The Inauguration of Nancy J. Vickers as the seventh President of Bryn Mawr College

Inaugural Address

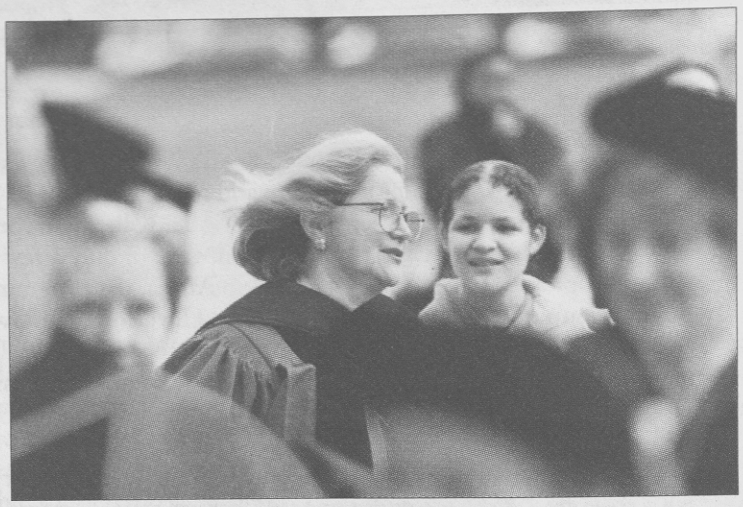
DECEMBER 6, 1997

Barbara Trimble, Betsy Cohen, Hanna Gray and Pat McPherson; Bryn Mawr alumnae, faculty, staff, students, and trustees; Haverford colleagues and managers; representatives of brother and sister institutions and assembled family and friends - I accept this presidency with great admiration for this institution, for its achievements, for its clear and enduring commitment to its mission, and for the exceptionally talented community of men and women whom I have now begun to know and with whom I look forward to laboring on Bryn Mawr's behalf. It is truly a privilege to join your company.

Three years ago, when I surprised everyone (including myself) by accepting a position as a dean at the University of Southern California, a dear friend

asked if I now looked to a future in academic administration. As these stories go, I said no, not really. I was momentarily persuaded, I reported, by the intellectual challenge of thinking through a major revision of the curriculum and by the anticipation of working with a wonderful team of colleagues. But I was sure that once the moment had passed, I would head back to the classroom and to the library. Anyway, if I were to pursue academic administration, I added idly, I would only want to be a President or a Provost of a small liberal arts college… preferably a women's college.

At the time, I had no ready answer for my friend's next question. Why a women's college? But I have thought about my offhand remark a great deal since then, particularly this past year. My own undergraduate experience at Mount Holyoke was the heart of my education. It was there that I learned about standards and discipline; there that I felt the exhilarating results that drudgery can yield; there that I developed so passionate an engagement in my work that I simply had to persist in it. They were life-changing years. I suspect that many of you in this audience know from personal experience, or from close observation, what I mean. I arrived at college a fairly ordinary girl from a very large public high school in the suburbs of a city

