Two very different times. Two very different leaders. One enduring message. Advancement through higher education promises passage to a life of service and reward. Today, at the University’s annual Commencement, we celebrate the opening of every graduate’s pathway.

Benjamin Franklin was Penn’s founder, but in 1754, exactly 250 years ago, the Trustees elected Rev. William Smith the first Provost of the College and it was Smith who shaped the University’s course for a century and more. Smith established the model undergraduate curriculum that prevailed until the introduction of the Bachelor of Science degree in 1852. He graduated the first class of collegiate students in 1757 and celebrated their academic achievements in a student-centered commencement ceremony that remained in effect until 1895. He raised funds among the elite of Philadelphia in such a way that the college at Penn became an ivory tower, so distant from the interests and aspirations of the Philadelphia community that it took the introduction of undergraduate professional schools to transform Penn into an institution resembling that of today.

Smith’s classical curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts degree, firmly entrenched in a thorough knowledge of classical Greek and Latin, was not finally set aside until 1914. Meanwhile the professional schools grew up all around the College: the Medical School, the Law School, the School of Engineering, the Dental School, the Wharton School, the School of Veterinary Medicine, the School of Design, the Graduate School of Education, the School of Nursing, the School of Social Work and the Annenberg School. These schools came to represent Penn far more than the study of liberal arts and continued to do so until recent times. An institutional transformation began in the late 1950s and only in the past decade was fully realized. Penn today is a great, internationally-renowned university of teaching and research, with a distinguished School of Arts and Sciences at its core.

A Picture of Penn: 250 Years in the Making

Thus, it is hoped, the student may be led thro a scale of easy ascent, till finally rendered capable of Thinking, Writing and Acting well; which are the grand objects of a liberal education.

Provost Rev. William Smith
Plan of Education in the College of Philadelphia
1756

In its first years Penn consisted of the College of Philadelphia, and an Academy and Charity Schools, which served younger students. Nearly one hundred students were enrolled in the College, where they took classes in Latin, Greek, mathematics, and some philosophy in their first year; and composition in Latin and Greek, moral philosophy, and natural philosophy in their second and third years. Smith taught the most advanced classes in the
When the Federal government moved to the District of Columbia, it left behind a great mansion, built by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the President. Never occupied by John Adams, who thought it too palatial for the leader of a republic, the President's House was purchased by the University of Pennsylvania in 1801, remodeled for academic use and occupied in 1802. Penn remained on the Ninth Street campus until its move to West Philadelphia in 1872. Drawn and engraved by William Birch and Sons. Collections of the University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center.

College: "Logick, Rhetorick, Ethicks, and Natural Philosophy." Moral philosophy, or ethics, was the study of humankind and eventually formed the basis for the modern social sciences. Natural philosophy was the study of the physical sciences. The life sciences were excluded, but in 1765 others at Penn formed the first medical school in British North America, a distinction which makes it correct to call Penn America's first university.

1804: An Honorary Degree Celebrates the Age of Enlightenment

The Board proceeded, with the faculty, to the Hall in Fourth Street, to hold the public Commencement, when the several Degrees were conferred agreeably to the Mandamus.

Minutes of the Trustees

Wednesday, 6 June 1804

In 1802 the University acquired its second campus, on the west side of Philadelphia's Ninth Street, between Market and Chestnut Streets. The Trustees continued to hold Commencement, however, in the great Hall on the old campus, on the southwest corner of Fourth and Arch Streets. In 1804 the Governor of Pennsylvania led the academic procession, which paraded seven city blocks from the new campus to the old. The audience heard nine student orations, including one on "the Advantages of a Liberal Education, particularly to men in important public station" and another on "the use and value of Classical Literature." Vice Provost John Andrews awarded eight Bachelor of Arts degrees and fifteen degrees of Doctor of Medicine. There were also two honorary degrees, both Doctors of Divinity.

