

Charter Day
April 6, 2009
Faculty Remarks
By Steven B. Stewart, Chair, History Department

The word *vision* conjures up an infinite number of possibilities. To a land developer it may be the dream of a hundred new homes situated around a community park with ball fields and tennis courts. However, to a rural land owner it may simply be protecting the sight lines of his pastoral view.

For many of the westward bound adventurers that used the Harris Ferry in the mid-1700s, the Susquehanna River was the line of demarcation separating the last pockets of civilized life from the raw, untamed wilderness. These early pioneers were eager, wide-eyed optimists who were ready to take hold of the unsettled lands west of the Alleghenies. Their *vision* of the future rested with their ability to use a gun, horse, axe, and plow to tame the land

While helping these early settlers across the river, John Harris, Jr. had his own vision of the future. To him the enterprising spirit was a matter of the mind – an *empire unto itself*. Where an idea was as important as the plow; where reason and logic could offer peace through contract and government; where a mathematical equation represented infinite possibilities and language studies would introduce global awareness. Harris' vision for the future lay back East – not West.

Plucking a school master from the town of Lancaster, Harris went to work to begin his enterprise in education. Using a room in the family home on Front Street, his and his neighbors' children were introduced to something more valuable than gold – an education.

So, in 1784, before the town of Harrisburg was ever laid out, before there was a courthouse, a town newspaper, a theatre, or a library, even before the establishment of the U.S. Constitution itself, Harrisburg Academy was born. For the next 225 years it would, as John Harris envisioned, prepare young minds to meet the challenges of an ever changing country. Among the legacy of its graduates include a Pennsylvania governor, two Representatives to the U.S. House, a local newspaper publisher who would become an advisor to President Wilson and also an American representative to the Treaty of Versailles.

Over the years the school has survived economic recessions, business panics, and full-blown depressions. It has weathered wars and times of peace. It has expanded in times of growth and has once merged to become co-educational. The Academy has changed its locations at least nine times. But, evident throughout its history there has been one enduring factor – the school's vision of offering students a chance to learn in a supportive academic environment that helps them to develop their individual talents.

Having spent 40 years teaching at the Academy, I can tell you I just don't educate students. In the process I also find myself being challenged to learn and grow more each

day. The same can be said of my Academy colleagues. We are all professionals, but we are linked together in our common purpose to bring out the best in each student.

Some of our faculty members have taught college and on-line courses. They have written books and published articles. Others have retired from teaching but have returned to offer evening courses, teach part time, or lead important planning committees. A few of our teachers have re-invented themselves, moving from the classroom to become administrators, develop and teach computer and science curricula, or to become accredited International Baccalaureate instructors. Some teach during the day and pursue their master's or doctorates at night and on weekends. As colleagues, some of us have coached together, sometimes with the assistance of our former students and sometimes against coaches who were our former students. Some open their homes to our International students while others have hosted visiting German musicians. Our teachers travel and study abroad and lead groups of students on tours of other countries. As it is with a small school offering a full curriculum and its extra curricular activities, our faculty has volunteered to take on those after-school duties that enrich student life. We collaborate on and support each other's projects and endeavors. And, one of our greatest privileges has been to teach each other's children.

I also must mention our partners in the educational process, our dedicated parents. Like my colleagues, the Academy's parents not only sacrifice financially to send one, two, or three children to the school, but they also can be seen well after school hours helping with fund raising projects, Capital Campaign drives, the Academy Auction, and helping with a host of other school events. Some parents who have seen the last of their children graduate from the school have returned to chair or serve on the Board of Trustees, lead strategic planning committees, or head up fund-raising efforts. They are very supportive of the school, its program, and its teachers and always seem to go the extra mile to make the Academy experience the best it can be.

Visitors to our school can't walk around our building and not see who we are and what we are. The student artwork on display in our Gallery, the photos in our hallways and the many bulletin boards that call attention to achievement and activities attest to what makes the Academy so unique. The rhythmic sounds of our musicians and the dialogue of a play's rehearsal heard in our halls also define who we are. The printed word of our student newspapers and the designs found in our yearbooks are but a fraction of the creative ideas and writing our students produce here. These are the Academy's treasures.

The frontiers of today are different from that of 1784, but like John Harris of old, the school continues to stretch its horizons and broaden its vision. Always exploring new frontiers, we continue to pursue the cutting edge of the latest technology where teacher and students alike have won statewide recognition. And, with our newly instituted International Baccalaureate program, we are the only school in the area to offer this internationally recognized and widely acclaimed diploma. These successes and achievements are no accident. Our present administration, led by Jim Newman, continues to explore ways to enhance faculty endowment, program and curriculum development, to ensure Harrisburg Academy is among the best educational experiences in the region.

Over the years at Harrisburg Academy I have always felt associated with the most dedicated, professional, and helpful group of people. In short, the Academy is a great place to work, learn, and grow together.

Thank you.