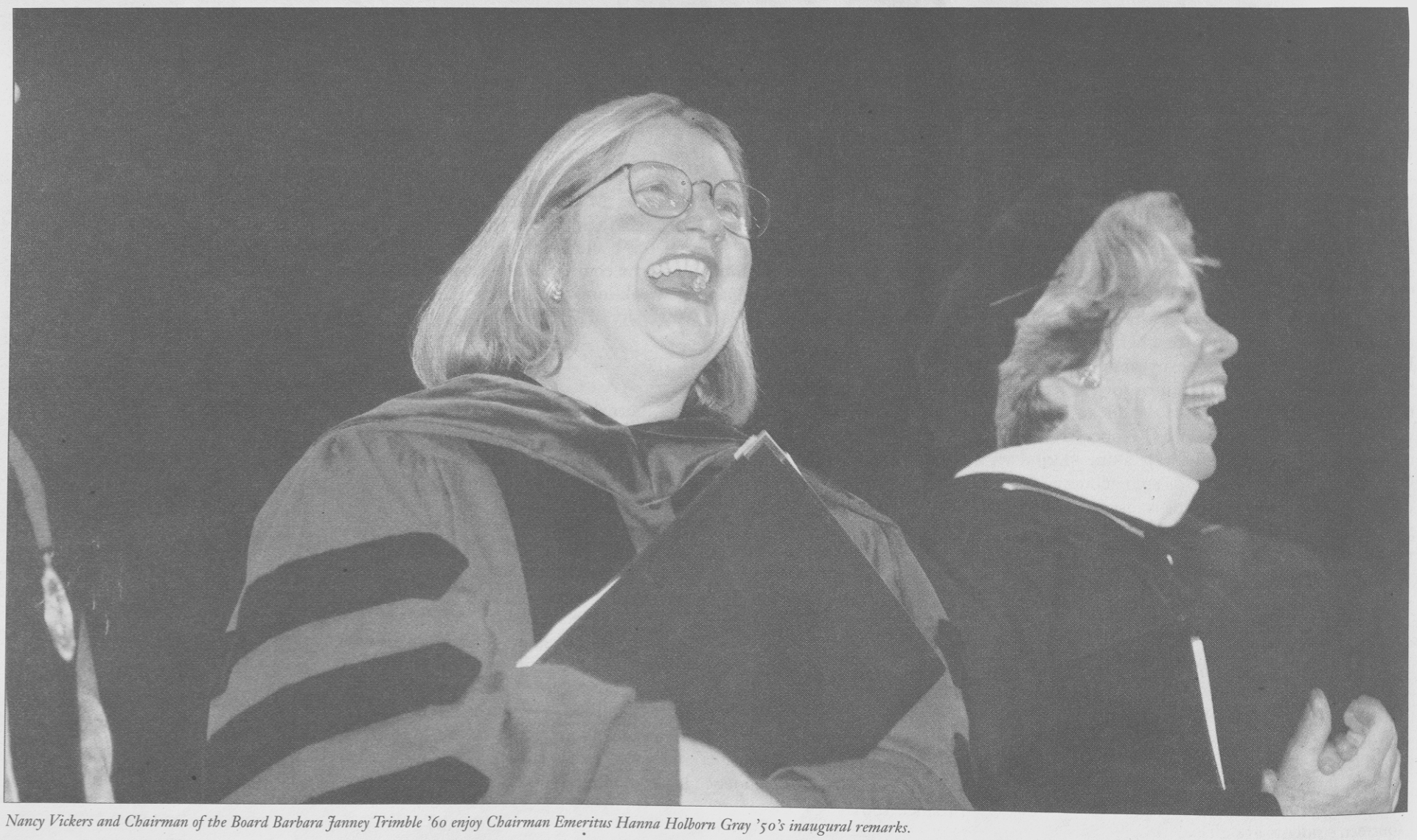


President Vickers chats with Jennifer Moore '00 following the inaugural ceremony.

on the way to becoming "Motown." My energies were focussed largely on such issues as my daily selection of Capezio flats and matching headband; I was self-assured in my knowledge that shoes made the woman. I will never forget the mixture of amusement and horror my freshman roommate expressed as she witnessed this soon-to-be-abandoned morning ritual. For over the course of four years I was to become, I like to think, a young woman of substance. Should "sweet sixteen at entering be sweet sixteen at graduation"? M. Carey Thomas had asked in her remarks to Bryn Mawr students at the start of the academic year in 1899. Her characteristically subtle answer: "Emphatically no. A college is not a place for arrested development."

This College has indeed never been a place for "arrested development." And in the extended change it now undergoes — that Bryn Mawr rarity, the transition from one president to another - the community has marked development by an appropriate re-interrogation of mission. The symposium last spring to celebrate Pat McPherson's extraordinary contributions to the College showcased the depth and breadth of Bryn Mawr's commitment to the liberal arts; it testified compellingly to the enduring value of a liberal education. That testimony will need to be given continued and forceful voice not only within, but perhaps more important, well beyond our walls. I envision this inaugural occasion as a sort of companion piece. Beginning with Mary Kelley's lecture yesterday on women's education at the turn of the nineteenth century and continuing with a presidential symposium next November on women's education at the turn of the twenty-first century, I would urge us to reflect upon our role as a women's liberal arts college.

From its founding in 1885, Bryn Mawr has sought to make possible the full and equal participation of women with men in a common intellectual, professional and public life. The College has never been a separate community of women, nor has it conceived of the project of women's education in that way. We owe our foundation to Haverford, though it has been said that we quickly outflew their well-behaved "barnyard fowl" aspirations for us, to use M. Carey Thomas' language, and metamorphosed into properly



Nancy Vickers and Chairman of the Board Barbara Janney Trimble '60 enjoy Chairman Emeritus Hanna Holborn Gray '50's inaugural remarks.

feminist "soaring eagles." To their credit and ours, a unique collaboration between two very distinct institutions has evolved over the years, a collaboration that defines and enriches us both. Bryn Mawr's scholarly and pedagogical life has always recognized men and women on an equal footing; the task of running the College has been a shared one. And the long tradition of including men in the College's graduate programs might even lead one to conclude that Bryn Mawr could be termed "coeducational," if the term itself were redefined and qualified along the lines former Bryn Mawr Provost, now President of Barnard, Judith Shapiro sketched in her own inaugural remarks in 1994: "Is [coeducation] being used to describe an institution where men and women are equally likely to study all fields? Where they are equally likely to hold positions of responsibility and authority in extracurricular activities? Is it an institution where men and women are found in similar numbers at all ranks of the faculty and administration? If so, then we might indeed have 'coeducation.' If not, then I believe we have something else." Her wonderful irony, of course, turns on the simple fact that within much of our culture we seem to require an institutional focus on women to produce a "liberated zone" of truly equal opportunity.

