific ways in which you find progress lacking?

## *Chapter Six: Is it Fair?*

Slavery and immigration were huge moral and social issues in John's time, and the memory of the injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of people as chattel has been passed down through the generations. Immigration reform is a highly politicized topic that has also been a part of the history of the U.S.

- Although slavery is illegal in the U.S., where do you see as its effects today?
- What do you believe are the key issues about present day U.S. immigration?

## *Chapter Seven: Half of My Life is Gone*

Literature and poetry can articulate ideas about the purpose of life and the passage of time. One of the best-known examples would be the writings of Benjamin Franklin, who wisely said: “The doors of wisdom are never shut.”

- What movies, plays, biographies, fiction, non-fiction and poetry have helped you recognize and express “the meaning of life”?

## *Chapter Eight: Thy Will Be Done*

John Simmons’ endowment of a college is revealed in this chapter. Rather than leave his fortune to his family, John Simmons placed a metaphorical cornerstone in his city which ensured educational opportunities for generations of women (and men!).

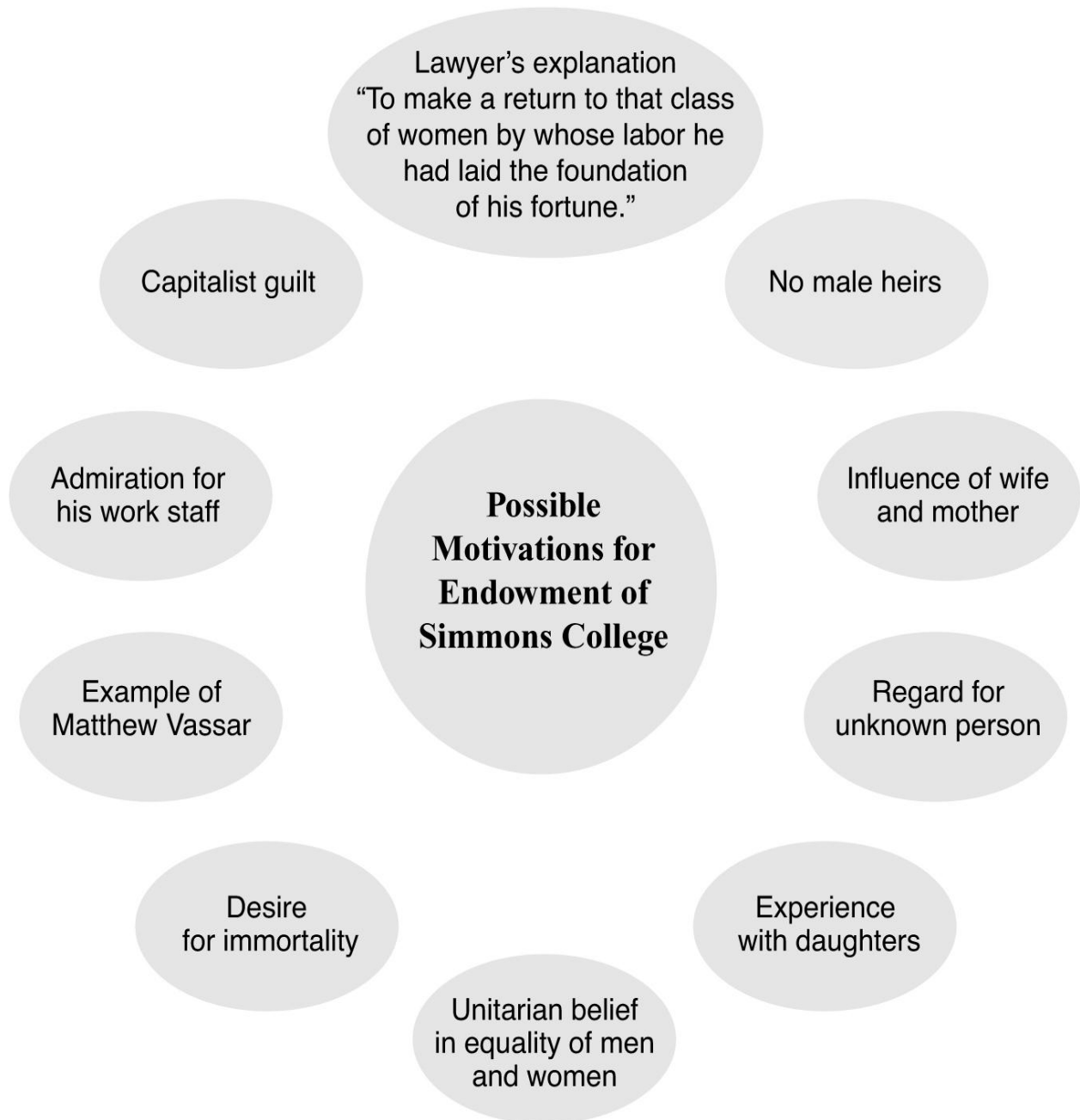
- Are there any tangible objects you would like to leave behind?
- What are your feelings about leaving a legacy?
- How would you like to be remembered?

## *Chapter Nine: Wheel of Fortune*

The Great Boston Fire of 1872 thwarts John’s plan, but Simmons College rises nonetheless.

- What are your “setback” stories? What were the final results?
- Is adversity really the best teacher?

# John Simmons' Wheel of Fortune



Graphic by Eileen Kenneally, [Kenneally Creative](#)

# Supplement to the Reader's Guide

## *LOOKING BACK*

1. Can you recall an image/photo—real or virtual—of yourself during your college years? What were you like then? What were your dreams, concerns, causes, loves and goals?
2. What is your story about choosing the college you attended? Are you glad you attended that college? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe your college experience academically? Socially? Emotionally? How did you change from your freshman to senior year?
4. Did you have a professor or college friend who remains memorable? What story can you tell to describe that person and his/her long lasting effect on you?
5. Have you ever attended a college class reunion? Why or why not?
6. Name three big changes in society since your college days.

## *GIVING BACK*

1. John Simmons left behind his Bible, an oil portrait, and some of his china. Perhaps through these objects we can glean something of his values, taste and position in society. What three objects would you put into a time capsule to help someone in the future understand your life and times?
2. Do you keep a diary or journal or blog? Why or why not?

3. John Simmons' reputation comes from donating a large portion of his fortune to start a college for women so that they might gain "an independent livelihood." What would you like said about you by future generations?
4. In his will, John Simmons left his daughters funds so they would be comfortable, but not wealthy. What do you think of his decision?
5. What is your favorite philanthropic cause or charitable organization? How did you become involved with that mission?
6. Have you given back to your college? Why or why not?

## *LOOKING FORWARD*

1. John Simmons' legacy helped women to push forward through college education, a radical idea in his day. What is your opinion of single sex education today? What do you feel are its advantages and disadvantages? What types of educational institutions and enterprises do you envision for the future?
2. What do you think a college education should provide?
3. Imagine our future. What innovations in the arts and sciences might advance society? For example, what is today's equivalent of the sewing machine?
4. Reformers always play a significant role in shaping society. Name two present-day leaders you expect will impact the future. How might this happen?