

The Reluctant President: Gaylord P. Harnwell and American University Leadership after World War II

ABSTRACT: This article examines the University of Pennsylvania's presidential search of 1952–53, which led to the election of the physicist Gaylord P. Harnwell, in light of other universities' presidential searches and literature on such searches during that era. It reveals the existence of a competitive market for university leaders characterized by three common themes: how universities prioritized keeping their own rising stars; the growing power of the faculty in university governance, which translated to pressure to hire an academic as university president; and how professors who directed military-oriented research during World War II parlayed that experience into postwar administrative careers.

GAYLORD P. HARNWELL (1903–82), president of the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) from 1953 to 1970, was probably the most influential executive head in that institution's history. According to John Puckett and Mark Lloyd, authors of a new history of Penn after World War II, "Harnwell charted Penn's rise to the status of a truly national university" by raising its academic stature, strengthening its financial resources, and transforming the campus from one "landlocked by an increasingly congested urban environment to a tree-lined, pedestrian enclave with closed streets and quadrangles, buffered if not fully protected from the encroaching city."¹

In light of his prominence and accolades, it is surprising to learn that a Harnwell presidency was far from foreordained when the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania (the official corporate name of the governing board; hereafter "the Trustees") began their search to replace Harold

¹ John L. Puckett and Mark Frazier Lloyd, *Becoming Penn: The Pragmatic American University, 1950–2000* (Philadelphia, 2015), 25.

Stassen in November of 1952. The Trustees seemed determined to find a seasoned university chief to take the reins in College Hall, while Harnwell, then chairman of the Department of Physics, professed not to want the presidency.

Beyond telling us that Penn's most influential president was apparently nowhere near the Trustees' first choice, the story of this search—and of other institutions' earlier attempts to pry Harnwell from Penn—reveals the existence of a highly competitive market for university leaders in the post-World War II period. Local and idiosyncratic factors drove the selection of Harnwell and many other university presidents of this era. Nevertheless, Harnwell's path to Penn's presidency suggests three common themes that characterized this market for university leaders: how universities prioritized keeping their own rising stars in a tight market for faculty and administrative talent; the growing power of the faculty in university governance, which in many cases translated to pressure on a governing board to hire an academic as university president; and how professors who led organized, government-funded, military-oriented research during World War II parlayed that experience into postwar administrative careers in universities.

Harnwell's career and other presidential searches that occurred around the same time as Penn's (1952–53) show that elite private research universities in this period offered money and leadership positions to dissuade their rising stars from leaving for other institutions. In the wake of Harnwell's widely hailed direction of government-sponsored research on underwater sound physics during World War II, several other institutions pursued him for deanships or presidencies. He nevertheless stayed as chair of the Department of Physics at Penn, which gave him an enormous salary. Both Columbia University and the University of Chicago in the early 1950s offered their presidencies to internal candidates who were receiving interest for similar positions elsewhere.

The presidential search that netted Harnwell also provides a concrete example of the nascent growth of faculty power in university governance. The search was the first major test of Pennsylvania's new faculty governance body, the University Senate, created just months before the search began. On one hand, the Trustees consulted substantially with the Senate early in the search and eventually chose a president who not only met the criteria the Senate had laid out but was part of the Senate constituency. On the other hand, the Trustees chose a president who was not on the Senate's

“preferred” list and ignored the Senate during the final phase of the search, leaving faculty members bitter.

Harnwell’s acceptance of the Penn presidency after being pursued by several other institutions illustrates the career-boosting role of experience in directing a wartime university-operated federal government laboratory. Before hiring Harnwell, Penn pursued Caltech president Lee A. DuBridge, who held one of the most prominent among these directorships during the war and became the gold standard university presidential candidate afterward. Undoubtedly, some of the allure of these candidates came from the belief that they had connections with the new federal government apparatus for funding peacetime science that had grown out of the wartime labs. Universities hoped that such candidates could bring federal funding to the institutions they were called to lead. Historians have written much about how the federal government’s wartime Office of Scientific Research and Development developed practices that transformed university research and universities as institutions in the postwar era, especially by acclimating elite research universities to working with the federal government. Universities had largely been opposed to such partnerships before the war due to fears about loss of control. This literature has explained how postwar federal research funding largely flowed to universities through individual professors “on the basis of personal contacts” but has generally not recognized the related trend of wartime lab directors going on to university presidencies.² By recovering that trend, this essay broadens our understanding of how the war research experience impacted postwar universities.

Harnwell joined the University of Pennsylvania faculty in 1938, but he was no stranger to the Philadelphia area. The son of a Chicago attorney, born and raised in Evanston, Illinois, Harnwell attended Haverford College. After graduation in 1924, he quickly achieved a staggering record of study under some of the world’s leading physicists: first, a one-year fellowship under Ernest Rutherford at the illustrious Cavendish Laboratory in the University of Cambridge; next, a PhD completed within a mere two

²For a typical view of OSRD influence on postwar universities, see Rebecca S. Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley, 1997), especially 14, 63–66; quote is on 65. David Kaiser has recognized the outsized importance of physicists in postwar university life, including their assumption of many deanships, but does not mention their presidencies. See “The Postwar Suburbanization of American Physics,” *American Quarterly* 56 (2004): 851–88, especially 853.

years under Karl Compton at Princeton; and, finally, a two-year National Research Council postdoctoral fellowship, the first year spent working with Robert Millikan at Caltech and the second back at Princeton, where he subsequently became an assistant professor in 1929 and associate professor in 1935.³ Harnwell met his wife, Mollie, during travels associated with his time at Cambridge. They married shortly after he completed his doctorate and drove to California in her convertible, with Mollie, as Harnwell recalled, “getting an enormous sunburn on the back of her neck.”⁴

After nearly a decade on the Princeton faculty, Harnwell began to look for another position. He wanted a promotion, and, as he explained it, “they just didn’t have any places in the hierarchies of physics at Princeton at that time.”⁵ In December of 1937, he was under consideration to become head of the Department of Physics at Indiana University. It is unclear which side began that interest or what became of it.⁶ Around the same time, Luther P. Eisenhart, a renowned mathematician and dean of the Graduate School at Princeton, “proposed to the authorities of the University of Pennsylvania, that [Harnwell] be made Chairman of the Department of Physics.”⁷ Penn recruited Harnwell rather aggressively, albeit with limited financial enticements. A cadre of Penn administrators met with Harnwell near Princeton and later brought him for a campus visit.⁸ Harnwell recalled that “President Thomas Gates, in front of a candle-coal fire in his College Hall office[,] asked me to rejuvenate a lagging department with the admonition that there were no funds for this, and I would have to raise the necessary financial requirements myself.”⁹ A Penn faculty committee “persuaded” Harnwell to take the post, member Detlev Bronk recalled with pride years later.¹⁰ Bronk, a pioneering biophysicist from the School of Medicine, would go on to the presidencies of Johns Hopkins University (1949–53) and Rockefeller University (1953–68).¹¹

³ Gaylord P. Harnwell to E. F. Johnson, Mar. 3, 1945, box 1, folder 5, Gaylord P. Harnwell Papers, UPT 50 H 289 (hereafter GPH Papers), University of Pennsylvania Archives (hereafter UPA).

⁴ Gaylord P. Harnwell, interview with Walter M. Phillips, Oct. 22, 1977, box 1, folder 9, GPH Papers, UPA.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gaylord P. Harnwell to H. B. Wells, Dec. 7, 1937, and Harnwell to Wells, Dec. 15, 1937, box 1, folder 9, GPH Papers, UPA.

⁷ L. P. Eisenhart to Gaylord P. Harnwell, Nov. 7, 1944, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

⁸ Gaylord P. Harnwell to Roy F. Nichols, Sept. 22, 1966, box 3, folder 18, GPH Papers, UPA.

⁹ Gaylord P. Harnwell, Remarks at Class of 1922 55th Reunion Dinner, May 20, 1977, box 1, folder 3, GPH Papers, UPA. Gates was president of the University of Pennsylvania from 1930 to 1944.

¹⁰ Detlev Bronk to Gaylord P. Harnwell, Sept. 1, 1970, box 3, folder 18, GPH Papers, UPA.

¹¹ Frank Brink Jr., *Detlev Wulf Bronk, 1897–1975* (Washington, DC, 1978).

