PAST AND FUTURE DREAMS

A Brief History of Harrisburg Academy 1784-2009

Gerard E. Martin
DEDICATION

To All Members of the Harrisburg Academy Family,
Past, Present, and Future,
Who Make the Dream Come True
Thank You.

To dig deeper into the present, we must dig even more deeply into the past. As Thomas Carlyle said: “Nothing that was worthy in the past departs.” Two previous works, *Standards Must Equal the Best* by Gerard Martin and *The Early Years of the Harrisburg Academy* by Gregory Morgan, chronicled the first 200 years of Academy history, from 1784 to 1984. The major emphasis of this narrative is to focus on the Academy’s history from 1984 to 2009, when the Academy celebrates 225 years of existence, 200 years since its incorporation, and 50 years of residence on the West Shore.

My sincere thanks go to all members of the Academy family who have so graciously shared their memories. You have helped us dig more deeply into the past 25 years, so that we can appreciate more fully the present and even steal a glimpse into the future.

Special thanks to Dr. James Newman, who first planted the seed for this project. Jim, I hope you are pleased with what has grown from that seed. To Dr. Shelly Myers, Sherry Andersen, and George Gonzales in the Development/Alumni Office; Jessica Warren in the Admissions Office; Linda Whipple in the Communications Office; David Zett in the Business Office; Bob Bell in the Technology Office; and Debbie Potter, the Administrative Assistant to the Head of School, who have done so much to nurture and nourish the growth of this work, thank you. I am indebted to Matthew Grandon, Class of ‘08, a computer and technology expert, for all of his assistance, and to Terry Bowie for the cover art.

To all of you, in the words of our Alma Mater, “rejoice and share fulfillment of our dreams.”
We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring will
be to arrive where we started, and
know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot
INTRODUCTION

“All those who enter here will, with open minds sincere, blend loyalty into its past and future dreams.” (Harrisburg Academy Alma Mater)

Dreams are the stuff of history—dreams fulfilled, dreams deferred, dreams denied. Dreams are visions, perceptions of what could be and not what is. Dreamers are visionaries. Yet, dreamers and visionaries, like prophets, are often without honor among their contemporaries. Sometimes treated shamefully, other times heaped with scorn and ridicule, they are portrayed as impractical, irrelevant jesters at the court of common sense, even though a dream is often reality shorn of cynicism. So, dreamers need courage. It is difficult to row against the current. To take the road less traveled can be a lonely journey.

Consider three dreamers from the past. George Washington had a dream of a nation free from the tyranny of a distant king. From the despair of Valley Forge, through dark years of repeated defeats, against the violent opposition of his Tory countrymen, he stayed the course to become the father of a new country. Abraham Lincoln had a dream. He envisioned a united country. He knew a house divided against itself cannot stand, nor could a country endure half slave and half free. Facing fierce hostility from his own party and cabinet, he freed the slaves and so preserved a United
States. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream in which all people would be judged not by the color of their skin, but by the conduct of their character. Standing firm against the animosity of both blacks and whites, he gave his life, and thus saved the soul of America.

Are these three dreamers just irrelevant specters of a distant dead past? The past is never dead. It isn’t even passed. Today is yesterday’s tomorrow. What now is has already been, just as what is to be already is. Past dreams become present dreams to shape future dreams. Yesterday, today and tomorrow – a unity of trinity. In the words of Albert Einstein, “the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion.”

The calendar tells us that 2009 marks the 225th anniversary of the birth of the Academy, the 200th anniversary of its charter by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the 50th year at its present location. The calendar is such a lifeless, lackluster witness – 12 pages to be ripped off the wall and forgotten. Who were the dreamers, the visionaries of the Academy past? What were their dreams and visions that came together to fashion our threefold celebration? Our history is a restless rushing river, not a stagnant pool nor an inert calendar page.

George Santayana said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” I would rather say if we neglect the past, we run the risk of failing to build upon it. The challenge for us is to recall and appreciate the visions of the Academy past as we forge the Academy future. Let’s briefly review just three of those visions, just three echoes of the past.
Man is a history-making creature who can neither repeat his past nor leave it behind.

W.H. Auden
CHAPTER ONE

ECHOES OF THE PAST (1784 – 1984)

In the year 1784, as the Harris Ferry made its slow return trip from the West Shore of the Susquehanna River, we can picture John Harris, Jr. gazing up at the stately mansion that he had constructed some 18 years before. That mansion remains today as the Dauphin County Historical Society on the corner of Front and Washington streets.

As he neared the East Shore, he must have felt pride in his accomplishments: a fine house, a thriving fur and trading post, and the always busy ferry carrying goods and settlers on their westward migration. In fact, the entire settlement later to be named Harrisburg was known as Harris Ferry. Yet, something was missing. John Harris was a hard man. He had to be. He had weathered the French and Indian War in which he had played a significant role in protecting the settlers. During the American Revolution, Harris enthusiastically supported the patriots. Two of his sons served in that war. One was killed outside Québec in 1775. Even now, there was the possibility of an Indian raid. His father’s grave, located in Front Street Park, was a constant reminder to be vigilant. For it was at this very spot that John Harris, Sr. was saved by his servant, Hercules, from marauding Indians under the influence of alcohol.

