

MAY 13, 2011

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for that introduction. I'm told that when someone in his late 90's starts to speak, he doesn't know when to stop. You'll be the judge of that this afternoon.

I entered Pingry in 1923 -- eighty-eight years ago! Since the school is now celebrating its sesquicentennial, this means that I have been associated with Pingry for almost 60 percent of its history. When I first began fifth grade here at nine years of age, I never gave a thought to Pingry's history. Pingry just seemed to have been around forever. One benefit of living to my age is that you come to have a better appreciation for history and the many changes that a long-standing institution like Pingry has experienced during its 150 years. I'd like to say a few words about Pingry's history, both before I arrived and as I have seen the school change and grow.

Let's go back to the Pingry early days. Dr. John F. Pingry was a graduate of Dartmouth in the class of 1836. He was 18. He then took up theology becoming a Presbyterian minister. He had a church in the village of Fishkill, New York for several years, but he had started to do some teaching as well. He eventually found his way to New Jersey and in 1861 founded our school in a small house in Elizabeth.

At that time Elizabeth had no high schools. It was the custom for people to go to work after they finished the elementary grades. Up until the 1920s, less than two percent of young Americans earned college degrees. In the 19th century colleges like Yale, my alma mater, would admit any young man who could pass the school's entrance exams, but those exams required knowledge of both Latin and Greek, among other subjects. Schools like Pingry came into existence to prepare the small number of students who wanted to go to college but didn't have access to private tutors.

In 1861, Dr. Pingry was not yet **Doctor** Pingry. In 1868 Princeton awarded him an honorary degree and from that point on he was officially Dr. Pingry. Dr. Pingry

always wore a stovepipe hat. I think there were at least two reasons for that. One, it was always a sign of dignity and those in leadership roles in those days -- like Abraham Lincoln -- usually wore that type of hat. And secondly, Dr. Pingry was relatively short and somewhat stocky. This type of hat added to his stature.

The early years of Pingry took place during the Civil War. News of Union victories was cause for great celebration. I like that picture of the Pingry students hanging out when they were granted a day off -- or was it half a day? -- when they got the news that Richmond had fallen.

By the early 1890s, Dr. Pingry had been the headmaster of his school for thirty years and was beginning to feel his age. So he got together a number of the leading citizens in Elizabeth, including Congressman Charles N. Fowler and reorganized the school so that it was now functioning under a board of trustees. The Congressman served as President of the Board from 1892 until 1918 -- and I think that all who have served on the Board will agree that 26 years is a very long time for someone to be president. The Congressman saw the need for a larger and more modern building with outside space sufficient so that the boys could do some athletics. The result was the new building on Westminster Avenue and Parker Road in Elizabeth. That was the school I attended in the early 1920's. The Congressman served for 8 consecutive terms and was Chairman of the House Banking Committee. He had a distinguished career.

In 1892, the new Board recruited 28 year old William H. Corbin known as "Pa," of the Yale class of 1889 to be the Headmaster. Pa Corbin had no connection with the family of Horace Corbin who had been on the Pingry Board from 1918 to 1933 and whose family continued to play a part at Pingry for many years. He was one of the men whose advice I sought when I was pondering whether to go to law school.

Pa Corbin was the last Yale alum to be head of Pingry until Nat Conard came along. Pa had been captain of the 1888 Yale football team. It was not only undefeated, and untied; it was even unscored on; it racked up 698 points to its opponents' zero. He came to Pingry to be the first designated headmaster under the new setup.

Pa Corbin's first job was to recruit faculty and set up the curriculum. This he did successfully, but he continued to have a big interest in athletics. When he offered to help the Pingry boys with their football team, they would have none

of it. During the Dr. Pingry era the boys had been allowed to have teams that they set up themselves. There had been no organized athletic program during the Dr. Pingry regime.

