Saint Joseph’s University

On the morning of September 15, 1851, some thirty young men gathered in the courtyard outside Saint Joseph’s Church, in Willing’s Alley near Walnut and Fourth Streets and one block from Independence Hall. After attending High Mass and reciting the *Veni Creator* in the church, these young men were assigned to their classes in a building adjacent to the church. That September morning marked the beginning of a rich and exciting history for Saint Joseph’s University.

As far back as 1741, a Jesuit College in Philadelphia had been proposed and planned by Rev. Joseph Greaton, S.J., the first resident pastor of Saint Joseph’s Church. The suppression of the Jesuits (1773-1814) and lack of human and financial resources delayed for over a hundred years the realization of Fr. Greaton’s plans for a college. Credit for founding the college is given to Rev. Felix Barbelin, S.J., who served as its first president.

He, along with four other Jesuits, formed the first faculty of Saint Joseph’s College. Before the end of the first academic year, enrollment rose from fewer than forty to ninety-seven students. In the following year (1852), when the college received its charter of incorporation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the enrollment grew to 126 students.

In January, 1856, Saint Joseph’s College moved to a more spacious site on the fashionable Filbert Street. Due to financial difficulties and the serious illness of the college’s second president, the college returned to its Willing’s Alley location in 1860. Shortly thereafter, the civil strife between the North and South resulted in the first of three wars that would greatly diminish the college’s enrollment. Through the Civil War and postbellum years, Saint Joseph’s College struggled to remain in existence.

With the purchase in 1866 of a city block between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets near Girard Avenue as a new site for the college, its future began to look brighter. Rev. Burchard Villiger, S.J., one of the original members of the college faculty, was appointed president in 1866.

It was during his tenure that new college buildings, made possible largely through a generous bequest from the estate of Francis Anthony Drexel, were constructed at the Girard Avenue location. A sporadic but continuing growth, both in student enrollment and academic excellence, is recorded for the new life of Saint Joseph’s College from September 2, 1889, when the college moved to this site from Willing’s Alley, until 1927, when a still larger campus was judged necessary.

In November 1922, an ambitious building fund campaign to raise $1,000,000 was organized by Rev. Matthew Fortier, S.J. His work in this difficult undertaking was successful and the pledges exceeded that goal. Subsequently, Saint Joseph’s College was able to purchase twenty-three acres in a beautiful residential area at the western edge of the city. Construction of a handsome building in modern Collegiate Gothic architectural style was begun in November 1925. Its dedication
took place on November 14, 1927. From that time to the present, the address of Saint Joseph’s has been 54th and City Avenue.

During the Second World War, the college’s enrollment was again greatly reduced. Following the war, aided by the “G.I. Bill of Rights,” enrollment grew rapidly. In 1943, an Evening College was founded. It was also after the war that Saint Joseph’s acquired several spacious homes adjacent to the campus, which were converted to its first residences for students. Through the decade of the sixties, Saint Joseph’s experienced unprecedented physical growth. Five more properties were added to the campus including the nine-acre estate of Margaret Gest, a Jesuit faculty residence, the Post classroom building, a science center, the Drexel Library building, a six-story student dormitory and expansion of the Student Center. All enhanced the modern facilities of the campus.

In the fall of 1970, the undergraduate day college opened its doors to women, bringing to an end its tradition as an all-male institution. Also in the early 1970s the College was separately incorporated from the Society of Jesus, with by-laws that connect the mission of the Jesuits to the institution. Saint Joseph’s was recognized as a university by the Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on July 24, 1978. The corporate charter was formally changed to reflect university status on December 27, 1978.

Shortly thereafter the University added a College of Business and Administration to complement the College of Arts and Sciences, and it also expanded graduate programs. At the same time, Saint Joseph’s built a new Student/Sports Recreation Complex. The need for a larger library prompted the expansion of the University’s Drexel Library. The campus was enlarged to 49 acres with the purchase of Saint Mary’s and Bronstein Halls on Lapsley Lane.

The 1990s under the leadership of Nicholas S. Rashford, S.J. (President 1987-2003) marked an era of significant change in student enrollment; development of new undergraduate and graduate programs in all three colleges; integration of state-of-the-art technology of every kind, in the classroom and throughout the campus; upgrading of science laboratories; hiring of new faculty; and new campus construction. Among the most important building projects undertaken were the following: the Chapel of St. Joseph; the McShain Student Residence and its footbridge traversing City Avenue and linking the city and suburban campuses; Mandeville Hall, home of the Erivan K. Haub School of Business; three large new student residence halls.