Harnwell gained national recognition during World War II for organizing scientific work that supported the war effort. President Roosevelt created the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) to mobilize the nation's scientists to that end. Its director was Vannevar Bush, the president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and a former MIT professor, assisted by Harvard president James B. Conant and MIT president Karl Compton, Harnwell's doctoral advisor.¹² The OSRD awarded contracts to universities to conduct research for the military. Under these auspices, Harnwell from 1942 to 1946 took a leave from Penn to direct a lab funded by an OSRD contract: the University of California Division of War Research operation, located at the US Navy Radio and Sound Laboratory on Point Loma in San Diego. He oversaw a staff of 550 and an annual budget of \$3.5 million "concerned with the technical problems presented to the Navy in the field of submarine warfare."¹³ The Navy considered the work of this lab an important contribution to its campaign against Japan in the Pacific. To recognize this service, President Truman awarded Harnwell the Presidential Medal for Merit, which existed only during the World War II era and was the highest honor for civilians. The citation read in part: "Dr. Harnwell . . . was directly responsible for the severing by submarines of the last sea route from Japan to the mainland of Asia by his intelligent and constant supervision of the work of preparing for the United States Navy certain special weapons and devices."¹⁴ Harnwell had earned his first major national professional position just before the war when he became editor of *Review of Scientific Instruments*, a leading physics journal, a role he continued until assuming the Penn presidency.¹⁵ The war work propelled his star much higher, particularly in government-related activity. After the war, he served on numerous bodies, including as chair of both the National Research Council Committee on Undersea Warfare and the Department of Defense Research and Development Board Committee on Ordnance.¹⁶ Through this activity, Harnwell made crucial connections

¹² Julius A. Stratton, "Karl Taylor Compton," in National Academy of Sciences, *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. 61 (Washington, DC, 1992), 39–57.

¹³ Harnwell to Johnson, Mar. 3, 1945, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA; "University of California Division of War Research Reports 1942–1946—Processing Record, Scripps Institution of Oceanography Archives," accessed May 14, 2016, <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/speccoll/findingaids/UCDWR86-47.pdf>.

¹⁴ Citation to Accompany the Award of the Medal for Merit to Dr. Gaylord P. Harnwell, Mar. 29, 1947, box 7, folder 30, GPH Papers, UPA.

¹⁵ Masthead, *Review of Scientific Instruments*, accessed Jan. 21, 2016, <http://aip.scitation.org/rsi/info/editors>.

¹⁶ W. E. Stephens and C. W. Ufford to Alexander Hamilton Frey, Dec. 11, 1952, box 1, folder 3, GPH Papers, UPA.

with the leaders and agencies of the new federal research economy that was transforming the landscape of higher education.¹⁷

Before the war ended, other universities attempted to recruit Harnwell for major leadership positions. Eisenhart also made another effort to push him up the academic ladder, giving his name to Rice Institute as a possible president.¹⁸ Lehigh University, an engineering-oriented institution located in the steel town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, approached Harnwell in early 1945 about its presidency. In May, Harnwell visited the Lehigh campus and also met with Lehigh trustees in Philadelphia. Afterward, Harnwell wrote Lehigh officials with an assessment of the institution and how he would fit there. He worried that Lehigh was too dependent on tuition due to a small endowment and that faculty salaries were too low. With respect to raising the endowment, he claimed to “have no experience and probably little aptitude”; he believed that “the responsibility for enlisting the necessary support would have to be predominantly that of the Trustees.” Despite these concerns, “the spirit and loyalty of the Lehigh family” that he witnessed made him “sure the future holds great promise of increasing stature.” Consequently, he stood ready if elected to “devote [his] best energies” toward “the further development of a distinguished University.”¹⁹ It is unclear why the pairing of Harnwell and Lehigh did not move forward, but the context in Harnwell’s papers suggests that perhaps Lehigh never made an offer. Lehigh eventually elected a similar candidate, Martin Whitaker, in April 1946.²⁰ A former chairman of physics at NYU, Whitaker worked during the war under Enrico Fermi at the University of Chicago’s Metallurgical Laboratory, directed by Arthur Compton (Karl’s brother, who subsequently became chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis). The Metallurgical Laboratory was a key component of the US government’s Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb. Whitaker then helped extend this work to a new site in Tennessee as founding director of Clinton Laboratories, the forerunner of Oak Ridge National Laboratory.²¹

¹⁷ Roger L. Geiger, *Research and Relevant Knowledge: American Research Universities since World War II* (New York, 1993).

¹⁸ Eisenhart to Harnwell, Nov. 7, 1944, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

¹⁹ Gaylord P. Harnwell to P. M. Palmer, May 16, 1945, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

²⁰ “Dr. Whitaker Announced as New President,” *Brown and White*, Apr. 24, 1946.

²¹ “Martin Whitaker,” Lehigh University P. C. Rossin School of Engineering and Applied Sciences Distinguished Alumni, accessed Dec. 9, 2015, <http://www.lehigh.edu/engineering/about/alumni/whitaker.html>.

At the same time as Harnwell was considering the Lehigh presidency, the State University of Iowa pursued him to be dean of its Graduate College. Harnwell made a campus visit to Iowa in the summer of 1945 but declined the position because of his “very limited” experience outside of physics, his belief that his “temperament [was] probably more suited to personal participation and direction than to general cognizance and guidance,” and a sense of obligation to Penn because of the capital investment it had made in the Department of Physics under his guidance.²²

The offer that Harnwell appeared to take most seriously came two years later, from the University of Minnesota, to be dean of its Institute of Technology. The institute, created in 1935, was a kind of omnibus university structure that contained the College of Engineering, the College of Chemistry, and the School of Mines and Metallurgy, as well as the Mines Experiment Station, the St. Anthony Falls Hydraulic Laboratory, and the Engineering Experiment Station. Enrollment was 5,335 as of January 1947. The Department of Physics was not part of the institute, but the university was open to have the new dean transition it there.²³ Minnesota channeled its interest in Harnwell through faculty members John “Jack” Tate, a physicist and former dean of the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts, and Henry Hartig, longtime chair of electrical engineering, both of whom knew Harnwell through government work.²⁴ Like Harnwell, Tate edited a major physics journal, in Tate’s case *Physical Review*, and had received the Presidential Medal for Merit to recognize his contributions to undersea warfare.²⁵ Tate and Hartig served on President James L. Morrill’s committee to recommend a dean for the Institute of Technology, and in May 1947, Hartig invited Harnwell and his wife to make a campus visit.²⁶

Harnwell said he had “been giving very serious consideration” to the invitation to visit Minnesota but explained that his interest depended on how things went at Penn. He made a similar, yet amplified, argument to the one he had given Iowa two years earlier about a sense of indebtedness to Penn. He reported that “President [George] McClelland has been

²² Gaylord P. Harnwell to Virgil Hancher, Aug. 26, 1945, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

²³ Henry E. Hartig to Gaylord P. Harnwell, May 21, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA; “About the College of Science and Engineering,” University of Minnesota, accessed Jan. 15, 2016, <https://cse.umn.edu/t/about-the-college-of-science-and-engineering/>.

²⁴ James Gray, *The University of Minnesota 1851–1951* (Minneapolis, MN, 1951); Giving Opportunities, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Minnesota, accessed Jan. 15, 2016, <http://ece.umn.edu/giving-opportunities/>.

²⁵ List of 1947 recipients of Presidential Medal for Merit, box 7, folder 30, GPH Papers, UPA.

²⁶ Henry E. Hartig to Gaylord P. Harnwell, May 8, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

very considerate and the University has been very generous to me personally increasing my salary at intervals to ten thousand dollars for the next academic year.”²⁷ Harnwell’s new salary equaled that of two of the biggest stars in American science, Ernest Lawrence and G. N. Lewis of the University of California, Berkeley, as of 1945–46.²⁸ Furthermore, Harnwell was “busily engaged in trying to recruit” new faculty for his department, “which ha[d] been seriously crippled by losses to other universities,” even of scholars he had hired since becoming chair in 1938. In addition, he had “been instrumental in securing funds from various sources to support the research programs” of several of his hires who remained. In other words, Penn physics revolved around an individual professor in a manner more common in German universities than in American academia. That situation also shaped the other face of Harnwell’s initial response to Minnesota. He found himself “yet unconvinced that the University of Pennsylvania can command the necessary funds to provide the necessary facilities and salaries to maintain a first rate physics department.” If Penn could not do so, Harnwell preferred to “put [his] efforts where they can be more effective”—meaning at another university.²⁹

Harnwell visited Minnesota in June, and Hartig, Tate, and Morrill subsequently launched a campaign of persuasion by letter with a tone that could be described as fawning. Tate told Harnwell, “You were the unanimous choice of our committee and now we are all holding our respective breaths hoping that you will accept.” The expectations for Harnwell were high, to say the least. Tate saw “no reason why, under your leadership, we cannot have as distinguished an Institute of Technology in a great state university as at M.I.T. and Cal. Tech.”³⁰ Hartig echoed this notion, telling Harnwell, “I’m sure you must be convinced of the worthwhileness of this job as an important contribution to education in America” because it would give the Midwest “a first class Technical Institute.” To achieve that, Hartig told Harnwell, “Minnesota needs just you.”³¹ Morrill wrote from his cabin on Otsego Lake near Gaylord, Michigan, to follow up on a phone call they had “from the cracker-barrel station up here, amid the

²⁷ Gaylord P. Harnwell to Henry E. Hartig, May 15, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA. McClelland was president of Penn from 1944 to 1948 and a member of the Trustees at the time of Harnwell’s election.

