Modern day Hartwick College is a nationally ranked, selective liberal arts and sciences institution, the roots of which reach back to 1797 with the founding of Hartwick Seminary through the will of John Christopher Hartwick. Hartwick was a Lutheran minister who arrived in 1746 from Germany via London to lead several mission congregations of early settlers along the Hudson and Mohawk rivers in what is now upstate New York. His dream of establishing an institution of higher learning became a reality shortly after his death with the founding of Hartwick Seminary in 1797. The New York State Legislature in 1816 incorporated the new school—the first Lutheran seminary in America—as a classical academy and theological seminary.

The Seminary and Academy had a long and useful history, training more than 300 ministers and educating over 3,000 young men and women. In the mid-1920s, Lutheran leaders in the state decided to add a four-year “college department.” With the support of the church and a group of local citizens, the College opened in 1928 in Oneonta, about 20 miles from the original site of the Seminary. Dr. Charles R. Myers, who had been president of Hartwick Seminary, became its first president. He was succeeded by Dr. Charles Leitzell, president of the New York Synod. In 1947 the charters of the Seminary and the College were combined, confirming the lineage of the College as the Seminary faded away.

The College developed slowly and gathered strength through the 1940s and ’50s under the presidencies of Dr. Henry J. Arnold and Dr. Miller A.F. Ritchie. From 1959 to 1969, under Dr. Frederick M. Binder, there was significant growth in size, physical plant, budget and endowment. In 1968 the College and the Lutheran Church concluded that the time had come for an amicable separation, and Hartwick became an independent college. Dr. Adolph G. Anderson served as president from 1969 to 1976, a period during which Hartwick developed more flexible and innovative curricular approaches. From 1977 to 1992, under Dr. Philip S. Wilder Jr., the College was characterized by the strengthening of its faculty and student body and by the building of a strong foundation of financial support. In 1992, Dr. Richard A. Detweiler assumed the presidency of Hartwick College, seeking to build on the College’s growing national reputation as a liberal arts and sciences college of character and excellence.