As John Harris, Jr. gazed at his mansion, he knew something was missing: a place to educate his children. A self-made man with...
precious little time and even less opportunity to attend school, he appreciated the value of education and dreamed of better for his children. That very year, he made his dream a reality. Harris set aside a room in his mansion and brought in a schoolmaster from Lancaster to teach his and his neighbor’s children. Thus, in one small room of the Harris Mansion was born the Harrisburg Academy, the fulfillment of one man’s dream.
As the number of children attending the Academy grew, so did his dream. He granted the rents and profits from the ferry to endow the Academy. On April 20, 1786, he began a subscription drive to raise money to enlarge the school. (The more things change, the more they stay the same.) Working with 80 neighbors, he built a log cabin school behind the mansion. They chose the first trustees in Academy history – John Hanna, John Kean, and John Hamilton. These trustees appointed Samuel Barnes Davis the first of 36 headmasters to lead the Academy for the next two and one-quarter centuries.

Some 23 years later, on April 4, 1809, the State Legislature chartered the Academy under the Law of the Commonwealth: “There shall be and hereafter is established in the Borough of Harrisburg in the County of Dauphin an Academy or public school for the education of youth in useful Arts, Sciences and Literature by the name and style of The Harrisburg Academy.” It goes on to name nine trustees and spells out their duties. The Act of Incorporation concludes: “The sum of one thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby granted to the Trustees of the Harrisburg Academy, to enable them to purchase a lot of ground whereon to erect a suitable building....” It is unfortunate that John Harris did not live to see the chartering of his school. He died in 1791 at age 64, but his dream lived on.

In 1947, some 160 years after the birth of the Academy, millions of returning servicemen crowded the nation’s colleges, and Harry Truman was President of the United States. No stranger to making difficult and unpopular decisions, Truman had a sign on his desk that read: “The Buck Stops Here.” That “little haberdasher from Missouri,” as his critics derided him, knew that he alone would be held accountable and bear the blame for his decisions. It can be very lonely at the top.
That same year, Raymond Kennedy, the 24th Headmaster of the Academy, had a vision for the school that involved a monumental and, for many, a most unpopular seismic shift in direction for the Academy. With the approval and support of the Board of Trustees, he decided that henceforth the Academy would be a co-educational school. Kennedy knew the buck would stop at his desk. He would be reversing more than 160 years of Academy tradition. He also knew old ways die hard.

It is difficult for us today to appreciate the magnitude of his decision. We must try to recapture the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. Education, and especially higher education, was in the minds of most the prerogative of men. Oh, there were schools for young women, such as The Seiler School. However, the curriculum was quite different than in schools for young men, such as the Academy. Young men were educated to go on to four-year colleges and graduate school.

The opportunities for young women after high school were extremely limited. Perhaps some would go on to a normal school for two years and become teachers for grammar school only. A few might even go on to a two-year school of nursing, but wouldn’t even think about attending medical school. Most were expected to become secretaries, get married, and raise a family. That a woman would ever become a college president, a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, commander of a space shuttle, and even a candidate for President of the United States was far beyond the wildest stretch of imagination. Even though Thomas Jefferson coined that magnificent phrase, “all men are created equal,” deep down in his psyche he believed that some men are more equal than others. Jefferson believed only male, white, protestant landowners should have the right to vote and hold office. We’ve come a long way since then, but there still remains a glass ceiling.

What then led Raymond Kennedy to arrive at his decision?
We must hope because it was the right thing to do. There was also
a very practical economic reason. In 1947, the Academy enrolled
only 75 students. Sue Seiler, daughter of Jacob Seiler, the longest
tenured Headmaster in Academy history, established The Seiler
School for Girls in one room of the Seiler home, a striking parallel
to the beginning of the Academy. In 1947, enrollment in the Seiler
School was larger than that of the Academy. However, the Academy
was in a better financial condition, and the time was right for a

merger. It was time to seize the opportunity. A new location in the
Wallower Mansion on Front and Maclay streets; a new Headmaster,
Moreau Hunt; and, for the first time in history, a co-ed student body
began the 1948 school year. Raymond Kennedy’s dream was alive.

The date: February 2, 1959. The place: A windswept hill
at the corner of Erford Road and Routes 11/15. Under a leaden
February sky with a gusty Northeast wind and a feel of snow in the
air, 100 people braved the elements to watch Headmaster Frank
Sladen turn over the first ceremonial spadeful of earth. He was
breaking ground for the new site of the 175-year-old Academy.

There was nothing so unusual about that. In its 175-year
history, the Academy had changed locations more than a dozen

15
times. It had occupied the John Harris Mansion, a log cabin behind that mansion, the Maclay Mansion (home of Senator Maclay, son-in-law of John Harris), the site of the Dixon University campus, the McCormick Mansion at 305 North Front Street, and the Wallower Mansion at Front and Maclay streets. It is well to note that most of these locations were on Front Street, and all of the locations were in Harrisburg. To move out of Harrisburg and across the river – impossible, preposterous.

What thoughts then must have been racing through Headmaster Sladen’s mind as he turned over that first spadeful of earth? What doubts and fears must have crowded in to make him hesitate? He knew his decision to move to the West Shore would be unpopular with many and questionable to most. But, Frank Sladen had a dream. He had a vision and a large helping of courage. There were so many nattering nabobs of negativity, so many nay sayers. Heavy hangs the head that wears the crown.

Reporter Paul Beers, writing for the then Harrisburg Evening News, noted: “A lot could be said about the poor record of the city (vis-à-vis the Academy).” He went on to write: “A good preparatory school never was given an established site in town.” Perhaps he was harkening back to an unfortunate incident that happened almost 150 years previously. On March 8, 1814, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania approved an act granting the Trustees of the Harrisburg Academy and their heirs forever (emphasis mine) a part of the Capitol grounds for the purpose of erecting a building for an Academy and no other purpose. At this site, the corner of Walnut and Third streets, there now stands a statue of Senator Boies Penrose. It became the fifth home for the Academy. Just 11 years later, in 1825, the Commonwealth decided it had made a mistake and took back the property, paying $500 in compensation.