The honorary doctorate conferred upon Samuel Miller was the highlight of the Commencement of 1804. It is always a great distinction when an institution of higher education confers an honorary degree on one of its own graduates and Miller was a graduate of the College, Class of 1789. His honorary degree recognized an extraordinary achievement: the publication by Miller, a year earlier, of a two-volume history of Europe and America, titled A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century, a Sketch of the Revolutions and Improvements in Science, Arts and Literature, during that Period. Miller was just 35 years old and still flushed with the confident optimism of the Enlightenment. He was a native of Delaware, who had spent his adult life in Philadelphia and New York. His work chronicled the intellectual and artistic achievements of the 18th century and gave insight into life in the Middle Atlantic states during the early years of the American Republic. The book was an immediate best seller throughout the English-speaking world, and Miller was widely praised on both sides of the Atlantic. In the years after 1804, Miller was a trustee of both Columbia University and Princeton University, but his major accomplishment was as a founder of and faculty member at Princeton Theological Seminary.

1854: A New Degree Signals a New Direction in Collegiate Education

The degree of Bachelor of Science is given to such students as have attended all the courses in the Department of Mathematics, and in that of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, and one course in Natural Theology, and the Evidences of Christianity, with two courses in Modern Languages, or two
At the Commencement held on 3 July 1854, Provost Henry Vethake conferred Penn's first degree of Bachelor of Science. Two years earlier, when the Trustees formulated a new, applied science curriculum, a great storm had broken out, culminating in the resignation of the Provost. The Trustees responded by appointing Vethake to the provostship, the first person to hold that position who was not also an ordained clergyman. The second innovation during this period was the establishment of the Law School. Judge George Sharswood began giving law lectures in 1850 and in 1852 the Trustees formed a faculty of law, with Sharswood as its dean. The Law School then was very different from that of today. It was viewed as a supplement to the traditional method of legal education, which was an apprenticeship with a practicing attorney. Nor did the Law School require any educational prerequisites for admission, such as the now standard requirement of a bachelor's degree. Even so, by introducing undergraduate professional degrees in applied science and law, Penn was taking the first steps in moving away from the model of higher education Provost William Smith had inherited from early modern British practice. Penn held its 1854 Commencement in the Hall of the Musical Fund Society, at Eighth and Locust Streets. Musical Fund Hall was one of the most prominent meeting places in 19th century America. Charles Dickens lectured there in 1842; William M. Thackeray gave lectures there in 1853; and in 1856, the Republican Party held its first national convention there, nominating John C. Fremont for President of the United States. The academic procession of 1854 began at the College building on the Ninth Street campus, just north of Chestnut Street. Led by an orchestra, under the direction of Benjamin C. Cross, the Trustees, faculty, and graduating students marched four city blocks, south and east, into the grand center aisle of Musical Fund Hall. The program began with prayer, followed by a salutatory oration in classical Greek. With musical selections interspersed throughout the program, eight of the graduating seniors in the College, including the student who had earned the B.S. degree, gave commencement addresses. In 1854 the University conferred thirteen Bachelor of Arts degrees, one Bachelor of Science degree, seven Bachelor of Laws degrees, and in separate ceremonies, held in early April, 171 Doctor of Medicine degrees. There were no honorary degrees.

The College and Law School were still very small schools. They drew their respective student bodies almost exclusively from Philadelphia and its neighboring counties. The School of Medicine was huge by comparison and truly national in the composition of its student body. In the 1853-54 academic year, the school's 463 students came from twenty-five states and three provinces of Canada. The faculty of the medical school managed their affairs quite independent of the Trustees of the University, conducting lectures and demonstrations in a separate building from that of the College and giving clinical instruction at the Pennsylvania Hospital, at Eighth and Spruce Streets. In many ways the School of Medicine pointed towards Penn's future.

1904: The West Philadelphia Campus Becomes Home to the Modern University

The steady growth in the numbers of our undergraduate students in the several courses in the College deserves to be espe-
Weightman Hall, opened 14 December 1904. Weightman Hall was a gift of the alumni of the University. Provost Harrison reported, "No other University interest of equal significance and importance has ever been undertaken solely by our Pennsylvania men and carried to so complete and brilliant a conclusion." The new facility included a swimming pool, 100 hundred feet by 30, and a large gymnasium, 144 feet by 70. The Trustees simultaneously established a new Department of Physical Education, enrollment in which became mandatory for all undergraduates and all students in professional schools under the age of 21. Many living alumni remember the requirements of the physical education program, which remained in place until the late 1960s. William H. Rau, photographer. Collections of the University Archives and Records Center.