Pa sat back and watched them during his first year, when the boys had a pretty successful season. Then he asked them if they would like to play the school he came from, Westminster, which at that time was a fairly new school in Dobbs Ferry, New York. It moved to Simsbury, Connecticut in 1900. I went there in 1930. The boys accepted this suggestion. After all, they'd had a successful season. They thought they would show Pa a thing or two. Well they learned a thing or three themselves as Westminster soundly defeated them by a score of 40 to 0. After that, of course, Pa Corbin became the football coach as well as headmaster. The team improved every year until in 1897, Pa's last year at Pingry, they won the North Jersey Interscholastic Championship. Pa also created and expanded an athletics program at Pingry.

Let's now fast forward to the 20th century. I came to Pingry in the fall of 1923; Calvin Coolidge had just become president after the death of Warren G. Harding. Pingry was for boys only in those days, and the elementary grades had only one teacher for all subjects. Our fifth-grade teacher was Mrs. Wagner. I think she was only a temporary teacher, and was only at Pingry for a year or two. There was a bakery in Elizabeth at that time whose delivery vans were emblazoned with the legend "Mrs. Wagner's Pies". We used to kid around saying, "How come Mrs. Wagner has time to bake all those pies before coming to teach us?"

Sixth grade was taught by Miss Harriet Budd, who was a glowing light of Pingry from 1901 to 1937. She became a legend in her own time. I remember as if it was yesterday her reading to us in the afternoons. One of the books she read to us was called **The Reds of the Midi**. Recently I wondered if it was still around. I checked the nearby library and sure enough they had it. I reread it around Christmastime. It's still a good tale. Miller Bugliari's wife's maiden name was Elizabeth Budd -- she and Miss Budd were distant cousins. Like Miss Budd, Miller too has become a legend in his own time with something over 700 victories to his credit.

I was now in the Middle School presided over by Mr. Otho Vars. I never had heard the name Otho before or since; so I decided to find out where it came from. I found out that Otho was a Roman Emperor and had been a friend of Nero's. Unfortunately, his wife Poppea was so beautiful that Nero took a liking to her and

told Otho to get a divorce. Otho said, No Thanks, and for that Nero got him out of the way by making him the governor of Lusitania. Poppea now got a divorce and married Nero. Nero in due course killed her just as he had his mother and others who were close to him. Then in the spring of the year 68, Nero at the age of 30 took his own life fearing what was about to happen to him. Otho did not become his successor immediately for there was an interim successor senior to him, Galba by name, who became Emperor and who Otho had to arrange to have murdered. That accomplished, Otho became Emperor on January 15 of the year 69. And then on April 15 of the same year Otho, following Nero's example, took his own life.

Returning to the 20th century, we find Mr. Otho Vars presiding over the Middle School and teaching the 7th grade. He presided a good deal longer than the Emperor Otho did. Mr. Vars was there for many years and was highly respected. I have very good memories of him.

My last year at Pingry was 1926, which incidentally was the first year I heard the word Sesquicentennial. That word was much in use in 1926 during the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

I had to leave Pingry because my parents had moved from Cranford to Madison. And in those days Pingry did not have the far ranging bus system that it has today. When I went to Pingry, my father dropped me off on his way to work in Newark, and then I took the 4:16 train home to Cranford every afternoon along with boys from Roselle, Cranford, Westfield and Plainfield. Would you believe! The half-fare ticket from Elizabeth to Cranford cost 9 cents. I left Pingry after the school year ended in 1926 and entered the Madison Academy and then went away to boarding school.

I didn't have any further connection with Pingry for several years until one day in the early 1950's, when I was living in Summit I took my older son Rick, who was about ten years old, to see the school. The Parker Road building by then was six decades old and in bad shape, but we visited the impressive new school that was under construction on North Avenue in Hillside, a mile or so away from the old campus. While we were looking on in wonder, who should we run into but my old friend and Pingry classmate, Charlie Atwater, who was also looking at the construction project. He had become a successor to Otho Vars as head of the middle school and in due course became headmaster. Pingry's new Hillside campus, of course, had a gymnasium, but within the first few years it became

evident that it was not adequate, and a second gym was added. The dedicatory remarks for the new gym were given by my cousin, Kim Whitehead, one time captain of Pingry's football team and in the Pingry Athletic Hall of Fame. He was also my Yale classmate, Yale football captain, and a member of the famous 1934 Ironmen.