²⁸ University of California Budget for 1945–46, Final Draft, June 21, 1945, Earl Warren Papers, F3640:4094, California State Archives.

²⁹ Harnwell to Hartig, May 15, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

³⁰ John T. Tate to Gaylord P. Harnwell, July 16, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

³¹ Henry E. Hartig to Gaylord P. Harnwell, July 23, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

clanking of coins” and to remind Harnwell of the salary offer of \$12,500. He noted that Otsego Lake “is also the summer-place of the Compton brothers—Karl, Arthur, and Wilson—and two of them are due fairly soon.” Karl and Arthur Compton were physics royalty, and all three had been university heads. That association likely colored Morrill’s enthusiasm for Harnwell. Morrill emphasized “how earnestly we hope you may come to Minnesota” and the “distinction and productivity” that Harnwell would bring “to our University enterprise.”³² Both Tate and Morrill offered to travel east to discuss anything about the position with Harnwell.³³ Hartig also tried to clarify the expectations for the deanship and mollify fears he sensed in Harnwell. Hartig insisted that Morrill “does not want a paper shuffler (which I take it you fear is the essence of the job).” What Morrill did want was “an aggressive program of industrial-sponsored or motivated research to be developed” in order to realize the full promise of the land-grant ideal, since those colleges were intended “to encourage teaching and research in the Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, but thus far have largely failed to develop the second mission with any approach to the effectiveness of the first.”³⁴

Minnesota’s hot pursuit startled Harnwell, especially because he took a different message away from his visit than did his hosts. What Harnwell saw on his visit was “that the present set up was generally speaking one of technology rather than science and that an engineer rather than a scientist was the person for the Deanship.” Conversation with Morrill had led him to believe that the president’s main goal was “to expand and improve the technical engineering departments,” thus better fulfilling the land-grant emphasis on mechanic arts and “furnish[ing] the people and industries of Minnesota with the consulting and other service advantages that would accrue.” Building a Midwestern Caltech or MIT, although “a goal worthy of every effort and sacrifice indeed,” was “quite different” from the understanding of Minnesota’s aim that he gleaned from his visit. Such an endeavor would “require a very clear formulation of greatly enhanced objectives, a firm agreement upon them, and a recognition of their extensive implications within the University as a whole by not only the administration but all of the policy forming bodies responsible to the state for the conduct of the University.” It would not be so easy simply to reprise

³² James L. Morrill to Gaylord P. Harnwell, July 23, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

³³ Ibid.; John T. Tate to Gaylord P. Harnwell, July 22, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

³⁴ Henry E. Hartig to Gaylord P. Harnwell, July 8, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

Caltech or MIT in a university where such an institute would have to coexist with other academic units and navigate the vicissitudes of state politics. This astute analysis suggests why several institutions wanted Harnwell's leadership.³⁵

In a long letter to Tate, whom he viewed as a mentor, Harnwell provided a self-assessment and analyzed his possible fields of endeavor. He was overly self-deprecating, claiming that he had "not achieved any considerable formal scientific recognition." He essentially repeated what he had told Lehigh about his personality, insisting that he had "no gift for personifying the work of my associates in such a way as to act as a colorful personal focus for attracting honors and recognition to them." He seemed obsessed with being "effective," a term that peppered his prose. He also wrote about his big-picture view of science. Harnwell believed that "the function of science in society must of necessity become increasingly important" and that this function had two "comp[arabl]y significan[t]" aspects, technology and education. Technology provided "the artifacts and processes that distinguish our material civilization and offer the facilities for greater human per capita effectiveness." By contrast, science-as-education cultivated "the spark or rationality humans seem to possess through the inculcation of logical and dispassionate thought processes until it becomes a reliable guiding beacon instead of being dissipated in the pyrotechnics of passion and prejudice that at present passes for social and political deliberation." In these formulations, the verbose Harnwell was thoroughly modern, a product of the early twentieth century's intellectual life and assumptions.³⁶

Geographic, familial, and financial considerations also influenced Harnwell's thinking. He and his family had just purchased and renovated a house in Haverford, the Philadelphia suburb where he had attended college, with an investment of almost \$30,000. The location was perfect for his children's educational pursuits. Moving from Philadelphia to Minneapolis would make it more difficult for him to continue his government work. Furthermore, despite the higher salary at Minnesota, "the income tax and individual property laws" there would mean "a considerable decrease in our income."³⁷ Harnwell did admit, though, in a rare voicing of Christian faith in a professional context, "I know about the difficulty of

³⁵ Gaylord P. Harnwell to John T. Tate, July 24, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* Pennsylvania had no state income tax at the time, but it is still not clear how a \$12,500 salary at Minnesota translated into a lower income than a \$10,000 salary at Penn.

getting money bags through the eye of a needle so [income] is not determining in the choice of a career.”³⁸ He continued to practice his childhood Episcopalianism during his career at Penn, including involvement at St. Martin-in-the-Fields near the president’s house in Chestnut Hill while he lived there, and in retirement he applied to the Quaker Meeting in Haverford, which he had also attended as a college student.³⁹

In Harnwell’s final analysis, his sense of obligation to the Department of Physics at Penn won out, especially because Penn was about to kick off a two-million-dollar campaign for a new physics building, resulting in the construction of David Rittenhouse Laboratory. He believed that “an announcement of my impending departure would go far toward fore-dooming [the campaign] to failure.” He also added another consideration that perhaps foreshadowed his later reluctance to be considered for the Penn presidency: he had “a very sincere interest in science as a teaching and practicing physicist, and a withdrawal to purely administrative matters would leave an intellectual gap [that would be] hard to fill.”⁴⁰ Harnwell declined Minnesota’s offer, and its Institute of Technology ended up with an interim dean for two years.⁴¹ There are no records of subsequent pursuits by other universities in Harnwell’s papers, probably because he became so invested in the physics building project that he no longer entertained such inquiries, although it is also possible that he became less “hot” of a candidate as the wartime milieu faded into the past. These three episodes, though, show how Harnwell’s successful direction of a wartime lab provided him with contacts and administrative experience that made him known and attractive to institutions looking for leaders. Harnwell’s response to the pursuits reveals him as loyal, cautious, humble, not susceptible to flattery, and possessed of keen insight into how an academic institution could flourish.

Despite this attention from other universities, albeit ones of lower status than Penn, and despite his loyalty to Penn, Harnwell seemed to be an afterthought when his own institution began looking for a president in 1952. Indeed, it would take five months and multiple failed pursuits of other candidates before the Trustees finally turned to the decorated physi-

³⁸ Gaylord P. Harnwell to Henry E. Hartig, July 28, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

³⁹ Rev. Philemon F. Sturges to Gaylord P. Harnwell, Jan. 19, 1954, box 1, folder 20, and Harnwell to Theodore Whittelsey, Apr. 11, 1975, box 1, folder 3, GPH Papers, UPA.

⁴⁰ Gaylord P. Harnwell to James L. Morrill, Aug. 4, 1947, box 1, folder 5, GPH Papers, UPA.

⁴¹ Ibid.; “About the College of Science and Engineering,” University of Minnesota, accessed Jan. 15, 2016, <https://cse.umn.edu/r/about-the-college-of-science-and-engineering/>.

cist in their midst. This process contrasted sharply with the zealous pursuit Harnwell had experienced from Iowa and Minnesota. Ultimately, however, his loyalty would be rewarded.

