

The Corner of 34th and Walnut Streets

By Diane McClure Holsenbeck, CW '68



Stepping onto the diagonal walkway at 34th & Walnut fifty-four autumns ago, I felt the dual excitement of beginning college and being in Philadelphia. That diagonal path had replaced the Woodland Avenue Trolley that bisected the campus when my father joined the Bicentennial Class of 1940. If the trolley tracks had not been demolished and gone underground we freshmen might have found ourselves on a country estate in Valley Forge as had been proposed in 1948. But how were we in the autumn of 1964 to predict what that walkway would witness in becoming part of the stream leading to the emblematic 1968, *the year that shaped a generation?*

Two anagrams reflect "the times (that were) a changin'," SOS (Save Open Space) in 1964 and SCUE (Student Committee on Undergraduate Education) in 1965. As to the former, we inherited the non-violent protests against removing 33 stately elm trees to ironically make room for the new Graduate School of Fine Arts Building from the term before we enrolled. As to the latter, SCUE's initiatives demonstrated that President Harnwell took them seriously, and the debate that ensued was peaceful, establishing Penn as unique during the escalating campus protest movement ignited by President Lyndon Johnson's order to send the first combat troops into South Vietnam in the autumn of our Sophomore year. This caught our attention because undergraduates could be drafted, and it gave birth to STOP (Students opposed to germ warfare research - on the Penn campus). Again Dr. Harnwell as a famous physicist, inventor of sonar, and a member of Germantown Quaker meeting, wisely handled the sit-in at College Hall.

Despite the controversies surrounding the construction of the Fine Arts Building, it helped to frame what became College Green, which was greatly enhanced by Blanche Levy's gift of making sense of our natural walking habits, from the entrance to campus at 34th and Walnut Streets and radiating out to that most precious cross campus core.

I have a nostalgic memory of helping to construct snow sculptures Senior year when a storm kept Neil Welliver at home and his TA, Frank Kowasaki, led us from the studio in Furness to College Green. We

hoped our ephemeral sculptures did homage to the nearby John Boyles' statue of Benjamin Franklin. It was that evening which struck me that our undergraduate vocabulary for the ground floor area we called "The Van Pelt Mixer" was a 1960's equivalent of the space serving the same purpose in the Frank Furness Library from 1891. An inscription in the leaded glass windows in the vestibule explained why there was a small pass-through window to receive books from the students who entered mostly for social reasons without passing through the doors into the reading room that read "Talkers are no great doers."

At least with the merger of men's and women's student government in 1965 and the election of a female student body president we co-ed '68ers benefited from being allowed to wear slacks for the first time in Van Pelt Sophomore year. That meant on a snowy night I could go from the Furness Building on College Green directly into the library without returning to Hill or Sergeant Halls to change into a skirt or dress. If the long proposed Women's Campus had been realized we would have headed to where "Hill Field" was located, and of which excellent use was made by the field hockey and lacrosse teams.

Another historically relevant memory from Senior year stems from an assignment in my Statistics Class, a requirement for archaeology majors. We were directed to the Moore School of Engineering to make use of the digital, electronic, and programmable ENIAC weighing thirty tons, to solve a homework problem. One entered a check size card into this first electronic general use computer and some calculable time later watched it reappear seemingly at the other end of campus. Aside from the well-known debacle in terms of the University's missed opportunity to patent the invention, take note baby boomers of the Class of 1968 that the first public demonstration of the programmable 30 ton ENIAC computer took place in February 1946.

Freshman year we read the cover story of "Drugs in America: drugs in the Ghetto" in LIFE magazine as we listened to The Supremes singing "Baby Love" on the juke box in Cy's "Dirty Drug," seemingly far away from the population featured in that article. Also that autumn a great commotion erupted as I returned from classes one Friday to Eero Saarinen's "La Bastille". The extraordinary undergraduate from the Class of 1963, John Wideman, had returned to campus to say farewell to his undergraduate sweetheart before heading to England as the first African American Rhodes Scholar. *"The times they are changing."*

Harnwell's successor in 1970, the brilliant Martin Meyerson, was responsible for focusing on, among other achievements, the University's first unified landscaping plan, hiring the Brit Peter Shepherd, to literally (excuse the pun) shepherd his 1977 plan to fruition.

It is fitting and meaningful that we will dedicate the Legacy Garden at our Fiftieth Reunion on May 13, 2018, at the center of our life at Penn. After our class organizational meeting over Homecoming Weekend in 2016, the votes came in swiftly and overwhelmingly in favor of this location. If only to reflect on what transpired for you there after entering the path from 34th and Walnut Streets in 1964 to where it leads us now, I urge you to help cut the ribbon into the future at Penn.