Geraldine Rhoads '35, Frances F. Jones '34, Margaret Woods Keith '32, and others waiting their turn in the alumnae processional.

At the turn of the twentieth century, in 1899, M. Carey Thomas challenged Harvard President Charles Eliot's assertion that those engaged in the college education of women pursued a highly experimental project of unproven value to society, for which the existing traditions and curricula of higher education for men could not offer any guidance. It was indeed the occasion of a Wellesley inauguration that had somehow inspired him to muse: "It would be a wonder, indeed, if the intellectual capacities of women were not at least as unlike those of men as their bodily capacities are." He might just as well have suggested the creation of "a new Phidias and a new Titian, new Greek tragedies, new Chemistry, new philosophies," Thomas shot back before an audience of Bryn Mawr students a week after hearing Eliot's remarks, "in short, a new intellectual heavens and earth." And a new and separate intellectual heavens and earth were clearly not what Thomas had in mind for her new Bryn Mawr woman.

Thomas returned to this question again in an article for the *Educational Review* in 1901. "Given two

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Selections from Inaugural Remarks

Betsy Zubrow Cohen '63
Vice Chairman of the Board of the Trustees
Chair of the Presidential Search Committee

From a letter to her friend Bryher – Marianne Moore, August 31, 1921:

"The net result of my experiences at Bryn Mawr was to make me feel that intellectual wealth can't be superimposed, that it's to be appropriated; my experience there gave me security in my determination to have what I want. I can't very well illustrate, it would take too long, the more since you and Hilda and I are at the antipodes from each other in our notions of education. In an article on the advantage to a musician of university training, a journalist quotes a friend of mine who is a musician as saying that her college experience gave her 'a sense of repose and conscious strength' and 'developed good taste and the power to think problems through,' 'breadth of style and a more strongly defined colour sense.' At Bryn Mawr the students are allowed to develop with as little interference as is compatible with any kind of academic order and the more I see of other women's colleges, the more I feel that Bryn Mawr was peculiarly adapted to my special requirements."

President Vickers, Professor of French Grace Morgan Armstrong, and Eugenia Chase Guild Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Latin Julia Gaisser exit Goodhart Hall.

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bridge-builders, a man and a woman," she wrote, "it is simply inconceivable that the preliminary instruction given to the two should differ in quantity, quality, or method of presentation because while the bridge is building one will wear knickerbockers and the other a rainy-day skirt. You may say you do not think God intended a woman to be a bridge-builder. You have, of course, the right to this prejudice; but you will probably not be able to impose it on women who wish to build bridges." This conviction — that women can and should have access to a full range of choices as they seek to engage the world on their own particular terms — clearly remains as much at the heart of Bryn Mawr's mission as it was a century ago.

But the role of a women's college is no longer in a simple and straightforward way about offering women the education and the access to the world that is denied them elsewhere. There are, fortunately, a great many opportunities and choices open to women at the end of the twentieth century, even if we must admit that the pioneering spirit and determination of Bryn Mawr's alumnae have not yet swept away every shard of a shattered glass ceiling. It is clear, however, that "real" women can study and work at a coeducational college or university, and, as we all know, "real" men can and do study and work at a women's college. But Bryn Mawr's early and abiding commitment to women's education informs not just our decisions about whom we teach but also about what and how we teach. We cannot allow Bryn Mawr to rest on its impressive laurels, to remain only what it has become thus far. We must not become an institutional case of arrested development.

The challenge to us as a community, and to me as a president, is to remain true to the qualities that define the College and yet experience them not only as a justification for the highly laudable status quo but also as an impetus for change. Bryn Mawr is an institution with a remarkable sense of itself and its purpose. I am not likely, in describing it to you, to tell you anything you do not already know. But what I would like to do, from the newcomer's fresh perspective, is invoke three values at the core of Bryn Mawr's character, values which for me not only define its past and present but which speak meaningfully to the directions in which we should be going.

First of all, Bryn Mawr is academic. And I do not mean this in the self-evident sense that we are a place for teaching and learning, but in a deeper, rarer sense. Bryn Mawr's claim for women as people of intellect

Thomas Lloyd, director, leads the Bryn Mawr–Haverford Chamber Singers in a rendition of Shakespeare's Songs *by Ralph Vaughan Williams.*

Selections from Inaugural Remarks

Julia H. Gaisser
Secretary of the General Faculty

It is a privilege to speak on behalf of the Faculty of Bryn Mawr College.

I am sure you've already noticed, President Vickers, that Bryn Mawr is a very traditional place, and that we take our traditions seriously. On the one hand, we have a tradition of intellectual achievement, of commitment to the education of women, and of dedication to the highest standards of scholarship.