* * *

Penn's search for a new president began in early November 1952, after Dwight Eisenhower's triumph in the US presidential election ensured that current university president Harold Stassen would resign to join the Eisenhower administration. Robert McCracken, chairman of the Trustees, appointed a search committee with himself as chair. Nearly seventy years old, McCracken was "the most influential lawyer" in Philadelphia.⁴² His homogeneous committee was a who's who of Philadelphia men of power. Former US senator George Wharton Pepper, a longtime trustee and former law faculty member, was one of the university's most noted alumni.⁴³ Pepper, then in his mid-eighties, was still publishing and giving speeches, and he took an active role early in the search before health problems sidelined him.⁴⁴ The group also included Edward Hopkinson Jr., a lawyer, investment banker, and founding chairman of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission; Lamont DuPont Copeland, a future president of DuPont; Horace Stern, chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court; Orville H. Bullitt, a banker, civic leader, and brother of the diplomat William C. Bullitt; Philadelphia Electric Company president Henry B. Bryans; and Sun Oil president Robert G. Dunlop.⁴⁵

McCracken enlisted two prominent and well-connected Penn alumni as consultants: Harold Dodds, who had been president of Princeton University since 1933, and Joseph Willits, a former faculty member and dean of Penn's Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, who since 1939 had directed the Rockefeller Foundation's Division of Social Science.⁴⁶ Willits's papers provide a treasure trove of documentation from which to

⁴² Edwin Wolf, *Philadelphia: Portrait of an American City* (Harrisburg, PA, 1975), 299, quoted in John Lukacs, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900–1950* (New York, 1980), 315.

⁴³ "George Wharton Pepper (1867–1961)," Penn Biographies, University of Pennsylvania, accessed Dec. 11, 2015, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1800s/pepper_geo_wharton.html.

⁴⁴ Collection Guide, George Wharton Pepper Papers, UPT 50 P423 (hereafter Pepper Papers), UPA, accessed Jan. 19, 2016, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/faids/upt/upt50/pepper_gw.html.

⁴⁵ Robert T. McCracken to George Wharton Pepper, Dec. 4, 1952, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA; Kirk R. Petshek, *The Challenge of Urban Reform: Policies and Programs in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1973), 20–21; Biographical sketch of Edward Hopkinson Jr., Nov. 18, 1957, box 1189, folder "Hopkinson, Edward, Jr. #2," Office of Alumni Records Biographical Records, UPF 1.9 AR, UPA.

create an account of the search. These documents show that Willits had an enormous and perhaps even decisive influence. At least part of the motivation for McCracken's turn to these consultants was probably the high level of discontent among multiple Penn constituencies about Stassen's entire presidency, from his selection through his departure. Stassen was a former governor of Minnesota and a 1948 Republican presidential candidate who, after failing to gain the nomination during the convention in Philadelphia, essentially stuck around and became president of Penn. At least some faculty members viewed Stassen's tenure as a "humiliation" forced upon them by the Trustees.⁴⁷ One suspects that the Stassen debacle prompted McCracken to make sure he got his second chance at hiring a president right. Most likely, McCracken was determined to get a candidate with proper academic vetting and believed that Willits, with his sterling academic reputation and many connections, was the man to deliver it. Before McCracken even convened the official committee in early December, Willits was working his connections. He telegraphed University of California president Robert G. Sproul about a member of Penn's "long list," Harry Newburn, president of the University of Oregon.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, he wrote McCracken with summaries of his phone conversations with several people about President Jesse Buchanan of the University of Idaho and Chancellor Franklin Murphy of the University of Kansas, who held a Penn MD and was just thirty-six years old.⁴⁹

A frequent concern in presidential searches was and is ensuring that stakeholders in the university feel that their voices are heard. For McCracken, two critical stakeholder groups were the faculty and the alumni. Faculty input was particularly vital in the wake of the Stassen debacle. In the early 1950s, governing boards consulted with faculty in about half of academic presidential searches in the United States. Faculty participation in such searches was on an upward trend in this era, rising from roughly one-third in 1939 to roughly two-thirds around 1960.⁵⁰ Such involvement had been unusual enough during the 1930s that it prompted an article in

⁴⁶ Robert McCracken to Joseph H. Willits, Dec. 1 and 22, 1952, box 7, folder 70, Joseph H. Willits Papers, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereafter JHW Papers, RAC).

⁴⁷ George Wharton Pepper to Theophilus E. M. Boll, [Dec. 1952], box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA. Quote is from Boll, mentioned by Pepper in reply. One possible commentary on Stassen's presidency is that he remains the only Penn president of whom there is no portrait hanging in the first floor hallway of College Hall outside the Office of the President.

⁴⁸ Joseph H. Willits to Robert G. Sproul, Nov. 16, 1952, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁴⁹ Joseph H. Willits to Robert McCracken, Nov. 28, 1952, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁵⁰ F. W. Bolman, *How College Presidents are Chosen* (Washington, DC, 1965), 13.

the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* by Cornell University professor Julian Bretz lauding his institution's 1935–36 presidential search for including four faculty members (three of them deans) along with five trustees on the search committee. This committee worked methodically, deliberating for six months to bring a list of two hundred names down to a group of twelve.⁵¹ More frequent faculty participation in presidential searches by the 1950s reflected the increasing professional role in governance of American universities after World War II, which resulted in part from “growth in the demand for faculty” and a rise in their professional status.⁵² Penn exemplified this movement. Just a few months before the search, the Trustees and administration authorized the university's first comprehensive faculty governance body, the University Senate, under the leadership of law professor Alexander Hamilton Frey, its founding chair.⁵³ At its November 25 meeting, this body appointed an Advisory Committee of the University Senate on the Selection of a President, also chaired by Frey. He reported that “he found Mr. McCracken sympathetic to the idea that an educator should be chosen if possible.”⁵⁴ Subsequently, the Senate committee advised the Trustees that it wanted a president “who has spent a significant part of his professional life in university education,” one “selected on the basis of ability rather than reputation,” and one “to whom the presidency would be a next step up and who has no immediate aspirations other than the improvement of the University in every possible way.”⁵⁵ These criteria were tailored to specific points of faculty dissatisfaction with Stassen—that he was not an educator, that the Trustees chose him for what his reputation would bring the university, and that he viewed the Penn presidency as a stepping-stone to his next political office.

This faculty preference for an educator as president intersected with a national dialogue among academics that bemoaned what they saw as a rising trend of nonacademic presidents. One major event that fueled this wave of commentary was Columbia's 1947 election of General Eisenhower

⁵¹ Julian P. Bretz, “Selecting a President of Cornell,” *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 25 (1939): 150–57.

⁵² Larry G. Gerber, *The Rise and Decline of Faculty Governance: Professionalization and the Modern American University* (Baltimore, 2014), 79.

⁵³ Paul W. Bruton, “Alexander H. Frey: Stimulating Teacher, Esteemed Colleague and Delightful Companion,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 117 (1968): 1129–30.

⁵⁴ University Senate, Minutes of the Advisory Committee Meeting, Nov. 25, 1952, box 8, folder 23, University Senate Records, UPB 25, UPA.

⁵⁵ Alexander H. Frey to Robert T. McCracken, Dec. 26, 1952, box 13, folder: McCracken #1, History of the University Project Records, 1925–1977, UPP 1 (hereafter Nichols Project Records), UPA.

as its next president. Such consternation appeared as early as 1944, when Jay Carroll Knode, dean of the University of New Mexico College of Arts and Sciences, published a study suggesting a shift among state university presidents to backgrounds in “practical administrative and business experience and training” between 1916 and 1941.⁵⁶ Perhaps the strongest statement along these lines came in late 1947 from Monroe Deutsch, a classicist who had just retired as provost of the University of California, Berkeley. He argued, “the election of General Eisenhower will give a mighty impulse” to the “decided trend toward the choice of nonacademic presidents,” which would “endanger . . . the future of American higher education.”⁵⁷ Nonacademic presidents, he believed, would not sympathize with university ideals but would sell them “on the auction block of success, and all the sinister pressures of the outside world, today barred out by academic freedom and university ideals, will easily rend the dikes,” making the university a place of “efficiency” and “conformity.”⁵⁸

Two years later, the editorial board of *The American Scholar* sounded similar worries in an editorial titled “In Memoriam—the College President.” This editorial was the inaugural number of a “new venture” for the journal; such pieces would “be signed *R. W. Emerson, secundus*, in deference to the originator of the phrase, ‘the American scholar.’” Editorials would be reviewed by the full board, which included such luminaries as Jacques Barzun, Van Wyck Brooks, Alain Locke, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. The editors lamented that the president’s “first task is to raise money,” despite promises to the contrary by trustees, and that as a consequence the president “must be young, energetic, a good speaker and a bland reception-linesman.” The result of the fundraising emphasis was that “the whole executive intelligence of the modern seat of learning goes into advertising, selling and hoarding,” and that “the college president becomes a largely factitious person.” As the president became more involved with selling and less involved with learning, trustees wondered why it was necessary to select a president from among scholars and turned to “lawyers, bankers, statesmen, merchants and soldiers.” Like Deutsch, the editors were concerned that this new trend in the presidency traveled under the banner of “efficiency and

⁵⁶ Quoted in Walter Crosby Eells and Ernest V. Hollis, *The College Presidency 1900–1960: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, DC, 1961), 36.