Perhaps Mr. Beers was referring to the attempt by the Board of Control of the public schools to transfer the property of the
Harrisburg Academy to the Harrisburg public schools in 1867. The Academy rejected this proposal. The Harrisburg School Board tried again in 1873, only to be rejected again.

Two court cases, in 1903 and 1932, did little to improve relations between the City and the Academy. In the “City of Harrisburg v. Trustees of Harrisburg Academy,” the city won the right to collect municipal taxes from the Academy over the objection of the trustees that the school was exempt from such taxes. This decision was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania some 29 years later.

Learning from the past, Headmaster Sladen and the Board envisioned the future of the Academy on the West Shore, on a site donated by L.B. Smith. Mr. Sladen must have held his breath waiting to see if his vision would come to pass. On September 28, 1959, opening day, the halls were alive with the sound of students. The Academy moved into its new quarters with a record enrollment of 230 students. What a way to celebrate its 175th birthday. Dreams do come true for the stout of heart.

But the times, “they were a’ changing.” Dwight Eisenhower gave his farewell warning of the dangers of a military-industrial complex. John Kennedy declared in his Inaugural Address that the torch had passed to a new generation. The tranquility of the fifties crashed into the turmoil and turbulence of the tumultuous sixties and the unsettled seventies. We were shaken by the assassination of President Kennedy, his brother Robert, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement occasioned a soul-searing search for identity and meaning. Drugs, dropouts, and doubt assaulted traditional values, ushering in a new, uncertain, and frightening era.

The Academy also struggled to determine its identity. The Harrisburg Evening News headlined: “Academy Keeps Tradition Going.” Should the Academy remain insulated behind the ramparts
of tradition, comfortably living in the kinder, gentler past, protected from the foment swirling around it?

In 1963, new Headmaster Robert Andrews initiated a country day curriculum extending the school day until 4:30. The longer day was an attempt to secure the advantage of a boarding school – and boost enrollment – by utilizing the lost hours of American education without taking students away from their parents’ homes. A number of Academy families traditionally transferred their children to boarding school after 8th grade. These families saw boarding school as a safe haven to protect their children from the unrest swirling about them, like “boats against the current borne back to the past.” (F. Scott Fitzgerald)

During these years, the Academy made significant academic advances. It was fully accredited by the Middle States Association and The National Association of Independent Schools. Ninety-seven percent of the graduates from 1963 to 1968 entered college. Yet, the Academy still struggled to attract students.

Mr. Andrews made a very prescient observation in his Annual Report: “I am certain our smallness is the chief cause of our continued smallness.” Small size can be a very real advantage, but often triggers financial problems. Red ink became all too familiar on the Academy financial statements.

John Horner became the Academy’s 31st Headmaster in 1968. From the outset, he was determined to meet the changing world head on. He knew that it was not only possible to preserve treasured traditions, but also to use tradition as a tool to build “new” traditions, a seeming oxymoron. Mr. Horner balanced the budget. Using his membership in many civic and educational organizations, he projected the image of the Academy outward into the community. Under his leadership, the school expanded the diversity of both the student body and the faculty. By 1974, the school added a new auditorium and gymnasium, expanded the library, and built a new
wing for science labs and classrooms. Preserving the Academy’s outstanding fine arts program, he realized the school must upgrade and modernize its science and math programs to meet the challenge of his day. If you build it, they will come. So he did. In just nine years, the enrollment grew from 236 to 320 students.

Under Headmaster Ralph Gillette, the Academy underwent a complete reorganization in 1980. The Country Day Program quietly passed out of existence as the Academy became a four-division school, each division to meet the changing growth and developmental stages of its students. The Academy came into the computer age. The year 1981 saw the largest enrollment in the school’s 197-year history, reaching a peak of 392 students.

The Three Mile Island nuclear disaster had welcomed Ralph Gillette to his new school. As terrified parents snatched their children to evacuate the area, he must have wondered what he had gotten himself into. Now, five years later, as he prepared to celebrate the 200th birthday of the school, the country was in the midst of a recession compelling him to write in his Annual Report: “1983 has been a difficult year... I am prepared to join you in a maximum effort to secure a bright future for the Harrisburg Academy.”
There are those who look at things the way they are and ask, “why?”
I dream of things that never were and ask “why not?”

G. B. Shaw
CHAPTER TWO


As the Academy celebrated 200 years, Headmaster Ralph Gillette and Board President John Davis were formulating a new direction for the school. There then was, there always has been, and there probably always will be a dream of moving the Academy to a new and larger location. They cast their eyes to the south campus, 16 acres across Routes 11 and 15. At that time, the south campus, now the site of playing fields and tennis courts, was undeveloped. The school had purchased several acres as a buffer against further encroachment of suburban sprawl. Their idea: to build an upper/middle school on a slight hill and a separate lower school in the wooded area to the east. In 1986, as James Cantwell became Headmaster, investigation into the feasibility of the move began in earnest.

Fortunately, in my opinion, it was a dream deferred. As stated in the Minutes of the Board in 1987: “While inconveniences do occur in the necessity of sharing facilities, having the whole school on the same campus and under the same roof allows for valuable interactions between the age groups. This seems to have become a part of the Academy philosophy over the years.” We often speak of the Academy family, a family and not an impersonal institution. It is not an uncommon sight to see a 10th grader reading to a 2nd grader, or a senior scoop up a Kindergartner and carry him down the
corridor. As one of the Middle States Evaluation Team members said, “One of the great strengths of the Academy is the supportive atmosphere. There exists an atmosphere of mutual respect among the students and staff. This is one of the strongest characteristics of the Harrisburg Academy.” One Academy graduate summed it up rather nicely when he said at an alumni dinner, “It is an easy place to come home to.”

