



A History of Smith's Presidents



THE INAUGURATION OF A SMITH PRESIDENT is one of the college's most prestigious and festive events, replete with all the pomp and circumstance, tradition and vision that mark any great college celebration. It is a time to recognize Smith's history, its significance in the world, and the extraordinary legacy of its leaders.

In that spirit, here is a glimpse at Smith's past presidents and what they accomplished to move Smith forward.



F I R S T Smith College opened in the fall of 1875 with 14 students under the presidency of LAURENUS CLARK SEELYE. He served as president for 35 years and oversaw a time of great prosperity for the college. President Seelye grew the college's assets from Sophia Smith's original bequest of \$400,000 to more than \$3 million. He increased the number of faculty from six to 122; its student body to 1,635; and its buildings to 35.

S E C O N D Smith's second president,
MARION LEROY BURTON took office in 1910. A graduate of Yale Divinity School, President Burton was a gifted public speaker with an acute business sense. During his tenure, he led one of the largest and most successful campaigns at any college during that time to raise \$1 million in endowment. He also gave alumnae greater representation on the board of trustees and created close partnerships with Mount Holyoke College, Vassar and Wellesley.

"We live in a critical period of our national life. The unprecedented accumulation of wealth, the consequent presence and increase of luxury, the appearance and growth of the leisure class all suggest a serious problem. Our youth must be trained to conserve the best interests of our nation. Adequate knowledge of history, clear conceptions of our traditions of democracy, ready ability to discern forces which make for the destruction of these ideals — these must be the aims of our education."

MARION LEROY BURTON ~ 1910

T H I R D **WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON**
became Smith's third president in 1917. Under his leadership, Smith expanded its global reach and in 1924 launched its pioneering Junior Year Abroad Program, sending students to study in France, Italy and Spain. He also revised the curriculum to introduce the major and instituted new programs in science, landscape architecture and theatre.

"The college that regards itself as having reached the limit of improvement is in a dangerous way. The growth in numbers, the advance in general educational ideas and methods, the changes in the position of women in the community, all call for a perpetual reconsideration and readjustment of our organization. And at the present time, the revolutionary changes — social, economic, even ethical and religious — promise to make demands on those responsible for the education of the next generation for a power of adaptability and a breadth of vision such as have perhaps never been exacted in modern times."

WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON ~ 1918

F O U R T H HERBERT DAVIS

took office as Smith's fourth president in 1940, in the midst of World War II. He opened the campus to the first Officers' Training Unit of the Women's Reserve, or WAVES, and added a summer term so that students could graduate more quickly and go on to government service. He led with the strong belief that serious study was a way for women to confront the global threat to civilization.

"Education of any kind can never be a safe investment. If it is worth anything at all, it must be a risky business. For by its very nature it must be an experiment in freedom. If we really believe that the glory of man is in the powers of his mind and spirit, we must provide that freedom in which alone the mind can do its work. It is a farce to talk about the defense of freedom unless we are ready to accept the fruits of freedom, and in education to recognize one chief purpose — to produce free spirits, and to let them work freely."

HERBERT DAVIS ~ 1940





F I F T H BENJAMIN FLETCHER

WRIGHT came from Harvard to become Smith's fifth president in 1949. Throughout his time in office, he was a strong defender of the faculty's intellectual independence, especially as McCarthyism bred suspicion across the country. He grew the campus, overseeing several building projects, including Helen Hills Hills Chapel, and completed the college's \$7 million fundraising campaign.

S I X T H THOMAS CORWIN

MENDENHALL became Smith's sixth president in 1959. His tenure was characterized by the profound social and cultural shifts of the 1960s. Recognizing the need for change, President Mendenhall revised the curriculum to put more emphasis on independent study. He modernized campus facilities, oversaw the construction of a new Fine Arts Center, and instilled a sense of social responsibility among students and alumnae.

S E V E N T H JILL KER CONWAY

became Smith's first woman president in 1975. A charismatic and energetic leader, President Conway became widely known for her commitment to the liberal arts and women's education. Her administration was marked by several major accomplishments, including a large-scale expansion of Neilson Library, the growth of the Ada Comstock Scholars Program and the creation of an executive education program for women.

"We must acquire the knowledge and develop the resources to counsel our students about the typical career experiences of women and about the typical turning points in women's lives. Women's lives in our culture require them to make new beginnings in their late thirties or early forties and it is my hope that Smith College, as a women's college, may provide educational resources which will make that stage of new beginnings not one of disorientation or crisis but rather one of renewal and increased potential for growth."

JILL KER CONWAY ~ 1975

E I G H T H In her decade as president, MARY MAPLES DUNN led Smith through exciting and challenging times. When she began in 1985, the campus community was more diverse than it had ever been, creating opportunities for engagement around issues of race and ethnicity. President Dunn helped the college raise more than \$300 million during her tenure. She improved computer technology across campus and broadened the curriculum, introducing course offerings in non-Western and neglected American cultures.

N I N T H RUTH SIMMONS, Smith's ninth president from 1995 through 2001, was the first African-American woman to lead any top-ranked American college or university. She galvanized the campus through an intense strategic planning process that led to a number of landmark initiatives, including the creation of the first engineering program at a women's college and the launch of the Praxis internship program, which provides every Smith student with a funded internship.

T E N T H CAROL CHRIST took up her duties as Smith's 10th president in 2002. Early in her tenure, she launched an energetic program of outreach, innovation and long-range planning. She identified areas in the curriculum on which to build, including international studies, environmental sustainability and community engagement, and led several major building projects. Among them was the design and construction of Ford Hall, a state-of-the-art science center that serves as the home of Smith's engineering program, and the MacLeish Field Station, a 200-acre woodland tract in Whately, Mass., that is used for environmental research and education.

"Since I have come to Smith, I have been amused by how often I have been asked whether Smith's development of the sciences, embodied in its new engineering program and its plan for a new science center, means that it will abandon the liberal arts. Citizens of 18th-century Virginia could have asked Thomas Jefferson the same question when he introduced medical science and natural history into the curriculum. Like Jefferson, I have no intention of abandoning the humanities; they are my intellectual passion. But surely the sciences are among the liberal arts — fields of study that contribute to general intellectual culture."

CAROL CHRIST ~ 2002



On Saturday, October 19, 2013,

KATHLEEN McCARTNEY

WILL BE INAUGURATED AS THE

E L E V E N T H

PRESIDENT OF SMITH COLLEGE.