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Recent History of West Chester University

by Jim Jones and Gerald Schoelkopf

The West Chester University and its predecessors have played an important role in the Borough for more than one hundred and twenty-five years. Since Russell Sturzebecker's Centennial History of West Chester State College (West Chester, PA: Tincum Press, 1971) covered the first century so thoroughly, this essay will focus on the last twenty-five years (1974-1999).

Heads of West Chester University and its Predecessors, 1871-1998

Title	Name	Years of service
Principal	Ezekiel Cook	1871-1872
Principal	William A. Chandler	1872-1873
Principal	George L. Maris	1873-1881
Principal	George Morris Philips	1881-1920
Principal	Andrew Thomas Smith	1920-1927
President	Norman W. Cameron	1927-1935
President	Charles S. Swope	1935-1959
Acting President	H. La Rue Frain	1959-1960
President	T. Noel Stern	1960-1961
President	Earl F. Sykes	1961-1969
President	Paul W. Rossey	1969-1973
President	Charles G. Mayo	1974-1982
President	Kenneth L. Perrin	1982-1991
Acting President	Stanley J. Yarosewick	1991-1992
President	Madeleine W. Adler	1992-2008
Acting President	Linda Lamwers	2008-2009

President	Greg R. Weisenstein	2009-2016
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The 1960s were a turbulent time on the campus of the West Chester State College, as it was then known. In November 1965, one student set herself on fire in the Quad to protest the war in Vietnam. Various student groups demanded an end to racial discrimination and college regulations concerning the dress code, dormitory visitation and course content. The unrest spread to the faculty, which divided in response to the activities of a group of junior professors who became known as the "Ad Hoc Committee." By the end of the decade, the state police appeared on campus, the university's president resigned, and six professors filed a lawsuit for damages resulting from the denial of tenure and promotion.

Things quieted down on campus in the 1970s, but the changes introduced during the previous decade affected relations with the Borough. As students moved off-campus in increasing numbers, they created a booming market for rental housing and induced many long-time residents to move out of the southeast ward. Traffic congestion increased as well, as a growing number of students owned their own automobiles and public transportation to the Borough declined.

The reforms of the 1960s ended university control over students who lived off-campus, and the Borough took on increased responsibility for policing student behavior. Customs like mud fights and panty raids, that had once seemed so quaint when carried out on campus, became less amusing when they took place in the Borough's neighborhoods. Friction developed between neighbors and students, finally leading to the creation in 1986 of a "Town-Gown Council" to improve community relations. The Borough passed ordinances intended to reduce the problem by providing for the inspection of rental properties, limiting the number of occupants, placing limits on noisy parties, and requiring parking permits in the neighborhoods nearest to the university.

All of this represented an enormous change in the relationship between the school and the Borough. The first incarnation of today's university was the State Normal School, founded in 1871 to train public school teachers, with support from some of the borough's most prominent citizens. Until its acquisition by the state in 1913, the Normal School operated as a private institution financed by the sale of stock and the assets of two contributing institutions, the West Chester Academy (founded 1812) and the Chester County Cabinet of Natural Sciences (founded 1826).

With the proceeds of the sale, the directors purchased ten acres on South High Street and built their first building. The three-story structure (plus attic), which became known as "Old Main" was designed by Addison Hutton and constructed with green serpentine stone from Brinton's quarry. For many years, this building housed the entire school, and as late as 1970, Old Main still housed several hundred female students. When new, the building also held classrooms, dining room, gymnasium, library, museum, and a chapel (auditorium). At the time of its demolition in 1971, it filled much of the modern open area known as "the Quad," and was the largest serpentine building in the world. Its replacement, the five-story New Main Hall, opened in 1974.

When the Normal School first opened, students followed a two-year "Elementary Course," and after an additional two years, they received a diploma in science or the classics. The Normal School began to offer summer courses in 1877, and the program expanded to include a third year in November 1900. The curriculum remained unchanged until 1926, when the school changed its name to West Chester State Teachers College and began to offer a four-year Bachelor of Science in Education. After creating a number of special training programs during World War II, the college returned to its four-year undergraduate curriculum until 1959, when it began to enroll graduate students. In 1960, the school became simply West Chester State College, and in 1967, it was reorganized into the three schools of Music, Education, and Health and Physical Education, each with its own dean. Finally, the college became a university in 1983, and three years later, assumed the present structure of the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business and Public Affairs, and the Schools of Education, Music, and Health Sciences.

Although the university has never been larger than at present, its growth occurred in distinct stages. The first major expansion took place before World War One during the tenure of Principal George M. Philips (1881-1920). During this period, the Normal School acquired thirty-six additional acres, and constructed an addition to Old Main (1889), a gymnasium (1890), the principal's house ("Green Gables," finished in 1891), Recitation Hall (1892) and the "Sanitarium" (1892), the "Model School" (Ruby Jones Hall, in 1899), and the Old Library (1902). Enrollment also grew during this period, and in 1901 the Normal School graduated 166 students, up from ten in 1874. In order to house everyone, the school opened Wayne Hall, an all-male dormitory, on Church Street in 1911.