There is, of course, a downside to this “small school” atmosphere. Some parents might hesitate to send their children to a small school, fearing they might miss out on the greater number of activities and diversity that they believe may be available in a larger school. The Academy has converted this perceived weakness into a very real asset. Small class size leads to greater individualized attention and as a result, higher academic achievement. Absence of serious disciplinary problems lets the teachers teach and not just maintain order. The variety and number of academic courses are outstanding. Music, Art, Drama, Community Service, Quiz Bowl, Math Counts, etc., all flourish. Athletic teams are more than competitive as shown by the numerous championship banners hanging in the Louis Lehrman Gymnasium. The school’s no-cut policy makes such an achievement even more remarkable.

As for diversity, the Academy has made a concerted, ongoing effort to attract a highly diverse student body. Students come from seven counties and 28 school districts. Since 1984, the school has hosted more than 100 international students. The Academy became an International Baccalaureate School in 2007. To make the school more affordable and accessible, a substantial financial aid program is in place. In the 2008-09 school year, 24% of the students received more than $640,000 in financial aid. We shall address the issue of diversity at greater length in the following pages. Suffice it to say, the Academy, though small in numbers, is large in scope. Bigger is not better.
Another constantly recurring dream is to attract and retain an outstanding faculty. Without the benefit of state aid, the Academy must continually struggle to maintain fiscal stability. In 2006, the President of the National Association of Independent Schools said he does not believe independent schools can remain affordable without finding new sources of revenue to augment tuitions. When tuition provides the major source of income, the independent school must face a precarious balancing act between the needs of the school and the ability of parents to pay.

Teacher and staff salaries comprise the largest expenditure in the school budget. The Academy has been able to attract an excellent, dedicated faculty, even though teacher salaries have lagged behind those of their public school counterparts. Headmaster Ralph Gillette was keenly aware of this discrepancy and began a concentrated effort to address the problem. Headmaster Dr. James Cantwell took up the struggle from 1986 to 1989. In his 1988 Headmaster’s Annual Report he wrote: “The faculty are never given enough for providing the quality day-to-day program for our students. We are indebted to these outstanding teachers.” High praise indeed.

Dr. Cantwell and Board President Henry Rhoads sought innovative new ways to improve faculty salaries. They established a Faculty Endowment Fund as a separate entity from the General Endowment Fund. The establishment of a full-day Junior Kindergarten and an Extended Day Program made the Academy more attractive to young families.

Dr. Cantwell stressed visibility as a priority, not only on the school campus, but also in the community. A newspaper article called the Academy, “that hidden gem on the West Shore.” By his active community involvement, his many speaking engagements, and his dedication to community service, he helped the Academy become a known gem on the West Shore. He began the revival of a dormant Alumni Association. The many changes in location of
the Academy militated against strong alumni loyalty. It is difficult to be loyal to a school that no longer exists at the location where you were a student. Alumni are wonderful sources of support for improving teacher salaries, since alumni are the beneficiaries of the outstanding preparation for college provided by teachers who are not just mentors, but also good friends.

Harrisburg Academy was recognized as a Blue Ribbon School in 1992-93.
The poet Langston Hughes poses the question: “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?” Once again, the deferred dream of moving the Academy to a new site sprang to life. On November 11, 1989, Gregory Morgan was formally installed as the 34th Headmaster of the Academy. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Morgan remarked: “If you told me a year ago I’d be working in Wormleysburg and living in Mechanicsburg, I’d have thought you lost your marbles. But the reality is that it feels very good to find myself in these exotic sounding locations.” He then made reference to a gift of 41 acres of land on Wertzville Road as the site for a proposed new campus. The deferred dream was alive. At a later date, he said that when he arrived, it was with the expectation that we were going to build a new school: “That was the challenge that attracted me.”

For the next 16 months, the Minutes of the Board of Trustees abound with optimistic reports as the Academy sped ahead to accomplish the dream of a new campus. There was much to be done before 1995, when the gift of land would revert back to its original owners. Feasibility studies, hiring an architectural firm, and marketing the existing campus absorbed much of the time and energy of the Headmaster and Board. Toward the end of 1991, the tone of the Board meetings became more muted. The economic downturn in the early nineties and the depressed commercial real estate market caused the planned move to a new campus to be put on hold. Was the dream finally dead?

Langston Hughes goes on to say about a dream deferred: “Maybe it just sags like a heavy load, or does it explode?” Freed from the tyranny of the dream of moving to a new campus, the Academy could now concentrate time and energy on other matters. In 1993, the Academy received the prestigious Blue Ribbon Citation for Excellence in Education from the U.S. Department of Education, making it one of only eight independent schools in the United States...
to be so recognized. On June 8, 1993, Senator Harris Wofford stated in a letter sent to the school: “I commend you on the leadership, vision, involvement and dedication that it takes to receive such a prestigious honor. Your school is truly a role model for schools across the nation.” Perhaps a Blue Ribbon Committee member said it best: “Greatly as I admire the fine teaching in the classroom and outside of it, the student environment is the distinguishing quality of the Harrisburg Academy, the environment in grades K to 12 under one roof at the present location.”

Yes, freed from the tyranny of the dream of moving to a new campus, the Academy could focus on becoming a new school on traditional turf. That, I think, qualifies as an “explosion.” In 1997, at an estimated cost of 2.7 million dollars, the first phase of renovating the school began. Two additional phases were scheduled for completion in 2001. Like the proverbial sphinx, a new Harrisburg Academy arose. The dream was to be reality. The only question: Was it worth the wait and expense?