⁵⁷ Monroe E. Deutsch, “Choosing College Presidents,” *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 33 (1947): 522, 523.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 523–24.

the practical way.” They concluded that it left higher education “guilelessly drifting, at the mercy of every external current, and with only an occasional hand at the helm.”⁵⁹

The American Scholar chimed in on this topic again shortly before Harnwell’s election with a piece by William Carlson, whose career shows that the serial university president was not unknown at that time. Previously the president of the University of Delaware, Carlson wrote as president of the University and State Agricultural College of Vermont, but he would soon leave for the helm of the State University of New York, and he finished his presidential career at the University of Toledo. Like Deutsch and the editors of *The American Scholar*, Carlson deplored the recent trend of nonacademic presidents, including “a five-star general at Columbia, a White House hopeful at Penn, an Army secretary at North Carolina, governors at Virginia and Bucknell.” He lamented that “by short-circuiting educational leadership in favor of the magic managerial touch, colleges are coming close to forgetting their real business, the training of young minds.”⁶⁰ Instead of blaming trustees, however, he chided faculty members for their “ineptitude” in pursuing presidencies, “which throws the burden on their boards of trustees to go out and find someone, even though off the campus, who seems to know what the score is.”⁶¹

Perhaps it was in light of such concerns that McCracken’s committee consulted with the faculty, through both the official University Senate committee and back channels, during the early stage of the search. At its fourth meeting, on December 30, the search committee met with the University Senate committee, which presented five internal and twenty-three external names and spoke of its desire eventually to reduce that number to a combined short list of six to ten. Harnwell was not included. In fact, the Senate committee expressed that some faculty preferred a candidate from the humanities or social sciences.⁶² At least one search committee member, Pepper, concurred. He wrote to Conyers Read, a former president of the American Historical Association who had just retired from the Penn faculty, that he agreed with Read’s suggestion of someone from the humanities or social sciences but that such a person should be able to

⁵⁹ Editorial, “In Memoriam—the College President,” *American Scholar* 18 (1949): 265–70.

⁶⁰ William S. Carlson, “The Roughest Profession: The College Presidency,” *American Scholar* 21 (1951–52): 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶² Meeting of the Trustee Committee on New President, Dec. 30, 1952, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA.

translate “visions and ideals” for the common man.⁶³

In addition to the concerns of the faculty (particularly about the academic caliber of the president), another key factor in elite private university searches of this era was that institutions were loath to lose up-and-comers whom they viewed as top administrative talent. Penn’s earlier retention of Harnwell when others pursued him for deanships was one instance of this trend. Another occurred in 1951, as the University of Chicago sought a replacement for the larger-than-life Robert Maynard Hutchins after his twenty-two-year tenure at the helm. Hutchins bequeathed an over-extended university featuring both a budget deficit and an undergraduate enrollment in long-term decline (more serious than the short-term decline from GI Bill–fueled peaks that other institutions experienced at the time). Chicago searched for four months, “vetting . . . hundreds of names.” The short list included Bronk, two liberal arts college presidents—Charles Cole of Amherst and Gilbert White of Haverford—and two U of C administrators, Lowell Cogeshall (dean of the division of biological sciences) and Lawrence Kimpton (vice president for development). Cogeshall and Kimpton were the two finalists. The trustees chose Kimpton in part because “he had turned down one or more offers of other presidencies while awaiting Chicago’s decision.” Kimpton held a PhD in philosophy from Cornell, where he had written a dissertation on Kant. After serving as a dean at Deep Springs College and the University of Kansas City, his key break came when the University of Chicago appointed him as chief administrative officer of the wartime Metallurgical Laboratory. From there, he became dean of students at Chicago, then at Stanford, before returning to Chicago for the newly created position of vice president for development.⁶⁴

A similar situation prevailed in a search that was closer to Penn’s—chronologically, geographically, and in terms of the overall dynamic—when Columbia sought a successor to the much-derided Eisenhower. The results of the 1952 presidential election meant that both Penn and Columbia needed to replace a politician who had only arrived in 1948 and then spent much of his time away from campus.⁶⁵ The Columbia trustees selected Grayson Kirk, who had been Eisenhower’s provost and then

⁶³ George Wharton Pepper to Conyers Read, Jan. 21, 1953, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA.

⁶⁴ John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago, 2015), 322–27 (quotes on 324).

⁶⁵ Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754–2004* (New York, 2003).

acting president while Eisenhower was away conducting political activity. Kirk was a leading international relations scholar, a major player in the Council on Foreign Relations, and, through work with the Department of State, involved in creating the United Nations.⁶⁶ Columbia political scientist Frederick Mills sent the long list from Columbia's search in response to Willits's request for this information. The list contained forty-two names, including notable heads of other major universities (Raymond Allen of UCLA, Bronk, Lee A. DuBridge of Caltech, Gordon Gray of UNC, Henry Heald of NYU, J. E. Wallace Sterling of Stanford, George Stoddard of Illinois, Herman Wells of Indiana), foundation executives (Clarence Faust, Paul Hoffman), liberal arts college presidents (Cole, Arthur Flemming of Ohio Wesleyan, Otto Kraushaar of Goucher, Gilbert White, Lynn White of Mills), and public figures David Lilienthal, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and Frank Stanton. Columbia's list also included George Beadle and Charles Odegaard, who became major university presidents a few years later. Mills commented, "some of these are good prospects; some of them, in our judgment, were quite unsuited to the Columbia job."⁶⁷

Despite the long list, Columbia settled on Kirk just a month after the US presidential election, in contrast to Penn's six-month odyssey. Part of the reason was that Kirk was the obvious candidate and, indeed, already acting president. At Penn, by contrast, acting president William DuBarry, normally the executive vice president and "one of [McCracken's] most intimate friends," was not a serious candidate for the permanent position and, in fact, assisted the Trustees with the search.⁶⁸ According to Robert McCaughey's history of Columbia, "What passed for a presidential search . . . consisted of a couple of phone calls, one to Harvard president James B. Conant, who advised the Columbia trustees to stay with Kirk. An informal faculty committee that included I. I. Rabi agreed." (Rabi was another eminent physicist who starred in wartime research.) Perhaps the overriding factor in Columbia's quick hiring of Kirk was fear that he would go to another institution, especially since Rutgers had offered him its presidency the year before.⁶⁹ Indeed, right around the time Columbia's trustees elected Kirk, Willits told McCracken that Penn should try to get him if Columbia made a different choice. Willits also said Columbia was considering Lee

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 341–48.

⁶⁷ Frederick C. Mills to Joseph H. Willits, Dec. 19, 1952, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁶⁸ McCracken quoted in Jeannette P. Nichols and staff, "McCracken-DuBarry Friendship," Apr. 29, 1953, box 13, folder: McCracken #1, Nichols Project Records, UPA.

⁶⁹ McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia*, 344.

DuBridge, but it was doubtful that DuBridge would accept.⁷⁰ Still, this consideration suggests the high regard in which many people connected with elite universities held DuBridge.