But we also have a tradition of festivities and celebrations throughout the academic year – from Lantern Night, to Hell Week, to May Day – with a Grand May Day every fourth year at which the President (has anyone told you yet?) appears on horseback in medieval costume. We have a traditional cult of the goddess Pallas Athena, whose statue in the Great Hall is wooed and placated with votive offerings. We take pleasure in singing our traditional – and unsingable – Greek hymn on every conceivable ceremonial occasion, and we will insist on singing it again this afternoon.

But one of Bryn Mawr's finest and most highly prized traditions is our tradition of outstanding and dedicated presidents who enjoy the respect, esteem, and affection of their faculty colleagues. On behalf of the Faculty, then, I take great pleasure in welcoming you, President Nancy Vickers, to their distinguished number.

Valencia Powell
Representative of the Staff Association

It's an honor and a pleasure for me to stand here today to welcome Nancy Vickers on behalf of the staff. In my thirty years here, I've known the College's last three presidents, Katharine McBride, Harris Wofford and Mary Patterson McPherson, all whom have been exceptional leaders of this institution. Believe it or not, I'm still around to greet the seventh president.

This community provides a steady stream of surprises, challenges, and rewards for all who spend time here. President Vickers, I hope your tenure is filled with a healthy dose of all of these things. I'll share something with you I've noticed over the years – keeping a healthy sense of humor is the best single thing that will help you not only survive, but thrive.

We enthusiastically welcome you to Bryn Mawr.

Dana Linnell Simpson '98
President of the Self Government Association

When I was introduced to Nancy Vickers, I spotted a special gleam in her eye. From the first handshake, I knew that I was going to fall in love with Bryn Mawr again. In a wink, I pictured her in the president's chair. Of course, she is currently deeply engulfed in the process of enculturation and it will take time for her to intuit this community's infinite originality, but thus far, she has been in the residence halls, classrooms, and at the head of the meeting table. Her leadership embraces a true involvement with the affairs of the College. Remembering the lengthy terms of Bryn Mawr's previous presidents, we can rest assured that Nancy Vickers will be settling in for a while. Indeed, this is a thrilling prospect, providing ample opportunity for her to contribute an enduring legacy. The student body wishes her well, hoping she will find happiness, laughter, and achievement.

Sarah J. Kielt
Chair, Steering Committee of the Graduate Student Association

On behalf of the graduate students of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, I would like to extend a warm welcome to President Vickers. We have already had the opportunity for dialogue with President Vickers, and we feel confident that under her tenure Bryn Mawr's reputation for excellence in graduate education will continue.

Cynthia Chalker
Representative of the Graduate School of Social Work & Social Research Student Associations

It is my pleasure to bring you greetings from the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. The School was founded in 1915 and was originally named the Graduate Department of Social Economy and Social Research. Though a number of changes have been made at the School in the past eighty-two years, the School has remained dedicated to the empowerment of disenfranchised people and fierce advocates for social change.

In a written tribute to the African-American writer and activist Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill said: "You, Audre, only asked that we be brave, we be strong, we be committed to working for a joint liberation for the oppressed, a joint liberation for us all. You reminded us that new worlds do not come delivered on silver platters. New worlds, new ways of living, do require getting the hands dirty. New worlds require more than lip-service and appearances."

President Vickers, today I represent the 301 currently enrolled students and over 2,300 alumnae/i of the School. We are a group of people who believe in getting our hands dirty. People who work hard for change of all kinds.

We would like to take this opportunity to invite you to join us as we work to carry out our mission. And we offer you our support and assistance as you begin this new and wonderful journey as President of Bryn Mawr College.

Susan Webb Hammond '54
President of the Alumnae Association

Nancy Vickers, alumnae everywhere welcome you as the seventh president of Bryn Mawr. The 20,000 alumnae and alumni are represented here today by class presidents from eight decades – 1920 through 1997 – and by representatives of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research.

The alumnae and alumni represent the collective memory of Bryn Mawr. They share with Nancy Vickers the heritage of a Seven Sisters education: a commitment to excellence, a love of learning, and a certain independence of mind. They support, work hard for, and cherish the College.

Nancy, a month ago, at the Alumnae Association's Centennial Celebration, you became an honorary alumna, and we gave you appropriate symbols of Bryn Mawr, including an owl ring. You are already a valued colleague and friend. And we look forward to working with you and to giving you our support and assistance in our shared endeavors on behalf of Bryn Mawr.

Thomas R. Tritton
President of Haverford College

It is my pleasure to convey enthusiastic and hearty greetings to the Bryn Mawr College community from the Haverford College community. We celebrate with you.

Vickers, Nancy J. The perfect combination of talent and accomplishment required to lead a prominent institution dedicated to the education of women.

And so we are here today to take note and celebrate all the forces that conspired to bring Nancy and us together at this moment. For me personally, she has quickly become a steady and reliable friend; for Haverford College, for Nancy is thoroughly committed to our unique partnership; and for Bryn Mawr College, who looks forward to a brilliant future – this is our lucky day. Thank you, Nancy!