Put yourself in the shoes of an alumnus, Class of 1984, in town for a convention at the Radisson. You decide to visit your Alma Mater for the first time in 25 years. As you dash across busy Erford Road, you are startled by the tasteful new wing that wraps around the front of the old school and stretches along the playing field. Entering the front door, you pass by the Headmaster’s office and receptionist. The pleasant “welcome” and “glad to see you” from the faculty and staff haven’t changed even though some of the faces have. You walk down the Hall of Fame. Nice touch having all those plaques honoring the names of so many of the Academy family. Passing a large conference room to your right, you enter the spacious, cheerful dining room aptly named the John Butler Davis Gallery, since the walls are alive with outstanding student artwork.

Down a short flight of stairs, you wander past Upper School classrooms. You may not recognize the teachers, but you recall the
energy and humor in these rooms. Thank goodness their approach to learning is still that of cooperation. Teachers do not pontificate. They join the students in searching, questioning, and challenging old and new concepts. The students do not sit passively with glazed-over eyes. They are alive, alert, discussing. At the end of the corridor are the greatly enlarged art rooms in the fine arts wing.

Up one flight of stairs and a hard right turn leads you past the “Cove” and into the striking Middle and Upper School Library. What a warm, inviting space! Look at all of the computers. These students have so much more access to information than you ever had. Hope they appreciate what an outstanding opportunity. Oh yes, the Cove. It’s just a small alcove near the library where students can interact. It’s become a favorite spot for those who have earned the privilege to gather and learn how to use their free time productively.

You move down the corridor past remodeled and enlarged Middle School classrooms and take a quick peek into the Louis Lehrman Gymnasium. What an improvement. To your right are the new music rooms. Directly across the hall is the completely refurbished McCormick Auditorium, and to your left, the global interactive media center. Then more Middle School classrooms and finally a familiar face. There’s Mr. Stewart – still making history come alive for seventh and eighth graders. Then it’s up a flight of stairs into the completely remodeled Lower School. It’s fantastic what they have done and so different from when you were here. There’s even a new Lower School library at the foot of the stairs.

As you prepare to leave, you think to yourself that this is a completely new school. One thing hasn’t changed though – the Academy spirit, the spirit of family. For that you are truly thankful. It definitely was worth the wait and the expense.

For the next few years, the Academy paused to catch its breath. Under Headmaster Ralph Van Inwagen, it was a time to
review, reflect, regroup, and slow the frenetic pace of the previous years. As he said about his dream to take the Academy to its next level of excellence: “We want to blend these traditions with the realities of the present in preparation for the future.”

When Dr. James Newman took up the reins as the Academy’s 36th Headmaster in 2003, he penned the following: “When you enter the Harrisburg Academy, you become part of a community with a strong history, a vital present, and a vision of an exciting future.” A firm believer in the axiom, “learn from the past, live for today, and look to the future,” he hit the ground running. Given the mandate by the Board to stress academics, to build enrollment, and to increase the endowment, he immersed himself (he is a historian, after all) in the past achievements of the Academy with an eye on how to capitalize on them, all the while keeping focused on the long-term, big picture. Appreciating the need to engage all constituencies of the Academy, he and Drew Bitner, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, led the way in developing Academy 2008, the first strategic plan for the school in the 21st century. Nine committees, consisting of faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, parents, students, and friends, developed a vision and seven goals to be achieved by 2008. A daunting task.

Time and space preclude an exhaustive examination of each goal. A brief sampling can give the flavor of the entire plan. The first goal is “Academic Excellence.” One subdivision of that goal was to broaden opportunities for gaining global perspectives and learning. Our world is shrinking without becoming smaller – a seeming contradiction. As John Donne put it: “No man is an island entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent.” Like it or not, nationalism must bow to internationalism. Information and influence now move horizontally across borders, rather than vertically. As Thomas Friedman has written, the earth is flat. To prepare our students for this brave new world, the Academy became an International Baccalaureate World School, part of a worldwide network of almost 2,500 schools in 132 countries. This is “education without borders.”
In the spring of 2007, Dr. Newman delivered this message: “We are on the threshold of one of the most significant changes in Harrisburg Academy history. This fall, the Academy will be the first and only school in our area to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. The IB is a proven curriculum for teaching 21st century skills... It is a perfect fit for the Academy’s diverse community... As an IB World School, the Academy can aid employers seeking to attract and retain international employees and parents looking for global education for their children.”

The Academy’s first International Baccalaureate Diploma candidates on the steps of the State Capitol.

Briefly, the IB diploma candidate must take courses in six subject groups. Each subject culminates in a standardized international exam. Additional requirements include a Theory of Knowledge seminar that unifies the various academic disciplines, an independent research project summarized in an extensive essay, and student involvement in the Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) community service program. After successful completion of the two-year IB diploma program, the candidate will receive an IB diploma in addition to the Academy diploma. Students may opt to
choose the traditional course of studies in lieu of the IB program, or may select only some of the IB offerings. The Academy continues to offer Advanced Placement courses that tend to stress content and collection of facts in one area. The IB program emphasizes connections among many disciplines.

In the December 9, 2007, issue of the Patriot News, Robert Massa, Vice President for Enrollment and College Relations at Dickinson College, wrote: “The IB helps students to think globally about ethical questions inherent in relationships and partnerships. These questions are challenging and multidimensional and require an appreciation for and knowledge of other cultures.” Governor Edward G. Rendell wrote: “I applaud Harrisburg Academy for having the vision to offer the International Baccalaureate Program in Central Pennsylvania. By providing students with a broader understanding for the interdependence of all societies, this internationally recognized curriculum can help to ensure that Pennsylvania remains a competitor in our fast-paced global economy.”

