

A brief history of Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School

As the school enters its 175th year in 2018, the following historical items and dates are worth noting:

1839

The Rev. George Peck, a Methodist preacher, speaks in the Forty Fort meeting house about the need for a Methodist seminary in the Wyoming Valley.

1843

The Oneida Conference of the Methodist Church determines that Kingston will be the location of the new Wyoming Seminary, following competition between Wilkes-Barre and Kingston to see which community can raise the most money. Construction begins soon after.

1844

Wyoming Seminary opens on Sept. 25, 1844 with 14 girls and 17 boys in attendance. Reuben Nelson is named the first president of Wyoming Seminary.

1850

Special bill passed in Harrisburg that provides for the charter of the school. The original charter drafted in 1844 was illegal, since it included trustees from Pennsylvania and New York State. Pennsylvania statutes of the 1840s required any institution chartered in the Commonwealth to have only Pennsylvania citizens on its board.

1853

Fire destroys first Seminary buildings. Trustee William Swetland remarks at the scene: "It does not look as well as it did yesterday, but money can make it look better."

1856

For the residents of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Wyoming Seminary's Anniversary Week was "The Event" of the year. With the opening of Kingston's new railroad depot at the end of Market Street 5000 people arrived for anniversary. The opening of the D.L.&W. line from Scranton to Bloomsburg marks a new era for the school, enabling Seminary to attract students from throughout the region.

1857

Horace Greeley, owner and publisher of the *New York Tribune*, takes his own advice and goes west, speaking at Wyoming Seminary's anniversary exercises.

1862

Reuben Nelson resigns as principal, Young Smith appointed to take his place, but resigns after two months. Nelson reappointed. A week later, in June, a tornado hits the campus. Several weeks later and 150 miles to the south, the Battle of Gettysburg brings the war even closer to home. Then, in August, another disastrous fire hits campus. But November brings the establishment of the first Commercial Course to train students in the latest

business methods. Known through the years as the Business School, The Wyoming Commercial College and the Dean School of Business, thousands of young men and women were trained until its closing in 1969.

1862-65

The Civil War takes its toll on Seminary enrollment.

1865

The first of many floods washes over the campus.

1866

L.L. Sprague, at the age of 21, registers as a student to prepare for studies in law. Within the year, Reuben Nelson convinces Sprague to become a teacher and eventually the second principal of the Business School. That begins Sprague's 72-year career at Sem.

Baseball becomes the first official club sport.

1870

First alumni reunion; alumni association founded.

1872

David Copeland named principal.

1877

Military department organized; Wyoming Cadets provide "a most healthful and pleasing exercise." Sports required for non-military boys; girls required to take light gymnastic excises.

1882

Levi Sprague named president.

1883

Opinator founded; first Glee Club founded. Football introduced as a sport.

1884

Seminary's neighbor across the river, the Wilkes-Barre Academy, is renamed Harry Hillman Academy as a memorial to the son of a benefactor. It will remain so named until 1919, when it reverts to its original name.

First singing group established – the all-male Glee Club of the Independent Society.

1887

Nelson Tower constructed as an integrated component of Nelson Memorial Hall. Blue and White become the official school colors.

1892

Seminary plays in world's first night football game. Game called at half time because of darkness.

1897

The *Wyoming* (the yearbook) is first published.

1911-12

"Hall committee system set up in boys' dormitory to promote better order in the halls, [and to] stop the room ransacking and nocturnal disturbances."

1913-14

Girls' basketball team organized.

1925

The Wilkes-Barre Institute, a 51-year-old primary and secondary school enrolling 185 girls, moves from downtown Wilkes-Barre to its new building in suburban Forty Fort. This building will, in 1951, become Wyoming Seminary's primary and intermediate division.

1927

First wrestling team organized.

1928

The first Prom. Until this time, dancing had been forbidden among Methodists. However, students prevailed upon Dr. Sprague who permitted and attended the first prom off campus.

1935

College Avenue renamed Sprague Avenue in honor of Levi Sprague. Dancing permitted on campus for the first time.

1936

Levi Sprague dies at the age of 96. Dr. Wilbur Fleck named fifth president. On Fleck's tenth day as president, the campus is flooded.

1939

Wilkes-Barre Academy merges with Wilkes-Barre Institute, forming the Wilkes-Barre Day School in Forty Fort.

1944

"The True, The Beautiful and The Good" becomes the official motto.

1949

To house the increased number of male students (including veterans), the Carpenter Hall dormitory is completed.