The rapid advance of the College was only one reason why Provost Charles Custis Harrison issued extraordinarily optimistic annual reports 100 years ago. On a steadily expanding West Philadelphia campus, the College provided large, new facilities for the faculties of the School of Engineering, the Wharton School, and the School of Architecture (now Design). In the last quarter of the 19th century the University had also established the School of Dental Medicine, the School of Veterinary Medicine, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. In 1904 Penn formally established the Summer School, which immediately drew significant numbers of teachers throughout the Philadelphia region. The University was flourishing, with new buildings recently occupied by the Museum, the Law School, and the School of Medicine. Other new buildings were under construction or in an advanced stage of planning for the School of Engineering and the School of Veterinary Medicine. The Provost renovated old Medical Hall, renamed it Logan Hall, and turned it over to the Wharton School. Wharton remained in Logan Hall until its move to Dietrich Hall in 1952.

University life was also becoming modern. Houston Hall, the Quadrangle Dormitories, and Franklin Field all appeared on campus in the final decade of the 19th century. In 1904, Weightman Hall was under construction on 33rd Street. The faculty was increasingly composed of men who held the Ph.D. degree and conducted research and scholarly publication in conjunction with their classroom and clinical instruction. The undergraduate students published a campus newspaper, The Pennsylvanian, and the annual yearbook, The Record, chronicled dozens of other student activities. The administration of the University published a weekly newsletter, Old Penn, while the alumni published a monthly journal, The Alumni Register.

The academic year of 1904 culminated in Commencement exercises held in the Academy of Music, at Broad and Locust Streets. The procession was led by the Trustees, Provost, honorary degree recipients, and University faculty, who stepped into horse-drawn carriages at the entrance to College Hall and traveled more than twenty blocks to the Academy. The graduating students, led by their class officers, paraded behind. The program was no longer student-centered. Now it featured a distinguished guest speaker, who delivered a commencement address, as well as the singing of "Hail! Pennsylvania," an inspirational call to institutional loyalty. In short, the Commencement
Dietrich Hall and the trolley car tunnel under construction, 1954. Penn’s modern campus, with College Hall Green and Locust Walk at its core, was not possible until 19th century trolley lines could be placed underground and Woodland Avenue closed. This aerial view looks northeast, with the new Wharton School building, Dietrich Hall, occupying the center of the photograph and the excavation for the new trolley car tunnel in the lower right hand corner. The trolley car tunnel ran under the bed of the old Woodland Avenue, which was then closed and removed from city maps. Dietrich Hall had been opened for classes in 1952.

Julian Wasser, photographer. Collections of the University Archives and Records Center

exercises of a century ago were very similar to what we know and celebrate today.

In 1904, the proportion of the student body enrolled in the College and Graduate School was greater than the percentage held by the College alone in 1854, but even so, less than twenty percent was enrolled in the study of the arts and sciences. The faculty approved a total of 535 degrees for that year’s Commencement, 432 in the several professions and just 103 in arts and sciences. The big three – Dental Medicine, Medicine, and Law – led the way with 120, 96, and 91 graduates, respectively. They were followed by the College, with 73; the School of Engineering, with 56; the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, with 30; the Wharton School, with 29; the School of Veterinary Medicine, with 28; and the School of Architecture (now Design), with 12.

In 1904 the Commencement speaker was David McConnell Steele, who was just beginning a long and illustrious tenure as rector of St. Luke and Epiphany Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. He spoke on the responsibilities of University graduates as they began to take their place as leading American citizens. He summarized his remarks in three points: to know the great opportunities that America offers its citizens and to learn America by traveling over it; to take a balanced view of the different parts of the country and recognize each for their respective strengths; and to be fair-minded, assisted in large part by studying the nation’s history.