Even now, teachers are in electronic contact with other highly trained instructors in the global IB school network to discuss how best to guide the learning of their students. Such an opportunity fits nicely with another subdivision of the goal of Academic Excellence: “to continue to provide advanced technology to support all parts of the academic program.” Welcome to “e” world. The Academy has 167 computers for student use and another 80 for faculty and staff. Instruction in computer use begins not in first grade, but in the HATS Program. HATS is an acronym for Harrisburg Academy Three-Year-Olds. As indicated previously, the library has become a limitless source of information via the Internet, a window to the world of knowledge. Teachers are in constant and instant communication with parents, sharing concerns and addressing potential problems. Students have easy access to homework and class assignments. The school is in the process of connecting
classrooms to Dickinson College’s study abroad sites around the world. Our Global Awareness Club partnered with students in Tamil Nadu, India, on cross-cultural research projects. This is but a small sampling of how the Academy is using advanced technology. Under the direction of the technology staff, the Academy is daily upgrading, improving, and expanding its ability to keep pace with the exploding age of electronic information. Yet, in spite of all the wonders of the Internet, the school remains committed to upholding the primacy of the teacher in the classroom.

Goal number four of the Academy 2008 strategic plan addresses diversity and inclusiveness: “to deepen and strengthen the Academy’s commitment to racial, religious, cultural, and economic diversity within a caring school environment.” In recent years, the Academy has hosted as many as 14 international students at a time from countries such as China, Korea, Germany, France, Cambodia, Turkey and Denmark. Since 1984, more than 100 international students have enriched our school by offering first-hand exposure to and knowledge of their cultures. In return, these international students have taken home an appreciation of American life and customs.

Through a partnership with Dickinson College, the Academy provides scholarships to students from The Nativity School, a school for at-risk students in Harrisburg. Upon graduation from the Academy, Dickinson will provide these Nativity graduates, if admitted, with full funding for their college education.

Who are these Academy students who come from such diverse backgrounds? After 39 years of interacting with and observing them inside and outside the classroom, I have come to the conclusion that there is no typical Academy student. They are a heterogeneous group of outstanding, outgoing, outspoken individuals who jealously guard their individuality. In the words of a car commercial, there are drivers and there are passengers. Our
students are definitely drivers. Highly intelligent, they are quick to learn and equally quick to be bored. Extremely vocal (which can at times prove exasperating), they are hardly shy in expressing their candid opinions, all the while remaining open to new ideas and change. They are respectful and appreciative of their teachers, yet quick to pillory a poorly prepared presentation. They are thankful for the opportunities given them by their parents and idealistic enough to want to share those opportunities with others. They understand that education is a preparation for life and not just for making a living. They exhibit an ironic sense of humor and are a fun group to be with. For me, the most impressive characteristic of Academy students is their outstanding openness to and acceptance of others no matter how different in appearance, outlook, and personality.

Our students seem to carry these traits with them as they move on to become alumni. Dr. Newman realized our alumni roots go deep but not wide. As part of strategic goal number five, “Community Building,” he increased the Academy’s outreach efforts to alumni. Although still a work in progress, it has been a rewarding effort, as we learn more about the impact our graduates have made and are making on the world. As might be expected, from their many varied interests at the Academy, our alumni have spread far and wide in fields of endeavor and geographic location. In education and scientific research, medicine and the law, opera and filmmaking, business and government, Peace Corps and the military, they make their mark. From environmental expeditions in the Arctic to Peace Corps projects in tropical Africa, from London to Tokyo, they have left their footprints all over the globe. When you talk to these young men and women, one common theme occurs over and over again – how well the Academy prepared them for life.

Walt Whitman said: “A teacher’s goal is to encourage students to surpass the teacher.” As just one candidate to meet that criterion, I would mention one young man, who after graduating
from Yale, postponed his pursuit of a doctorate in neurobiology to come back and teach science at his Alma Mater. The Academy must be doing something right.

Two of the goals of Academy 2008 concentrate exclusively on the students and the faculty, the heart and soul of the Academy. Goal three addresses “Student Growth and Personal Development.” To integrate wellness and counseling programs for all students, the school increased emphasis on the role and activity of the school counselor and added a Learning Support Coordinator for Lower School and Middle School students. The Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) component of the IB curriculum took school and community service to the next level. Older students took on increased tutoring of younger students and became more involved in being positive role models. In today’s world, it is rare for young people to accept the responsibility for guiding and inspiring those younger than themselves to become better students and persons. Peer pressure can be a powerful force for good. Very often, young people are more receptive to encouragement and direction from those closer in age. It’s a win-win situation for both younger and older students, and best of all, it works.

The “First Friends” program has proven to be a real blessing for newcomers to the Academy. Coming to a new school where you have no friends can be a difficult transition for teens struggling with their identity and self esteem. By assigning a seasoned student to the newcomer to show him/her the ropes, to introduce him/her to teachers and other students, to help with academic demands, which often are more stringent than previously faced, the program makes the passage to the new school a pleasant and welcoming experience. A matriculation ceremony marks the transition from Middle School to Upper School. Even though Middle and Upper School students share the same building, newness of schedule, interaction with more and different teachers and greater expectations in the Upper School translate into a new experience.
The Extended Day Program increased its staff and became a more integral part of the school. Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten instituted a Suzuki immersion program. Grades 4-6 completed an inaugural season in Youth Lacrosse, and the Middle School initiated a cross-country program.

From Junior Kindergarten to senior year, the emphasis has been on ensuring a warm, welcoming, safe, and pleasant experience for all. Harrisburg Academy is a place where student growth and personal development go hand in hand with academic achievement. One might say the Academy is user friendly.