As the Columbia search concluded, the Penn search committee fixed its attention on DuBridge and another rising star president from California, Wallace Sterling of Stanford. Both men appeared on what seemed to be a Trustees' short list of six and on the "preferred" list of ten that the Senate committee had submitted. This overlap might be what prompted the search committee to move forward on these two men, which suggests that the Trustees took the faculty input seriously. Nine of the ten candidates "preferred" by the faculty held a dean-, provost-, or president-level position.⁷¹

The physicist DuBridge had a similar background to Harnwell but a higher profile, in part because he presided over the largest and most influential wartime laboratory—MIT's Radiation Laboratory, popularly known as the "Rad Lab."⁷² McCracken and his colleagues also surely took note that DuBridge, at the time they pursued him, held key US government positions. He served as chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Office of Defense Mobilization and also, like Bronk, was a charter member of the National Science Board.⁷³ DuBridge had been a nearly unanimous choice in 1946 at Caltech, which consulted several luminaries, including Vannevar Bush and Karl Compton, and found DuBridge at the top of each man's list.⁷⁴ Soon after taking office, DuBridge raised faculty salaries and rebuilt the physics department.⁷⁵ Caltech historian Judith Goodstein has written that "DuBridge had few peers . . . in his ability to explain science to the public, presidents, and members of Congress and to defend the principle of academic freedom during the McCarthy period."⁷⁶

Sterling, a historian and Stanford PhD, had previously been a pro-

⁷⁰ Joseph H. Willits to Robert McCracken, Dec. 15, 1952, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁷¹ Meeting of the Trustee Committee on New President, Dec. 22, 1952, and Advisory Committee of the University Senate on the Selection of a President, list of names, Jan. 31, 1953, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA.

⁷² Stuart W. Leslie, *The Cold War and American Science: The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex at MIT and Stanford* (New York, 1993), 21; Arnold O. Beckman, "Introduction of Dr. DuBridge . . .," in Lee A. DuBridge, *Frontiers of Knowledge: Seventy-Five Years at the California Institute of Technology* (New York, 1967), 6.

⁷³ Gregg Herken, *Cardinal Choices: Presidential Science Advising from the Atomic Bomb to SDI*, rev. and exp. ed. (Stanford, CA, 2000), 86; Judith R. Goodstein, *Millikan's School: A History of the California Institute of Technology* (New York, 1991), 276.

⁷⁴ Goodstein, *Millikan's School*, 265–66.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 271–75.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

fessor and chairman of the faculty at Caltech, and then director of the Huntington Library. Stanford's faculty advisory committee for the presidential search praised his character, personality, and speaking ability, but questioned his scholarship and administrative experience. According to Rebecca Lowen's history of Cold War Stanford, the Stanford trustees appointed Sterling in 1949 because he was noncontroversial, a good fundraiser, and not a New Dealer (a key factor for search committee member Herbert Hoover).⁷⁷ When Penn came calling, Sterling was deeply involved in evaluating potential new uses for Stanford's vast land holdings, a process that later, in the assessment of historian Margaret O'Mara, made Stanford a pioneering "great engine of science-based economic development."⁷⁸

Penn officials were unsuccessful in persuading the Californians. After a two-hour meeting with DuBridge in New York City, McCracken wrote Willits that the Caltech president "took with him some University of Pennsylvania literature, and told us that we would hear from him shortly from California, to which he returned at once. I doubt very much if we get him. The size of the job rather frightened him."⁷⁹ Two days later, DuBridge called to decline the offer, and the day after that, McCracken contacted Sterling to schedule a similar meeting in New York on February 15, when Sterling would be there for an Association of University Presidents gathering.⁸⁰ This meeting had the same result, as McCracken and DuBarry "were unable to persuade him to consider our invitation."⁸¹

After the failed pursuit of the Californians, the Penn search moved into another iteration, lasting from late February to mid-April, which culminated in the pursuit of F. Cyril James, principal and vice chancellor of McGill University in Montreal since 1939. McGill was one of only two Canadian universities to hold membership in the Association of American Universities, the small, prestigious group of the top research universities in North America, of which the University of Pennsylvania

⁷⁷ Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University*, 119; C. Stewart Gillmor, *Fred Terman at Stanford: Building a Discipline, a University, and Silicon Valley* (Stanford, CA, 2004), 292–99.

⁷⁸ Margaret Pugh O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 112.

⁷⁹ Jeannette P. Nichols and staff, "1952 Pattern of Presidential Selection," n.d., box 13, folder: McCracken #1, Nichols Project Records, UPA; Robert McCracken to Joseph H. Willits, Feb. 2, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁸⁰ Robert McCracken to J. E. Wallace Sterling, Feb. 4, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC; Nichols and staff, "1952 Pattern of Presidential Selection," Nichols Project Records, UPA.

⁸¹ Robert McCracken to Joseph H. Willits, Feb. 15, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

had been a charter member since 1900.⁸² On February 24, the search committee met and “passed a Resolution that, all things being equal, the Committee should choose a man who is now or had been a member of the University family.”⁸³ It is unclear what prompted this move. In addition, the committee sent the names of James and four others to Willits for judgments.⁸⁴ One was John Gardner, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, who was also in the mix for the Harvard presidency at this time, at least in his own mind.⁸⁵ Another was Clarence Faust, a former English professor and dean at Chicago and Stanford. At the time, he was president of the Fund for the Advancement of Education, a spinoff of the Ford Foundation.⁸⁶ Willits implied that Penn should focus on Faust and James.⁸⁷

The Trustees set upon James for multiple reasons, including that he was an alumnus and former faculty member. The Englishman had arrived in Philadelphia in 1923 as an international student in the Wharton School. He intended to earn a bachelor’s degree in economics and then return to England to become a banker. Instead, he collected MA and PhD degrees and immediately joined the Wharton faculty as an assistant professor of finance, rising to associate professor in 1934 and full professor in 1935.⁸⁸ It is unclear whether Willits taught James at Wharton, but the two were colleagues once James joined the faculty, and Willits was dean from 1933 to 1939, so he had considerable knowledge on which to base his recommendation. Willits and James were still in contact at the time of Penn’s search. Willits’s diary reports a conversation with James on January 30 covering a variety of matters related to McGill and the Rockefeller Foundation, but not the Penn search.⁸⁹ Another reason for pursuing James is that the Trustees had thought of him at least briefly in the short “search” of 1948 that netted Stassen.⁹⁰ McCracken wrote

⁸² Stanley Brice Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower: F. Cyril James of McGill* (Montreal, 1991), 59; Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), 348–49.

⁸³ Meeting of the Trustees Committee on New President, Feb. 24, 1953, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA.

⁸⁴ Joseph H. Willits to Robert McCracken, Mar. 6, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁸⁵ Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America’s University* (New York, 2001), 173.

⁸⁶ “Dean Faust to Leave Stanford,” *The Stanford Daily*, Feb. 6, 1951.

⁸⁷ Robert McCracken to Joseph H. Willits, Mar. 9, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁸⁸ Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower*, 15–27.

⁸⁹ Joseph H. Willits, diary, Jan. 2 to June 30, 1953, p. 31, PDF copy, JHW Papers, RAC.

to outgoing president George McClelland at that time: “I am glad that Cyril James has not yet come into publicity and I know that you are, as we may want to consider him some time.”⁹¹ Finally, like DuBridges and Sterling, James was on the faculty “preferred” list, so this move again showed that the Trustees took faculty input seriously.⁹²

Trustee Alfred H. Williams came to the forefront at this point in the search. Williams had been a faculty colleague of James at Wharton, then briefly his dean after replacing Willits. Williams later left the deanship to become president of the Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank, the position he held at the time of the search. Many Penn stakeholders, including members of the search committee, wanted Williams to be Penn’s next president, but he declined to be considered because of age, health, and stipulations related to his Federal Reserve pension.⁹³ In 1956, he would succeed McCracken as chairman of the Trustees. On March 18, Williams called James and, according to James’s diary, conveyed “a unanimous invitation from the trustees to succeed Stassen as President of the University of Pennsylvania.”⁹⁴ McCracken put it a little less definitively in a letter to Willits that same day: “Al Williams and I are going up to Montreal . . . to interview Cyril James on Saturday, the twenty-eighth. Al Williams made the arrangements by telephone, and Dr. James, while in no sense committing himself, seemed to want to see us.”⁹⁵ The Trustees apparently really did offer the job, at least verbally, before seeing James in person, as Willits later confirmed.⁹⁶ While that procedure seems remarkable, if not questionable, for such a position, it is also consistent with the haphazard character of the overall search.

James was conflicted. He wrote in his diary, “my mind keeps changing sides.”⁹⁷ Penn, he said, “has a great tradition, but has suffered of late from lack of good administration so that it does not now hold its proper place in the US. But it could—and there is the deepest of all compliments in being asked to

⁹⁰ I have not researched the selection of Stassen in 1948, but Willits told Jeannette Nichols that, according to “gossip,” McCracken and two other trustees chose Stassen without much of a search. Joseph H. Willits, interview with Jeannette P. Nichols, Feb. 11, 1971, box 4, folder: Willits, Nichols Project Records, UPA.

⁹¹ Robert T. McCracken to George W. McClelland, July 13, 1948, quoted in Jeannette P. Nichols and staff, “Cyril James Considered,” n.d., box 13, folder: McCracken #1, Nichols Project Records, UPA.