Rick entered Pingry shortly after it opened for business in the new Hillside location. He was there for six years before going away to Andover, where I too had gone. Our second son John followed, attending Pingry for seven years before going to Westminster.

In 1955, I was invited to become a member of the Pingry Board, and greatly enjoyed my service under chairmen like Conover English, and Chester Smith.

I was a slow learner, but by the end of 1969 I had come to the realization that notwithstanding its beautiful new and efficient schoolhouse, Pingry was in the wrong place for the long haul. Newark Academy had already moved to a beautiful campus in Livingston and was attracting some of the students Pingry would normally have had.

So I gathered up my son Rick, who was now back from a Marine Corps tour in Vietnam, and we went to see my neighbor Bob Parsons, who had by then retired or was about to retire as an elder statesman of the Pingry Board. I did so with some trepidation because Bob had been head of a foundation that did a lot of the funding for the move from Parker Road to Hillside less than twenty years earlier. And here I was about to suggest that all his excellent work should be set aside and that Pingry should move again! I gathered up my courage and told him what I thought. To my amazement, Bob took my point immediately and even proposed that we go out together to look at some possible sites. Later that winter, we drove out in the countryside near Bernardsville and Basking Ridge looking at several pieces of land.

I then broached the subject with the Board, offering to buy the land if they found a piece they were interested in and volunteered to transfer it to Pingry at my cost if it happened. To make a very long story short, there were Yeas and Nays, but the movers prevailed. And so we were off -- but I can't add "and running" for it was a slow tortuous march and there was much to be done. The ad hoc committee that pushed the move along over the years consisted of Harry Hoyt, David Baldwin, Fred Bartenstein, Mac Bristol, Joe Engel and me. Somehow we got the task done.

There were many problems. We had to deal with the city of Elizabeth, the town of Hillside, and the state of New Jersey in connection with disposing of the Hillside property. The price kept getting lower and lower until we sold it for a price that was practically a giveaway. Today it is a part of Kean College.

The prospect of a new school on the tract we found in Bernards Township led to some discussions between Pingry and the Kent Place School. We at Pingry had thought that since coeducation was inevitable, the all-girls' Kent Place might be interested in merging with us at the new site. In the end, Kent Place decided to remain where they were, and Pingry instead merged with Short Hills Country Day School. This highly successful merger enabled Pingry to become coeducational across the board in the fall of 1974 and to establish its junior school on the old SHCD campus in Short Hills.

Out here in Martinsville, we had our groundbreaking ceremony in April 1982 at a point near where our driveway and the highway now come together. There's a photo around that shows two headmasters, Dave Wilson and Scotty Cunningham, along with Fred Bartenstein, Mac Bristol and me with a sod-lifter in the background. During construction Fred Bartenstein was at the site and on the job practically every day working out changes with the contractor. In addition, there were more municipal regulatory problems than you could shake a stick at. One of the main problems was the disposal of sewage and the need to tap into one of the nearby sewerage systems. It was one thing for a farmer and his family to live on a piece of land and flush a toilet and another for a school with about 1,000 persons to be created there. We found ourselves having to deal with the State of New Jersey Environmental Protection Agency, the planning boards of Bernards Township, Bridgewater Township, and Somerset County, the sewerage authorities of Warren Township and the Somerset-Raritan Valley system, and many other municipal bodies. Fred Bartenstein not only dealt with the contractors, but used his superb legal ability to work things out with all the governmental authorities we had to deal with. Finally the new school was dedicated in May 1984, and the rest is history.

But history never really ends, and the job of Pingry is never finished. Over the years the playing fields have been substantially improved. In 2006, the new Middle School was dedicated. It is called the Carol and Park B. Smith '50 Middle School. And today the new Headmaster's House out here on this campus is, or soon will be under construction.

We have out front a splendid new statue of Dr. Pingry with some students -- two boys and two girls. While it is historically inaccurate, it is philosophically correct. I like that. Much has changed at Pingry since Dr. Pingry's day. But as long as there is a Pingry, the people and the means to make it better will surely appear, as in our time and in the past.

Thank you very much.

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