Since students are the *raison d’être*, the faculty, as molders of the students in collaboration with parents, constitutes the central pillar and foundation that supports the entire endeavor. Academy teachers are dedicated, highly intelligent and educated professionals who live to teach and not teach to live. The teachers are here because they love what they do and do what they love. Daily interaction with the students, though sometimes exhausting, keeps them young in spirit, if not in age. From interviews with retired teachers and speaking from my own experience, the answer to the question, “What did you enjoy the most about teaching at the Academy?” is always the same: “The kids.”

The art and science of teaching, like a living organism, must continue to grow and develop to prevent atrophy. Our teachers are eager to improve their skills and grow in their expertise. Professional development is vital for this to happen. Toward this end, the Professional Development Committee is implementing a three-year blueprint for faculty in-service days. These are days in which the faculty is exposed to new ideas from outside experts. Equally as important, teachers use this time to share their own ideas and methods of reaching out to students. The Academy provides financial assistance for teachers to attend seminars, conferences, and classes. The teachers then share what they have learned with
their colleagues. Ongoing courses during the year allow teachers to update and maintain their teaching certificates. In a word, our teachers continually become students so as to become better teachers.

As we approach our threefold anniversary, it is time to evaluate how well the Academy has achieved the goals of its five-year strategic plan. I would give a grade of A- with the following comment: Since this is an interim grade, based on the outstanding effort and achievement exhibited thus far, there is every reason to expect the grade will improve.

Simone Weil said: “The future is made of the same stuff as the present.” Is it possible that as we ponder these portraits of the present, we can catch glimpses of the future?
The past is but a beginning of a beginning, and all that is and has been is but the twilight of the dawn.

H.G. Wells
CHAPTER THREE


We awake to the dawn of 2009 with a new President, the Phillies as world champions, and a full plate of challenges. The dictionary defines a challenge as a stimulating problem looking for fresh solutions. There can be little doubt that our country faces many challenges, not least of which is the faltering economy. Government bailouts, a collapsing real estate market, failing banks, high unemployment, and inflation all have come together to form a perfect storm of the worst recession since the 1930s.

Thus, it is highly appropriate that the Academy’s new strategic plan be called Challenge 2013. This plan spells out the hopes, dreams, and visions of the Academy for the next challenging five years. When asked, Dr. Newman said he is cautiously hopeful for the Academy’s future. He is justly proud of the Academy’s past and honored to be part of the Academy family. To the question, “What do you see as the greatest achievement of the past five years, as spelled out in Academy 2008?” he gave an insightful answer: The greatest achievement was the plan’s ability to bring together all of the varied constituencies of the Academy in a unified, enthusiastic effort to further the real purpose of the school – the academic, social, emotional, and physical well-being of all of our students. Is the new Challenge 2013 an extension of Academy 2008? Certainly, it will build upon the accomplishments of the past and use them as a foundation for what is to come.
Realizing “you can never plan the future by the past” (Edmund Burke), *Challenge 2013* is a new strategic plan to guide the Academy into the future. Do you recall the A-grade for *Academy 2008*? That interim grade has been raised to a solid A. So much has been accomplished in the past five years that there could well be an inclination to pause, step back, take a deep breath, and rest upon the laurels of what has been. Goethe tells us that Faust lost the liberty of his soul when he said to the passing moment: “Stay, thou art so fair.” Such is not to be the Academy’s fate.

Those who look only to the past or to the present are certain to miss the future. *Challenge 2013* is a challenge to meet the demands, difficulties, and dilemmas of an uncertain future. Our future must not be dictated by our past. Second millennium solutions will not solve third millennium problems, nor satisfy third millennium demands. You cannot reach your destination by looking through the rear-view mirror.

Just what are these glimpses of the future, as found in *Challenge 2013*? What will be the Academy’s road map for the next five years? There may be detours, construction delays, and accidents that dictate taking alternate routes. Yet *Challenge 2013* will remain a dependable GPS to guide the Academy to its intended goal.

The Mission Statement for *Challenge 2013* captures in just two sentences the essence of the entire plan: “Harrisburg Academy offers an academically challenging and globally minded liberal arts education that encourages each student to reach his or her full potential. In our commitment to excellence, we provide tools and teach skills that will prepare students to thrive and succeed in college and in their future endeavors.” This brief statement incorporates many of the core values of our school: students who are lifelong learners instilled with the values of respect and responsibility for others; the promotion of each student’s growth in integrity, creativity, self-worth, leadership, global awareness, and critical
thinking skills; and a commitment to celebrate diversity and mutual respect. We aspire to set a standard for academic excellence and be an educational leader in Central Pennsylvania. This statement is the litmus test that all of the specific goals must pass if *Challenge 2013* is to be authentic.

As we prepare to examine the plan in greater detail, need we be reminded of Robert Burns’s warning that “the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley”? When dealing with tomorrow, it is essential to be flexible. Our mantra must be “firm but flexible.”

To provide the best physical, social, and emotional health possible for each student, the school will establish a Wellness Department. This department will address nutrition, health education, counseling, and programs in physical education, and will provide the training and tools necessary for designated advisors. These advisors will provide age-appropriate diversity training for students, while working closely with the faculty and staff. The goal is to promote a school community that enhances each person’s quality of life.

Once again, a major concern of *Challenge 2013* is academic excellence. The goal is to develop critical thinkers and life-long learners who are inquisitive, creative, tolerant, and principled. The implementation of this goal will encompass many areas. We will revise the curriculum. Special emphasis on science, math, and technology will ensure that these subjects are current and applicable to 21st century standards. This will necessitate enlarging science rooms and labs. We will investigate the expansion of the International Baccalaureate Program in both the Lower School and Middle School and the addition of another world language.