The University conferred thirteen honorary degrees in 1904, four of them on alumni. The degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on Samuel W. Pennypacker (LL.B. 1866), Governor of Pennsylvania and a Trustee of the University; James Tyndale Mitchell (LL.B. 1860), Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; and Horatio Curtis Wood (M.D. 1862), Professor of Pharmacology in the School of Medicine. The degree of Doctor of Science was conferred on George Dock, a graduate of the School of Medicine, Class of 1884, and by 1904, the distinguished Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine at the University of Michigan. Perhaps the most prominent of the honorary degree recipients was Jean Adrien Antoine Jules Jusserand, the French Ambassador to the United States.

1954: Penn Engages the City, the Nation, and the World

Those who have had the privilege of a university education have a special duty. They have a special obligation to maintain their sense of proportion in judging events inside their community and in relation to other peoples. They have to keep awake their sense of what are the true values. They must respect truth. They must show that respect for man and life which grows out of a true perspective on man and life. Finally, they must have the humility of one who thoroughly knows his own limitations, but also the scope of the demands which face him in our time.

Dag Hammarskjold
Secretary-General of the United Nations
1954

Penn took its first steps toward international citizenship in the 1950s. In 1953, a new President, Gaylord P. Harnwell, took charge of the University. He spoke volumes when he invited the world’s foremost ambassador of peace and cooperation to be the keynote speaker and receive an honorary doctorate at the first commencement ceremony of his new administration. In the 1950s Penn held two annual commencement exercises, the first in January, known as the “Convocation of University Council for the Conferring of Degrees” and the second in June, known simply as the University Commencement. The citation accompanying the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws conferred upon
January marked the formal dedication of the Annenberg School, which opened a year later. It was dedicated in October 1960 and on Hamilton Walk took place in October 1958; by 1960 construction was under way on Van Pelt Library and the Ravdin Institute of the University Hospital; two new dormitories, both for women – English House and the Women’s Residence Hall (now Hill Hall) were dedicated in October 1960 and February 1961, respectively; the new Annenberg School opened a year later. It was an extraordinary time for campus expansion, but perhaps the most notable for the University’s decision, made public in February 1954, to open to women students the undergraduate divisions of both the Engineering and Wharton schools. In a single stroke, the University formally lifted the final barriers to women’s enrollment in all academic programs at Penn.

Penn held its 1954 Commencement on Wednesday, 16 June, in the Municipal Auditorium, on South 34th Street, just below the University Hospital. The program featured two speakers that day. Charles Edward Wyzanski, Jr., Judge of the U.S. District Court for Massachusetts and President of Harvard University’s Board of Overseers, delivered the Commencement Address. In recognition of Columbia University’s Bicentennial Year, Grayson Louis Kirk, President of Columbia University, spoke on the “Right to Knowledge and the Free Use Thereof.” Penn conferred seven honorary degrees that day, three of them to distinguished alumni of its own.

In 1954, the faculty approved more than 2,000 degrees, 1,493 in the professions and 570 in the arts and sciences. The most popular degree was Wharton’s undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Economics, awarded to 560 graduates. The second most popular degree was the Bachelor of Arts, awarded to 392. A group of professional degrees – the D.D.S., the M.D., the M.B.A., and LL.B. – followed at 135, 127, 110, and 92, respectively. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences awarded 116 masters degrees and 62 PhDs. The proportion of the student body enrolled in the arts and sciences was larger than it had been fifty years earlier, but not to a remarkable extent. Penn was still very much an institution of higher education dominated by its professional schools.

By the year 2000, the arts and sciences undergraded the entire University. The School of Arts and Sciences occupied College Hall and directed more than fifty undergraduate majors and more than thirty graduate groups. The Bachelor of Arts degree was far and away the most popular, awarded to more than twenty-seven percent of the graduates; research degrees, both masters and doctorates, were earned by another thirteen percent of the graduates. Arts and sciences had therefore come to represent forty percent of the total study body, a larger plurality than at any previous time in University history. Of the remainder, nearly nineteen percent earned professional degrees at the undergraduate level, specifically, in business, engineering, and nursing. An even thirty-one percent acquired professional credentials by earning the masters degree, primarily in business, engineering, education, fine arts, nursing, and social work. Finally, about ten percent of the students earned traditional professional degrees in dental medicine, law, medicine, and veterinary medicine. By 2000 Penn was as richly diverse in the academic training it offered as it was in the student body it proudly graduated.

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