The Association of Alumnae held its first annual meeting on June 19, 1912, Commencement Day, at 3:00 PM in the Botanical Gardens. The women graduates of the Class of 1912, Provost Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith, the vice provost, deans and their families attended. A Japanese comedy was presented and was followed by an informal reception. A popular site for plays and receptions, the Botanical Gardens and the lily pond at its center (Bio pond) were designed by botany Professor John Macfarlane in 1894 and covered four acres.

The Association of Alumnae held its second annual meeting on Commencement Day, June 18, 1913, at 3:00 PM in the Botanical Gardens, and the all officers were re-elected for the same posts for the ensuing year. Margaret C. Klingelsmith and Dr. Henrietta J. Meteer were elected as active directors and Sara Chambers, Elizabeth Lodor, and Emma Newitt were elected as associate directors. Edna Bramble, Dr. Mary Louise Nichols, and Dena D. Ungemack were elected to the nominating committee. After the election, the Association, its guests, university deans, and women graduates of 1913 were entertained by the women undergraduates who performed four scenes from Shakespeare. A reception followed, and the Association adjourned until the fall.

The Association of Alumnae invited all women undergraduates and graduates to attend a public meeting on October 10, 1913, in Houston Hall. The purpose of the meeting was to plan a fundraiser for the treasury and for scholarships for women at Penn. First Vice President Dr. Sarah Miller served as chair of the finance committee. A theater benefit was decided upon at the meeting. The play, Milestones, at the South Broad Street Theater was selected with tickets to be sold for performances on October 27-29. At the meeting, musical entertainment was provided by Thomas Alva Edison’s latest invention the diamond disc phonograph! From the monies raised
through the fundraiser and annual contributions from its alumnae, the Association of Alumnae granted its first scholarship in 1913.

“More than any other one person, Dr. Smith helped create the climate which made possible the organization of an Association of Alumnae.” –Ruth Weir Miller, ’25. ’47 (1957), President of the Association of Alumnae 1956-58

Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith, provost 1910-1920, Blanchard Professor of Chemistry, and manager of the Wistar Institute, was an internationally known scholar, analytical chemist, and science historian. Dr. Smith mentored a number of women students who worked alongside the male students in his lab, including Gertrude Pierce Easby. Perhaps Dr. Smith’s biggest influence on the future of Penn was his stance on women’s education. As provost he opened admissions to the dental and medical schools to women.

On December 5, 1913 the Association of Alumnae hosted its annual reception at Houston Hall with Provost Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith and his wife as the honored guests. Dr. Pauline Spencer introduced Dr. Smith who gave an informal talk about the early history of the university and the part played by Penn during the Revolutionary War. He noted that twenty-one members of the Continental Congress, ten signers of the Declaration of Independence and seven signers of the Constitution of the United States were from Penn. No other college supplied so many!

The first year of the Association of Alumnae was an important one. The Association established one of its most important legacies, its scholarship program and honored its beloved advocate, Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith. Dr. Pauline Spencer, our first president, provided the leadership for establishing the foundation of the Association of Alumnae to engage the future. Pauline passed away at the age of 76 on September 9, 1941.

Photo credit: University Archives

Here is an update on one of our A of A scholarship recipients.