

Marshall the Man Who Made the Supreme Court

Dartmouth College case

Dartmouth College case, formally **Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward (4 Wheat. 518 [1819])**, U.S. Supreme Court case in which the court held that the charter of Dartmouth College granted in 1769 by King George III of England was a contract and, as such, could not be impaired by the New Hampshire legislature. The charter vested control of the college in a self-perpetuating board of trustees, which, as a result of a religious controversy, removed John Wheelock as college president in 1815. In response, the New Hampshire legislature passed an act [amending](#) the charter and establishing a board of overseers to replace the trustees. The trustees then sued William H. Woodward, college secretary and ally of Wheelock, but lost in the state courts.

Daniel Webster, a Dartmouth graduate and the most famous lawyer of his time, represented the trustees before the U.S. Supreme Court, which reversed the decision of the New Hampshire courts. The Supreme Court held that Section X, Article 1, of the federal Constitution prohibits states from altering the obligations of a contract, in this case, a charter. The founders of Dartmouth, the court ruled, contracted with the trustees for the perpetual application of the funds provided by the founders. The decision had far-reaching impact in its application to business charters, protecting businesses and corporations from a great deal of government regulation.

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