At the turn of the century, the early 2000’s brought academic recognition for Saint Joseph’s. External and peer review are indicators of institutional progress and the awarding of a Phi Beta Kappa chapter to the University and AACSB accreditation in both business and accounting for the Haub School of Business in 2000 augur well for the future of Saint Joseph’s. In 2000 there were 19 master’s degree programs as well as the first doctoral program, an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership.
In Athletics, the most exciting event was the 2003-2004 Men’s Basketball Season which became known as the Perfect Season (27-0) including a trip to the NCAA Tournament Elite Eight. This was overseen by Timothy R. Lannon, S.J. who had been named Saint Joseph’s 26th president in July of 2003.

The physical presence of the University was also expanding, and in 2002, a new boathouse was built on Philadelphia's famed Kelly Drive in a joint venture with St. Joseph’s Preparatory school and named for Robert M. Gillin, Jr. In 2004 two new residence halls were built, dominating City Avenue and 54th Street corner. Later named Rashford and Lannon Halls, these residences added over 400 additional housing spaces for sophomores.

In 2007 Saint Joseph’s greatly expanded online degree programs in Graduate Arts & Sciences, adding to the existing online Pharmaceutical Marketing masters program. In early 2008 the University opened Hawks Landing on 54th Street, a five-story parking structure that provided 460 parking spaces for members of the University community. The structure continued the growth of the campus and the revitalization of the City Avenue business district. The University Bookstore was relocated to the street-level retail space of Hawks Landing. Two restaurants also occupy the retail space.

A transformational addition to the campus came in the summer of 2008 when the University purchased the Merion campus of neighboring Episcopal Academy. The James J. Maguire, Jr. ’58 Campus acquisition instantly changed the dynamic of Saint Joseph’s University, adding 38 acres including 20 buildings to house classrooms, laboratories, space for the arts, for program enhancement, faculty offices, administrative space, intramural and recreation programs, and approximately 15 acres of playing fields and especially room for innovation. Named for alumnus James J. Maguire, Jr. ’58, who along with his wife, Frances, made a generous lead gift toward the purchase of the property, the Maguire Campus acquisition represented an epic moment in Saint Joseph’s University history. Additional lead gifts were also secured including one from Nancy and Brian’69 Duperreault.

In 2009, Michael Hagan ’85 provided a naming gift to transform Alumni Memorial Fieldhouse into the Hagan Arena, adding 1,000 seats. Together with the Ramsay Basketball Center and Wynne Hall of Fame Room, these facilities investments reenergized the Athletic programs. Also in 2009 the University College was renamed the College of Professional and Liberal Studies.

At the completion of Plan 2010: Path to Preeminence, the full-time faculty had grown to 290 and the undergraduate student body numbered 4,600. Adult students studying part-time in the College of Professional and Liberal Studies and Graduate Programs numbered 3,600, of which over 1,100 were enrolled in online degree programs. In 2010 the faculty implemented a new General Education Program which built on Saint Joseph’s strong tradition of liberal arts and includes writing-intensive, ethical focus, and diversity courses.

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In 2011 With Faith and Strength to Dare: The Campaign for Saint Joseph’s University was successfully completed, having raised $152.1 million, the largest amount raised in any campaign in the University’s history. Academic programs expanded to include 12 new majors, and The Haub School of Business introduced a fully-online MBA program.

In March 2012, the campus celebrated the opening of the John R. Post ’60 Academic Center and the John & Maryanne Hennings Post Learning Commons. The Post Learning Commons is the foundation of Saint Joseph’s dynamic 21st century learning environment. It will meet the research, study, technological and multi-tasking needs of students and faculty while providing a lively forum for academic discourse. Through the generosity of Maryanne and John’60 Post, the library expansion added 35,000 square feet to the Drexel Library which includes group study space, a digital media zone and space for the appropriate preservation, storage, display, and access to the University’s archives and the library’s rare materials, including a display of Jesuitica (Jesuit books and 18th century Jesuit material).

In April 2012, the University dedicated the Cardinal John P. Foley Campus Center on the Maguire Campus in honor of Saint Joseph’s University’s esteemed alumnus from the Class of 1957. The vibrant center, which was made possible through the generosity of Michael J. Morris ’56, is used as an Admissions Welcome Center as well as for student life and campus-wide activities. Spring 2012 also witnessed the baseball program’s long-awaited return to campus at the team’s new home field on the Maguire Campus, named for then Interim President John W. Smithson ’68. The facility features a turf playing surface, bullpens, bleacher seating for 400 fans, and a press box.

On July 1, 2012 the University welcomed C. Kevin Gillespie, S.J. ’72 as the 27th President. Later that summer, the six-story Villiger Residence Hall, located on the corner of Cardinal and City Avenues, opened to house over 400 freshman students.

In December 2012, the University acquired 5800 City Avenue (formerly owned by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as the Cardinal’s Residence), a 23,000 square foot three story residential mansion situated on approximately 9 acres, expanding the total size of the campus to 114 acres. The property will be converted in 2014 to space for gatherings and administrative offices.