Selections from Inaugural Remarks

Alfred H. Bloom
President of Swarthmore College

To our close partner, Bryn Mawr, I bring warm greetings from Swarthmore College and deep appreciation for allowing us to share in this joyful and historic occasion.

Our institutions consistently enrich each other's educational programs and support the diversity and vitality of each other's communities. They set for one another challenging models of excellence. And they also inspire in each other a determined optimism about the goals each most wants to achieve.

By determined optimism I mean that positive mind set which stands up to entrenched skepticism, which overcomes disheartenment and resignation, and which both recognizes complexities and holds to its vision across them – a mind set which, in other words, builds a sense of possibility and the confidence that enable the realization of long-term deeply valued goals.

But simply pointing to the positive messages carried by what we study, who we graduate, and what institutions represent cannot alone sustain the collective sense of possibility and confidence that enable our institutions to thrive. For that critical accomplishment leadership is required - leadership which takes that evidence to heart and which itself grows out of, and communicates, a determined optimism. Nancy Vickers brings leadership of that very kind.

Judith Rodin
President of the University of Pennsylvania

On behalf of the University of Pennsylvania, I bring you and your colleagues warm greetings on this very special day for Bryn Mawr College. Today, you officially take the helm of a vibrant, rich, and esteemed institution of higher learning. And you do so with the full support and best wishes of your academic colleagues at Penn.

The University of Pennsylvania and Bryn Mawr College have a long and substantive history of scholarly cooperation. Partners in consortia, joined in service-learning projects, engaged in successful student exchanges, Bryn Mawr and Penn have worked hand-in-hand for many years. And we will continue to do so for many years to come.

President Vickers – today you answer a high calling, and I wish you the very best in meeting the challenges of your office. I have no doubt that those challenges will give rise to triumphs, and that your tenure as Bryn Mawr's seventh president will be nothing less than stellar.

As Penn's seventh president, I share that lucky number with you. We also share the opportunity to lead two great institutions whose history and future are richly intertwined. Good luck and Godspeed.

Joanne V. Creighton
President of Mount Holyoke College

On behalf of the seven sibling colleges, with especially proud good wishes from your alma mater, Mount Holyoke College, I am pleased to greet you, Nancy Vickers, as one relatively new college president to another.

Nancy, you will find that it is hard for people to imagine the life of a college president. Friends will blurt out: "I wouldn't have your job for the world!" Indeed, as I well know, there will be times – such as when students outside your window are chanting: "What do we want? Answers! When do we want them? Now!" – times when you will wish to be somewhere else, anywhere else, but in the president's chair.

Nonetheless, it is also hard to imagine a job with greater rewards.

One of the great pleasures of being a president is the vista, the bird's eye view, afforded by the position. From this lofty perspective, a college president is likely to have occasional moments of seeing the college steadily and seeing it whole, to borrow a phrase from Matthew Arnold.

Nonetheless, those visions from the mount, as it were, provide great surges of adrenaline, for it is to see the college's energy, excellence, multifarious complexity. It is to see the common ground and common values which bind us together in common purpose. It is to see the powerful role our colleges have in transforming lives, in developing the intellectual capital of our society, and in shaping its ethical and humanistic character. It is to see the simultaneous strength and fragility of the institutions we serve. And, it is to know that we cannot take them for granted, that they need our undivided attention, our most inspired imagination.

Above: The procession of College alumnae (classes of 1929-97) marches past Rockefeller Hall.

Michelle King '98 and Sheenu Jalla '97, members of the Presidential Search Committee, at the gala reception in Thomas Great Hall.

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and ambition has created a rare and precious record of scholarly achievement at this institution. From its early years, the College has embraced the teacher-scholar as the ideal faculty member; graduate study has been an integral component of its educational project. As a result, it has not only replenished the academy with new research and new talent, but inspired its undergraduates to take themselves and their work seriously, no matter what their goals might be. Bryn Mawr's commitment to the active scholarly life continually reaffirms that education is not about mastering a narrowly conceived or static canon, but rather a persistent interrogation of the processes by which we learn and understand. Bryn Mawr cultivates habits of mind which transform its students' relationship to the world and prepare them to do whatever they choose to do with application and success, whether it be geophysical research or international finance, opening a women's health clinic in Africa, founding a production studio, raising a family, or, for that matter, building a bridge. In a society quite skeptical about the worth of the academy, and about the need for such a labor- and cost-intensive project as the acquisition of a liberal arts education, we must remain the strongest of advocates for the value of rigorously and liberally educated women, and men, in this nation and the world.