Closely allied to curriculum is scheduling. Coordination of schedules in all three divisions of the school has proven to be difficult because of the necessity of sharing facilities. This has been especially vexing when scheduling the use of the gymnasium. The intention is
to build a separate Lower School gym that, with the enlarged science and art rooms, would extend onto the Academy’s field hockey and lacrosse field. This plan will call for reconfiguring the playing field on the south campus. Instead of one field running parallel to Routes 11/15, there will be two fields running perpendicular to the highway. We shall develop this more fully as we discuss the goal of facility improvements. Suffice it to say, a revised schedule will permit the lengthening of classes in the Upper School to at least 55 minutes, a change that the faculty devoutly endorses.

The Academic Excellence goal will include broadening opportunities for students to gain global perspectives. The Academy potentially will accomplish this goal by expansion of the IB Program, establishing relationships with other schools abroad, and increasing study abroad opportunities for our students.

Academic Excellence requires an ongoing program of professional development that promotes student-centered teaching and active learning. The Academy must provide the faculty with the time and opportunity to increase its knowledge of curricular content and to implement best teaching practices. With these programs in place, the Academy will set a standard for educational leadership in Central Pennsylvania.

In these times of global warming, increased pollution of our air and water, and the diminishing of our natural resources, it is imperative that the Academy go “green.” Green schools are healthy for our students, faculty, and staff. Green schools are healthy for our community and for our planet. They also provide an educational opportunity for students to gain an understanding of how what we do has an impact on the inter-connected web of life. We are all part of one earth. What we do matters.

The Academy’s task will be to conduct a thorough assessment of our facility and to reach out to and engage all members of our community and members of our surrounding communities in a
cooperative effort to become good friends and stewards of the environment. This plan will include, among other things, an energy audit, reduction of energy consumption by 10%, becoming a partner in the EPA Energy Star Program, and incorporating “green” policies in all facility renovation and new construction.

Another goal, Parent and Community Relations, also emphasizes the need for cooperation and collaboration with many different groups. The aim is to strengthen partnerships and to make the Academy a regional resource that can have a positive impact on the greater Harrisburg area. The plan will begin with parents and alumni. Traditionally, parent involvement has been a hallmark of the Academy. We must build upon that strength and provide an even more welcoming environment that includes all parents. Along the same lines, we must reestablish an active Alumni Council and more fully involve alumni in the task of being effective ambassadors of our school.

The Academy must reach out to additional community and business partners. This will expand community service opportunities for our students and provide new sources for our senior intern
projects. Again, the school must reach out to local governments to collaborate on programs of mutual benefit. We should investigate partnering with other institutions of higher education as we have done with Dickinson College. The development of a rigorous summer-school program will provide new learning opportunities for all students in the greater Harrisburg area and attract new students to the Academy. It would appear that the emphasis for the next five years must be on reaching out and not just on looking inwards. The Academy must become that “known gem on the West Shore.”

The final two goals, Access and Affordability and Assets Advancement and Facility Improvement, go hand in glove. It has always been the aim of the Academy to attract and retain students and faculty from varied cultural, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Diversity enriches the educational experience for all. Our school must explore new options for increasing scholarship funds and seek marketing opportunities beyond our current geographic boundaries. It must be proactive in searching for faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds. We must find other non-tuition sources of income with the long-term goal of decreasing dependence on tuition by an increase in endowment funds.

We have already noted some of the unfunded infrastructure improvements: a new lower school gym, enlargement of science classrooms and labs, reconfiguration of the playing fields, expansion of the arts facilities, etc. These will require a substantial amount of financial support. Asset Advancement and Facility Improvement addresses these issues. In this troubled economic environment, this will prove to be a real challenge and require equal amounts of wisdom and courage. Because of the sound financial planning and stewardship of assets in the past, the Academy is well positioned to meet the challenge. A capital campaign together with an active alumni association, the cooperation of public and private entities, and the acquisition of new grants should make the goal achievable.
There it is, “a brief overview of Challenge 2013” – a glimpse down that long winding road into an unknown future. In the words of John Kennedy, “If that journey be a thousand miles, let history record we took the first step.”

Let the journey begin!
EPILOGUE

Thomas Wolfe wrote: “You can’t go home again.” Home resides only in the mothballs of memory. It is true we cannot relive the past, often an adorned and altered past. We can and must, however, revisit the past if we are to understand the present. The old are full of memories, the young full of dreams. The young can share in the memories and the old share the dreams. Only when memories exceed dreams does progress come to a halt. History cannot just be reruns. It must be about writing a new script.

Today’s vision for the Academy is possible because of the visions and visionaries who went before. It is incumbent on us to be faithful to our past, true to our present, and mindful of our future. The future of the 225-year-old Academy is in our hands, for “in today already walks tomorrow.” (C.S. Coleridge) The Academy has always encouraged students to live large, take risks, and dream big. We must practice what we teach. Only thus can the impossible dream become reality.

When we retrace our steps down the arches of the years of our long history, we conclude that the Academy is more than a building, more than a location. The Academy is an idea, a concept, an ideal. The spirit and the mystique of the Academy transcend time and place. This spirit is impossible to capture in words. It is an intangible and yet as real as the dreams that engender it.

And so we reach the end of this brief telling of the history of the Harrisburg Academy. It is finished, but it is not over. There
will always be another telling. In all these accounts we come back to one basic truth. The Academy is not about buildings, curriculum, numbers of students, or goals to be reached. The Academy is all about people and their dreams.