⁹² Advisory Committee of the University Senate on the Selection of a President, list of names, Jan. 31, 1953, Nichols Project Records, UPA.

⁹³ George Wharton Pepper to Henry Woolman, Dec. 9, 1952, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA.

⁹⁴ F. Cyril James, diary, quoted in Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower*, 191–92.

⁹⁵ Robert McCracken to Joseph H. Willits, Mar. 18, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁹⁶ Joseph H. Willits, “Interviews,” Apr. 10 and 11, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

⁹⁷ James, diary, quoted in Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower*, 192.

go back to a place that learned in seventeen years all of my weaknesses as well as any good points.”⁹⁸ But he was greatly enjoying the participation in British Commonwealth affairs that the McGill post afforded him, including seats for him and his wife at the upcoming coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. There was also a \$50,000 pension waiting for him if he retired at McGill.⁹⁹

The Trustees’ interactions with James in Montreal and Philadelphia confirmed their convictions about him. After the visit to Montreal, McCracken reported that they “had a first class day . . . and I think there is some real hope of his accepting . . . Al and I were tremendously impressed with James. He has grown greatly in my judgment, and in Al’s. I am sure that he is just the man we want if we can get him.” James had an apparently previously scheduled trip to Philadelphia to speak before the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences on Friday, April 10, and it turned into an unofficial—maybe even stealth—campus visit as part of the search. McCracken organized a dinner and implored Willits to come down from New York: “I know it would be of tremendous help to us if you could be here that evening. I think a good deal depends on his approach to the organization set-up at the University, and I know that you could talk about this more intelligently than anybody else.”¹⁰⁰ In addition to James, McCracken, Williams, and Willits, those present included George Wharton Pepper, Horace Stern, Henry Bryans, and Robert Dunlop from the search committee. Willits recorded, “James made a very favorable impression. He raised searching questions regarding the administrative organization of the University, the relative spheres of trustees and faculty, and the flexibility he would have in his top administrative organization.” The next day, Willits had lunch with James and recorded that he thought James’s decision would depend on the situation at McGill.¹⁰¹

Willits was right, but there was an additional twist. Someone leaked the Trustees’ offer to the press. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and other outlets, “taking it for granted that [James] would accept, printed the news with long articles about him” on Monday, April 13, along with a denial from McCracken. Montreal newspapers passed the news to their readers.¹⁰² James hastily asked for a meeting with the McGill Board of Governors.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 193.

⁹⁹ Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower*, 191–93.

¹⁰⁰ Robert McCracken to Joseph H. Willits, Mar. 30, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

¹⁰¹ Willits, “Interviews,” Apr. 10 and 11, 1953, JHW Papers, RAC.

¹⁰² Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower*, 196; “Former Instructor in Reading May Become Penn President,” *Reading (PA) Eagle*, Apr. 13, 1953.

He told his board that he wanted to stay at McGill but asked for a vote of confidence, since there were rumors that some wanted a change. They gave him a ringing endorsement, noting that he had doubled the endowment.¹⁰³ Thus ended Penn's pursuit of F. Cyril James—though he returned to Penn in 1957 to give the commencement speech and receive an honorary degree.¹⁰⁴

McCracken's committee went back to the drawing board yet again, and it was this iteration that produced the Harnwell presidency. Harnwell's name had been in play to some extent since the beginning. At the first search committee meeting on December 8, Harnwell was one of nineteen names that McCracken advanced for consideration. Harnwell appeared on the list within a cluster of six current or former Penn administrators, so McCracken was probably putting forward anyone feasible within that category, although Harnwell (as a department chair) held the lowest position of the six.¹⁰⁵ Three days later, two physicists hired during Harnwell's term as chair, W. E. Stephens and C. W. Ufford, submitted his name as a possible candidate through the University Senate process.¹⁰⁶ (Stephens coauthored *Atomic Physics* with Harnwell in 1955, and Harnwell named Stephens dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 1968.¹⁰⁷) But as the search went on, Harnwell only made the faculty's long list, never the short list of either the faculty or the Trustees until Willits put him on top. At some unknown point, Harnwell indicated he was not interested; McCracken had conveyed as much to Willits. But Willits, as he proposed Harnwell as the top candidate on April 27, told McCracken: "I wonder if a man can maintain that position. You can't quite say to him, 'Take it or leave town.' On the other hand, if he is a suitable man, I think you are entitled to bring the heaviest possible pressure to bear."¹⁰⁸ One oddity about Willits proposing Harnwell as the top candidate is that the two had never met, although Willits said he had heard only good things.¹⁰⁹ They overlapped

¹⁰³ Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower*, 196–99.

¹⁰⁴ University of Pennsylvania, *Two Hundred and First Commencement for the Conferring of Degrees*, June 12, 1957, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upg/upg7/1957prog.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Meeting of the Trustee Committee on New President, Dec. 8, 1952, box 30, folder 1, Pepper Papers, UPA.

¹⁰⁶ W. E. Stephens and C. W. Ufford to Alexander Hamilton Frey, Dec. 11, 1952, box 1, folder 3, GPH Papers, UPA; Harnwell to Hartig, May 15, 1947, GPH Papers, UPA.

¹⁰⁷ Jeannette P. Nichols, interview with Dr. William E. Stephens, Dean of the College, Jan. 18, 1971, box 4, folder: Stephens, Nichols Project Records, UPA.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph H. Willits to Robert McCracken, Apr. 27, 1953 (first letter), box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

for just one year on the Penn faculty. Harnwell's professed lack of interest is also a mystery. It is worth noting a protocol that existed at the time. According to William Carlson, there was "a tradition in academic circles that when a college presidency is at stake, the job should seek the man, and not vice versa."¹¹⁰ The presumption was "that a college's trustees will hunt out a suitable man through discreet inquiry, a staid suggestion here and there, and finally an invitation to be considered."¹¹¹

This stage of the search provides greater insight into some of the personal characteristics that Willits and the Trustees were prioritizing, now that they had broadened their search beyond experienced heads of institutions. Only two of the eight candidates in Willits's April 27 memo fit that description. Willits began the memo by emphasizing "the importance of Pennsylvania's finding a younger man with a stretch of years ahead of him." He concluded along the same lines: "I am sure there is first-class talent available at a younger age. I will do everything I can to help discover it and check on it if I can aid the committee to achieve the most desirable end."¹¹² Yet Harnwell was the same age as DuBridge and older than Sterling and James.¹¹³ Later in the day Willits sent another letter to McCracken covering still more candidates, including two other Penn faculty members: Dean Jefferson Fordham of the School of Law, who received positive reviews, and Francis C. Wood, chairman of the Department of Medicine, whom Willits's contacts described as personally pleasant but possibly limited in the breadth of his horizons. The issue of intellectual breadth also arose with Frederick Hovde, president of Purdue University, whom Willits described as a good administrator but intellectually limited. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the judgments of candidates is how few mentioned fundraising ability. The comments most frequently addressed disposition and reasonableness, while others discussed speaking ability, scholarly quality and depth of ideas, and the candidates' wives.¹¹⁴

The topic of a prospective president's wife was conspicuous in the era's literature on the academic presidency, so much so that Penn's search might actually have underemphasized this element relative to the time

¹⁰⁹ Joseph H. Willits to Robert McCracken, May 14, 1953, box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

¹¹⁰ Carlson, "The Roughest Profession," 70.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹² Willits to McCracken, Apr. 27, 1953 (first letter), JHW Papers, RAC.

¹¹³ Advisory Committee of the University Senate on the Selection of a President, list of names, Jan. 31, 1953, Nichols Project Records, UPA.