And second, Bryn Mawr is bold. Its ambitions for women have from the beginning led it to reach beyond the comfortable, the easy and the expected. As the first institution in the United States to offer graduate degrees to women, the first to offer its students the independence and responsibility of their own Self-Government Association, the first to grant a doctorate in Social Work, the College has cultivated a willingness to take risks on behalf of our principles, to experiment, to be different. And it has produced students in its own image — bold, confident and independent women. It is no accident that we have an independent Alumnae Association or that individualism is something of a cliché here. I hope that we can continue to find new ways to think and act with the boldness which has always characterized the College — to find the next risks worth taking, the new terrain to be explored.

And finally, Bryn Mawr is committed to an engagement with, and a betterment of, the world around it. The College's historic role in providing educational opportunities for women gives us a position of principle from which to pursue even broader concepts of access. Mary Maples Dunn, Bryn Mawr's former Dean, past president of Smith and director of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe, observed with characteristic clarity in her 1985 inaugural that the purpose of women's colleges in their early days was simply "the education of educable people otherwise discriminated against." I think that charge still offers powerful direction to our institutions today. It calls us to build our small community in purposely complex and densely textured ways and to welcome the challenge of generating mutual understanding across the many divides that fracture us nationally and

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globally. And we must not only conceptualize principles of mutual respect and collaboration; we — as administrators, as faculty members, as staff members, and as students — must live them. Indeed, our commitment to relating to, and working with, one another across our own divides must stand as a model that we carry beyond the confines of the college.

Our very smallness should make it possible for us to confront society's most difficult challenges in constructive ways and to learn from that effort. A proponent of diversity before it had a name, Bryn Mawr's third president Marion Park noted in 1922 that "Within the small circle of college life, closeness of acquaintance, which in the intelligent person is the foundation for democracy, is especially possible. North and south, professional and artisan, rich and poor, rub unaccustomed elbows, and probably in no other four years of the lifetime of the individual is she open to such complete change in her attitude toward persons and beliefs…" Today one in four of the

Kristin S. Kim '86, Trustee of the College and Attorney, Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett, chats with Claudia Calloway '80, Attorney, Choate & Associates.

College's undergraduates are American women of color. International students make up twelve percent of the student body. The education we offer is immeasurably enhanced by our socio-economic diversity as by the diversity of age, race, ethnicity, nationality, political perspective, sexual orientation, religious commitment and physical ability which we manage to achieve. Our history can and should guide us to find more and better ways to make a Bryn Mawr education accessible, and a Bryn Mawr experience amenable, to those who have not always found the doors to American higher education open.

My first task as the new President of Bryn Mawr was to open those doors to the members of the class of 2001, to welcome our freshmen and their parents to the College. It was one of those moments, not unlike this one, in which I felt the full measure of the responsibility I now so gladly and gratefully take up. I stood in awe of the courageous trust of parents "letting go," like so many before them, to the promise of a Bryn Mawr education; I reveled in the eager anticipation of their "millennial" daughters. We, as a community, are charged with the stewardship of nothing less than life-changing years, and the lives that we change will define the century to come. May we, as a community, exercise our high charge with admiration for the extraordinary accomplishments of our predecessors, with pride in who we are, and with a bold and innovative spirit as we chart our next steps.

Selections from Inaugural Remarks

Hanna Holborn Gray '50
Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Trustees

President Vickers: ...soon, and constantly, you will find yourself asked with that benevolently hesitant and subdued courtesy ordinarily reserved for those newly bereaved or incarcerated: "What did you used to be?" Administrative position is, of course, commonly thought to imply that its holder has forfeited all title to academic status and that, washed by swift Lethean waters, she has passed to the other, or philistine, side, to the nether kingdom of the bottom line.

And when you reply, "I was and indeed am a Renaissance scholar," the next question will be, "Well just what does that have to do with your new role?" In my own case, the merest mention of a specialty in Machiavelli was enough to provoke knowing winks and titters: his relevance was evident to all. But yours is a far purer Renaissance, the universe of Dante and Petrarch, of Marot and even, dare we say it, of Madonna, though not quite *their* Madonna.

At the same time, it was, as you know so well, a world which saw literature as having something to do with life, with the shaping of human community through education and moral suasion, with the development of individual will and capacity to their highest potential.

So let us pause for the moment at Dante ... *Divine Comedy* ... would not be bad way of describing the characteristic experience of your new life. But not all of the text is germane. We must certainly discard the *Inferno* as infinitely remote from Bryn Mawr. And put aside also the Paradiso, since the College, whatever her pretensions, cannot claim to exist outside historical time and space. That then brings us to the *Purgatorio* as the obvious link between two worlds.

I read recently that analysts were concerned, in evaluating the CEO of a certain corporation, about whether the gearing in his steering was connected to the wheels. At Bryn Mawr, the answer is a resounding "Yes." Let me support this by a brief *explication de texte*. ...