1950

Ralph Decker '28 named sixth president.

1951

Wyoming Seminary acquires Wilkes-Barre Day School; Seminary becomes only K-12 independent school in northeastern Pennsylvania.

1959

Ben Hopkins Moses '30 named seventh president.

1966

Harold C. Buckingham '19 named eighth president.

1967

Wallace F. Stettler named ninth president.

1972

Flood decimated campus. Nelson Chapel is damaged beyond repair but its historic clock tower is saved.

1975-80

A focus on rebuilding results in the new Pettebone-Dickson Student Center on Maple Avenue and the Buckingham Performing Arts Center and the Stettler Learning Resources Center, both on Sprague Avenue.

1976

Madrigal Singers organized.

1980

Dean of Admission Jack Eidam takes the first student recruitment journey abroad and initiates renewed focus on global awareness.

H. Jeremy Packard named tenth president.

1994

Campus celebrates 150th anniversary with total enrollment of 745. The Sesquicentennial Wing at the Lower School, including the Sordoni Library and five new classrooms, is completed.

1995

Sem reinstates the formal honor system.

1997

The \$21 million 150th Anniversary Capital Campaign is completed.

1998

New Pre-Kindergarten (age 3) program begins at Lower School.

1999

New Sprague Hall addition is completed, adding one office, four academic department offices and six classrooms to the Upper School. A \$5.9 million gift from the estate of Dr. Joseph Donchess '26, largest gift in school history, is received. A summer music program called the Performing Arts Institute (PAI) begins.

2000

Upper and Lower School campuses are wired for new telephone and computer networks; Fleck Dining Hall and the Lower School's newly named Amato Auditorium are completely renovated.

2002

Girls' lacrosse is founded as a club sport and becomes a varsity sport in 2003, bringing the school's total number of varsity sports to 20.

2003

For the first time, Sem students travel to Malawi in south-central Africa over spring break to bring medical supplies to hospitals, care for babies with AIDS in an orphanage and help repair a school.

2004

Sem revives the Societies as a one-day fun event, develops a new art gallery space on the first floor of Nesbitt Hall.

2005

A new course, Advanced Placement (AP) Russian, is offered. Sem students may now take AP exams in 25 subjects. An outdoor classroom, nicknamed the Snook, is built.

2006

The Madrigal Singers complete their first concert tour of Asia, performing in South Korea, Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. The new Karen Klassner artificial turf field, named for Sem's veteran field hockey coach and director of athletics, is built for use by the field hockey and lacrosse teams.

2007

Kip P. Nygren named the eleventh president.

2008

The entire Upper and Lower School campuses offer wireless Internet access.

2009

The O. Charles Lull Tennis Center and Roslyn Rudin Tennis Pavilion are built behind the Carpenter Athletic Center on Chestnut Street. Classroom upgrades take place on the third floor of Sprague Hall and the first floor of the Lower School. The *Opinator* goes online.

2011

The Sem Mock Trial team wins its first state championship, while incoming freshman Sukanya Roy wins the Scripps National Spelling Bee. An exploratory Mandarin Chinese language program begins at Lower School. The varsity football program is placed on temporary hiatus due to low participation numbers.

2012

Wyoming Seminary expands its Early Childhood program to include toddlers, students between 18 months and three years old. The Louis Maslow STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) School opens in fall 2012. Sem's Roat House is moved from North Sprague Avenue to the corner of West Hoyt Street and North Maple Street to make room for construction of the new Kirby Center for Creative Arts.

2013

A Mandarin Chinese language program begins at Upper School. A \$4 million renovation of Nesbitt Stadium is completed, and football returns from a two-year hiatus with a junior varsity schedule. North Sprague Avenue is closed to traffic from Market Street to the entrance of the Buckingham Performing Arts Center, creating a pedestrian campus.

2014

New Allan P. and Marian Sutherland Kirby Center for Creative Arts opens at the start of the 2014-15 school year. Football continues with a varsity schedule.

2015

Kevin P. Rea named the twelfth president. Rowing begins as a club sport.

2017

Wyoming Seminary joins RoundSquare, a worldwide network of more than 160 schools on five continents dedicated to the IDEALS of internationalism, democracy, environmental stewardship, adventure, leadership and service. Girls wrestling program begins.

2018

Extensive renovations to the second floor of Sprague Hall and Nesbitt Hall are completed, and the Lower School Gover Garden and Outdoor Classroom is ready for the start of the 2018-19 school year.