Growth slowed during both World Wars, but construction resumed following each war. To honor Principal Philips after his death in 1920, faculty, students

and alumni raised money to build Philips Memorial Hall, which was completed in time for the spring 1927 graduation. The new Ehinger Gymnasium was dedicated in May 1931, and construction began on Anderson Hall in February 1938.

After World War II, a large influx of new students forced the college to employ war-surplus military barracks for temporary housing, but construction resumed in earnest in the 1960s. The results included several new dormitories, the Elsie O. Bull Center for teacher training, the Schmucker Science Center, the Swope Hall music building, assorted athletic fields, and the Francis Harvey Green Library. Sykes Student Union opened in 1976, the same year that the library received its latest addition. Recitation Hall was renovated in 1989, Anderson was renovated in 1994, and Sykes received a major addition which was completed by January 1995. Student apartments at South Campus (1993), and the Boucher Science Building (1996), are the latest additions to the campus.

By 1999, the university will enroll twelve thousand students, about equal to the all-time high in 1990. This represents a twenty-fold increase since the turn of the century, when enrollment at the Normal School stood at about 600. The study body surpassed one thousand after World War I, and by 1926, there were over twelve hundred students, but even after World War II veterans began flocking to campus, there were still only 1600 students in the fall of 1946. That changed dramatically in the 1960s when the college grew from three thousand to more than seven thousand students in a single decade. After enrollment topped twelve thousand in 1990, it declined as the nation graduated its smallest high school class since the beginning of the "Baby Boom." To counter the decline, the university launched several recruitment initiatives that brought enrollment back up over eleven thousand by 1997.

The number of faculty has increased from the original eight in 1871 to just under seven hundred by 1997. More important, West Chester University faculty have played important roles in the community. Elinor Z. Taylor of the School of Education was elected to the state legislature in 1974, where she continues to serve. Andrew Dinniman of the History Department has served as a Chester County Commissioner since 1993. In addition, James L'Heureux of the Mathematics Department served as a Borough Council representative from 1989 to 1993.

The university faculty has had close ties with many local organizations, notably the Chester County Historical Society. Principal George Morris Philips was the second president of the Society from 1894 to 1920, and Francis

Harvey Green of the English Department served as the Society's president from 1937 to 1951. More recently, Robert Carlson, John Turner and Richard Webster of the History Department served on the governing board of the Society. Other faculty members have held prominent roles in the West Chester Rotary Club, the Chester County Art Foundation, and assorted fraternal and professional groups.

Since the 1980s, the university has tried to improve its international contacts. Those efforts led to the foundation of an exchange program with Henan University in China (1986), a "sister" campus in Fukuoka, Japan (1989), study abroad programs in Wales and England, and faculty-guided study trips to Peru (1991) and Ghana (1995-1996). The university has also instigated contacts with local businesses through the Center for Business, Industry and Government (founded in 1986), the Small Business Development Center (1995), and the creation of a satellite campus in Exton. In an unusual move that produced both economic and public relations benefits, the university played host to the Philadelphia Eagles professional football training camp from 1979 to 1995.

A 1994 report by the Dr. Cynthia Benzing of the Economics Department found that the university generated roughly \$460 million in spending, most of which was focused in Chester County. Although she did not examine the direct impact in the Borough, Dr. Benzing found that roughly sixty-five percent of all university employees live in the county, and as a consequence, most of the university's annual payroll of \$50 million was spent in the area. The university also made direct purchases of goods and services in the county worth five million dollars.

In addition to its economic impact, the university has provided a number of artistic and intellectual benefits to the community, including musical performances, public lectures, theatrical productions and art shows. The most notable events in the last quarter century were the visits to campus by former Presidents Ford (1972) and Carter (1993), but other speakers included former ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, primatologist and author Jane Goodall, historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1994), presidential press secretary Dee Dee Myers (1996), and actor/activist Edward James Olmos (1997). Other significant productions include the regular "Shakespeare in the Park" series offered each summer by the university's theater department, performances by the university Criteria's jazz ensemble, and the annual homecoming parades.

Since its inception, the university and its progenitors have provided high quality teacher education. A succession of practice schools--the Model School

(1871-1899), the Demonstration School (1899-1958), and the Laboratory School (1958-1976) all accepted children from the neighborhood. Since 1976, teacher training has taken place in area public schools, and as recently as the 1993-1994 school year, the university provided 44 student teachers to the West Chester Area School District alone.

The positive contributions of West Chester University alumni are too numerous to list in the remaining space, but these examples suggest the range of their accomplishments. Chris Sanderson (class of 1901) was largely responsible for the creation of the Battle of the Brandywine National Historical Park, and became well-known as a local historian, musician and radio personality. E. L. McKinstry (1890) worked as a reporter and later editor of the *Daily Local News*. Martin Berndt (1969) led the Marine assault group that rescued pilot Scott O'Grady in Bosnia in 1995. Marian Washington (1970) coached the US women's basketball team at the 1996 Summer Olympics. Diana Brewster Fabiani (1944) became an opera singer and composer. Karen L. Martynick (1976) is a Chester County Commissioner, Joe Pitts (1967) was a state legislator and US Congressman since 1997, Curt Weldon (1969) was a US congressman (until 2006) and Barbara McIlvaine Smith was a state legislator (2007-2010).