...First, it is surely crystal clear that the natural state of presidential existence is that of Purgatory. I do not for an instant suggest that Pride or Envy or Wrath or Sloth or Gluttony or Lust will ever confront you within these virtuous precincts. Nor do I predict any need to pass through circle after circle of horrors in some steep ascent to a higher and better place. On the contrary, I will remind you that Purgatory's mountaintop is in fact the location of the Earthly Paradise, which refers manifestly to the College; that this paradise is presided over by a lady – no mystery there – surrounded by seven handmaidens, who must clearly symbolize the seven liberal arts; and that entrance into this earthly paradise involves the most elaborate processions, featuring the most colorful costumes of the sort that only academics could conceive and stagger about in. I will remind you also that poetry and song play a central role in this earthly paradise, that attention is given to both the active and contemplative lives and to their union, and that its processionals celebrate the dream, perhaps even the reality of a Golden Age.

By contrast, the prevailing rhetoric of our own day maintains again and again that higher education, far from a Golden Age, has fallen to a state of purgatory, in the negative connotation of an unusually difficult era of irredeemable struggle and suffering. Yet a sense of history should help us understand that there have never been easy times, however happy they may look in retrospect, and that the complexities and imperfections and incessant movement of our earthly paradise paradoxically makes its work still more interesting and worthwhile, its aspirations more challenging, its hope for encouraging both individual intelligence and independence and community awareness and interdependence, more significant. To be called on to participate in this process, to help enable its continuing promise and purpose, is to embrace an imperative founded in the deepest commitment to educational and scholarly quality. It is to remain a teacher and to bring to one's tasks the scholar's concern for critical reflection, scrupulous respect for evidence, openness to many views, love of intellectual exchange, and resistence to simple-minded or merely fashionable conclusions and solutions.

...It would be presumptuous of me to offer advice, but I would like in closing to leave you as I have other colleagues on similar occasions, with some useful words of wisdom spoken by a coach whose gearing and steering were solidly connected to his wheels. "They say you can't do it," he said. "But sometimes that doesn't always work!" And so we welcome you as scholar president, and we wish you all good fortune as well as much delight in this earthly paradise.

Barbara Janney Trimble '60
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

On behalf of The Board of Trustees of Bryn Mawr College, I most warmly welcome everyone here this afternoon. Madam President, Bryn Mawr faculty, students, administration, staff, alumnae and friends of the College, Haverford colleagues, distinguished delegates from near and far, and, most especially, family and friends of Nancy Vickers, it is a happy occasion for us to gather with you today to mark the installation of Bryn Mawr's seventh president.

Inaugurations are fairly rare through Bryn Mawr's 112 years, there having been only four to date because the first two presidents elected to forego the experience. As we set forth in a new era with keen appetite for the future, we reflect with immense gratitude on the leadership that has brought the College to the present.

It is with our confidence in her ability to lead this institution and gratitude for her choice to do so that I present Nancy Vickers to you as President of Bryn Mawr College. Pursuant to the authority granted by The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the Trustees of Bryn Mawr College and on their behalf, I have the honour and pleasure to confirm formally your election to the presidency of Bryn Mawr College and to confer up on you all the rights, authority, and responsibilities pertaining to that high office, and again, speaking for the Trustees of Bryn Mawr College, I pledge to you our wholehearted support in the task you undertake.

In recognition of this occasion I hereby hand to you a volume containing the relevant provisions of the Will and Codicil of Joseph Taylor, who established Bryn Mawr College, and the text of the original charter.

Mary Patterson McPherson PhD '69
President Emeritus of Bryn Mawr College

I am delighted to be part of this very happy occasion and if you will indulge me I shall read from the work of several distinguished people connected with Bryn Mawr beginnings.

A delightful parody of Gilbert & Sullivan recited by Ada Comstock, Dean of Radcliffe College, at Katharine McBride's inauguration:

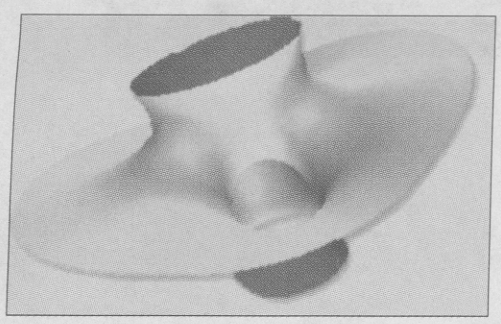
She is the very pattern of a modern college president
She's always on the job, though nearly always
a non-resident
She tours about the country to assemblies gastronomical
And makes all sorts of speeches from sublime to
broadly comical,
So though she piles up mileage being generally
non-resident
She is the very model of a modern college president.

Seeing Is Believing

Bogdan Butoi (left) models a hat in the shape of the Costa surface at the opening of the "Beyond Numbers" exhibit at the Maryland Science Center. He is joined (from left) by fellow graduate students in mathematics Cathleen Battiste, professors of mathematics Victor Donnay and Rhonda Hughes, Mihaela Teodorescu '95, Toma Pacararu, Gowri Meda Ph.D. '97, and Tanya Schmah.

"When I first saw it, I said 'what is *that*?'"

The question asked by Bogdan Butoi, a graduate student in mathematics at Bryn Mawr, refers to a shape known in mathematics as the Costa surface. The shape is noteworthy because it's a minimal surface that can be extended forever without intersecting itself. The more perplexing questions regarding this shape begin not with what, however, but with how — how is the shape created? The answer to that question — by punching three holes in a donut — prompted a project that grew from a summer research question five years ago to a permanent exhibit in one of the country's best-known science museums.



The Costa surface, as shown on Bogdan Butoi's web site describing the project.

Much of mathematics deals with calculations and formulas and their practical applications. "We weren't interested so much in that," says Associate Professor of Mathematics Victor Donnay, "just in understanding how that funny looking shape is connected to the donut."

To understand the connection, a team of students under Professor Donnay's direction in the joint Bryn Mawr-Spelman summer undergraduate research program developed a computer-generated video about it. Mihaela Teodorescu '95, who graduated with degrees in French and math, is one of the four students who made the initial version of the video. "I began work on this project the summer after my sophomore year," she says. "We weren't very sophisticated at first, and the next summer we went even farther."

In fact, the video went farther than anyone involved in the project imagined. It's now on display at the Maryland Science Center as part of an interactive mathematics exhibit entitled "Beyond Numbers." The video is also included in the traveling version of "Beyond Numbers" that is currently touring science centers across the country. The hands-on exhibit endeavors to show that modern mathematics is filled as much with art and nature as it is with science and equations.

Bogdan, who joined Mihaela and the team working on the video in 1995, received his M.A. in math from Bryn Mawr last spring and is now in the Ph.D. program. He and Mihaela, who is finishing her M.A. in French at Bryn Mawr this semester and plans to earn an M.A. in math next year, have known each other since high school in Romania and are now married. "Do we get a prize for the most Bryn Mawr degrees in one family?" he laughs.

The Costa video did more than give Bogdan and Mihaela an opportunity to work together — it also provided Mihaela with a subject for her senior thesis. "When I started on this that first summer, [Helen Herrmann Professor of Mathematics] Rhonda Hughes was just trying to *convince* me to major in math. But I enjoyed the project. It's rewarding to finally get where we wanted to be."

Also rewarding is what projects like this represent. "It's rare for undergraduates to do mathematical research," says Professor Donnay. "Most don't get the opportunity until they're in graduate school. In addition, they often are partners with professors in developing course materials. We now use this video in third semester calculus as part of a lab. It really shows students what you can do with mathematics."

Mihaela agrees. "Math is about things other than numbers," she assures. "It can be more down to earth than abstract algebra and spaces — and it can be fun!"

A web site that further explains the project, and also includes a small movie of the video, can be found at http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/~bbutoi/costa.html.

The Value of the Liberal Arts

Shortly before taking office last summer, President Nancy Vickers offered her perspective on the value of a liberal arts education on Marketplace, Public Radio's business and economic news program. Her comments appear here with permission.

Educators are beginning to respond thoughtfully, if not yet altogether effectively, to a broad cultural critique that relegates liberal education to the status of a luxury in an age of professional or even vocational education. We know, for example, that only seventeen percent of American families send their children to college or to university to get an education. Their stated goal is rather to get a job. In the academic marketplace of the late 1990s, students and their parents have decided college should be the most cost-effective route to first employment, an educational means to an economic end. This trend is altogether understandable, especially given the insecure environment, the world of continual downsizing or of proliferating jobs without benefits, that awaits college graduates. Still, such thinking is disturbingly short-sighted.

President Nancy J. Vickers

Such a privileging of job training over education insistently questions the usefulness of the student's broad exposure to a range of fields and disciplines in favor of a highly-focused formation. Why does a future engineer have to study English literature, parents and prospective students ask, or why must a future English professor take chemistry? Because the student must learn to solve complex problems within multiple contexts, to be able to read an article about biotechnology, for instance, through the critical lens of a political scientist or of a historian. When properly executed, a liberal education would shape a flexible and adaptable intellect, one that knows no fear in the face of the new.

Americans can now expect to change jobs many times in a single working lifespan. They must be prepared more for a life of careers that for a career for life. Such change may come by choice, a realization that one has done what one can do in a given profession, coupled with a desire to change gears, or by necessity, an unforeseen economic change, a turn of world events, a technological revolution.

So, it may well be that the greatest professional asset a student could take away from his or her college years is not the mastery of a specific body of knowledge, or even the persuasive power to deliver a good speech or write a good brief, or even the fluent control of a foreign language, though these are all certainly useful and marketable skills. Rather, the greatest professional asset may just be a flexible, adaptable quality of mind that welcomes stretching in new directions, that has learned how to learn and learn again and that can confidently greet the unknown, the uncharted, the unfamiliar.