¹¹⁴ Joseph H. Willits to Robert McCracken, Apr. 27, 1953 (second letter), box 7, folder 70, JHW Papers, RAC.

period, especially given that the Trustees essentially offered the job to DuBridg and Sterling without meeting their spouses. Carlson reported that in reviewing nearly one hundred dossiers of presidential candidates at an institution he called "Seaboard State," "repeated references to a wife's looks, intelligence, personality and manners bobbed up in perhaps two-thirds of the candidates' files." Yet "the candidates' emphasis on their wives' talents was not misdirected, for there was an undeniable fascination on the part of some of the trustees with this little tidbit."¹¹⁵ This focus had not abated ten years later, when professional literature on presidential searches began to appear. Harold Dodds, who after retiring from Princeton directed a study on the academic presidency, opined, "obviously the stability and strength of the marriage is a potent factor" in a president's success.¹¹⁶ F. W. Bolman, after researching 116 searches, found that "the candidate must have a 'good' wife, and many selection committees go to great lengths to assure themselves on this point."¹¹⁷ Further, "No matter how well qualified a candidate is, in other respects, if he has an 'unacceptable' wife he is seriously handicapped."¹¹⁸ The rationale was that the president's wife was essential for the university's public relations through her activities in the social scene.¹¹⁹

After Willits suggested Harnwell as the top candidate on April 27, the search moved quickly to pursue him. The committee apparently met April 30 and decided on Harnwell. The next day, McCracken invited him to a May 4 meeting at McCracken's law office about "quite an important matter," along with Provost Edwin Williams and trustee and committee member Henry Bryans.¹²⁰ In a university presidential search, a candidate often has a "champion," one member of the governing board who particularly promotes his candidacy. For instance, Robert Homans of the Harvard Corporation led a successful drive to elect the dark-horse candidate Conant as president in 1933.¹²¹ Bryans apparently played a similar (though perhaps more muted) role for Harnwell. After his retirement, Harnwell wrote that Bryans was "largely instrumental in persuading his fellow Trustees to appoint me to the presidency of the University in 1953;

¹¹⁵ Carlson, "The Roughest Profession," 78.

¹¹⁶ Harold W. Dodds, *The Academic President: Educator or Caretaker* (New York, 1962), 266.

¹¹⁷ Bolman, *How College Presidents Are Chosen*, 28.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁰ Nichols and staff, "1952 Patterns of Presidential Selection," Nichols Project Records, UPA.

¹²¹ James B. Conant, *My Several Lives: Memoirs of a Social Inventor* (New York, 1969), 81–89.

and again he was of enormous help in advising on strategy, tactics, and in particular, financial matters during my incumbency.”¹²² It is less clear why Williams was present. Perhaps the Trustees wanted to make sure he would have a good working relationship with Harnwell, given that the direction of authority between the two would reverse if Harnwell became president. Perhaps Harnwell had indicated to McCracken or Bryans that he needed to ensure that Williams would play the “inside man” role while he focused on external affairs; in a post-retirement interview, he depicted himself as having adopted this approach at the outset of his presidency.¹²³ On May 11, McCracken wrote Willits, “you will be glad to know that we agreed unanimously on Gaylord Harnwell, and that he has said that he will accept if elected. I feel sure that he will be elected. We are going to nominate him on May twenty-fifth and elect him, I think, on June tenth, which is Commencement Day.” It is not clear how much pressure the Trustees brought on Harnwell or what caused him to change his mind.

What is clear is that Harnwell took charge right away. Even written records give the sense that his presence must have been commanding. He attacked a dizzying array of problems during his first year. He took on a \$1 million deficit in Penn’s \$27 million budget.¹²⁴ He began the administrative reorganization of the university, which included forcing the powerful Orville Bullitt from a board overseeing the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, which Bullitt had “ruled with an iron hand.”¹²⁵ He engineered the de-escalation of Penn football from big-time status and gained Penn’s acceptance into the Ivy League when its members formally established it as a football conference in 1954. He did so amid concerns that the other members would bar Penn because of their suspicion that it would not follow the academics-first protocol that was to characterize the new conference.¹²⁶ He “formulate[d]” a “general philosophy” for social science research at the university.¹²⁷ He pushed Penn into major overseas projects, a type of work that would especially characterize his presidency.¹²⁸

¹²² Gaylord P. Harnwell to Henry T. Bryans, Feb. 15, 1972, box 3, folder 18, GPH Papers, UPA.

¹²³ Harnwell, interview with Phillips, Oct. 22, 1977, GPH Papers, UPA.

¹²⁴ Gaylord P. Harnwell to Deficit Budget Administrators, Jan. 7, 1954, box 25, folder: Budget Information 1953–4, Wharton School Office of the Dean Records, UPB 5.4, UPA.

¹²⁵ Paul F. Miller Jr., *Better than Any Dream: A Personal Memoir* (n.p., 2006), 156.

¹²⁶ Dan Rottenberg, “Jeremiah Ford: Recalling Penn’s Unsung Savior,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Jan./Feb. 1999, <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0199/Ford.html>.

¹²⁷ Gaylord P. Harnwell to Joseph H. Willits, Oct. 19, 1953, box 18, folder 135, JHW Papers, RAC.

¹²⁸ Ethan Schrum, *Administering American Modernity: The Instrumental University in the Postwar United States* (Ithaca, NY, forthcoming), chap. 4.

He greatly accelerated the physical transformation of the campus that had begun under Stassen.¹²⁹ Finally, he launched the Educational Survey (1954–59), the largest self-study ever undertaken by an American university—and hired none other than Joseph Willits, upon his retirement from the Rockefeller Foundation, to direct it. It is easy to see why William W. Scranton, who as governor from 1963–67 worked with Harnwell, said that people at Penn treated Harnwell “like a god.”¹³⁰

Despite the Trustees’ choice of a faculty member as president and their adherence to the University Senate’s “preferred” list for the first three candidates, the Senate ultimately ended up dispirited with the conclusion of the search. At the end of February, fresh off the Trustees’ pursuit of DuBridge and Sterling from the faculty “preferred” list, Frey reported to the Senate that “the work of the committee represented in his opinion considerable progress for the Senate as an institution.”¹³¹ By mid-May, he struck a different tone. He wrote to McCracken that “near the end of the process of selecting the next President, we find ourselves excluded from the proceedings in a way which we were not led to expect.” Frey emphasized that “since we do not know who has been selected it is obvious that we are not objecting to a person, but rather to what seems to us to be a breakdown of a soundly conceived procedure for which we entertained great hopes.” This exclusion, he said, would make it difficult to achieve their goals of securing faculty support for the new president and improving faculty relations with the Trustees. McCracken replied, somewhat oddly, that once the search committee had decided on Harnwell it stopped consulting with the faculty because “he was as well or better known to the members of the Trustees’ Committee than to some of you.”¹³²

Regardless of its bitterness over the conclusion of the search, the faculty’s assertiveness in creating the University Senate and its insistence that the Trustees select an educator as president had important long-term effects. The Trustees’ election of Harnwell marked the first time that a widely recognized scholar had become president of the University of Pennsylvania, a position that had only existed since 1930.¹³³ This move established a template that the Trustees have continued to follow to this day, as each of

¹²⁹ Puckett and Lloyd, *Becoming Penn*, part 1 (chaps. 1–4).

¹³⁰ William Warren Scranton, interview with the author, July 15, 2008.

¹³¹ University Senate, minutes, Feb. 25, 1953, box 1, folder 25, University Senate Records, UPA.

¹³² Nichols and staff, “1952 Patterns of Presidential Selection,” Nichols Project Records, UPA.

¹³³ Since its founding, the university’s chief executive had been called the provost, and the Trustees were often more involved in day-to-day operations than was typical at other universities.

Harnwell's four successors—the city planner Martin Meyerson, the historian Sheldon Hackney, the psychologist Judith Rodin, and the political theorist Amy Gutmann—has fit that description. McCracken's good decisions—to move past the Stassen debacle, to hire an educator, to listen to the faculty—combined with Harnwell's good work, propelled the University of Pennsylvania to a higher standing among American universities and thus made a lasting impact on education in the Commonwealth.

With respect to the postwar American university in general, the extensive documentary record of Harnwell's journey to the Penn presidency reveals an active market for top administrative talent. Even in such a market, though, the top talent was often reluctant to change locations for what appeared to be a step up, as exhibited both by Harnwell declining deanships and by established research university presidents resisting Penn's entreaties to its top job before it settled on Harnwell.

Beyond the insights it provides into the market for administrators, the selection of Harnwell raises something of a paradox about the postwar American university. On one hand, Penn's elevation of one wartime lab director to its presidency after first desiring another (DuBridge) suggests that the experience of wartime "big science" (especially physics) in the federal government labs operated by universities influenced ideas about who could best lead a major research university in the early years of the postwar federal research economy. The wartime experience helped make Lee DuBridge apparently the hottest property among presidential candidates and went far toward making Harnwell desirable to universities. This milieu influenced the University of Minnesota to think that Harnwell could be its Lee DuBridge or Karl Compton. For reasons that are not clear, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was a hub of universities hiring wartime lab directors as presidents. In addition to Lehigh securing Martin Whitaker and Penn choosing Harnwell, Pennsylvania State University in 1956 elected to its presidency Eric Walker, an electrical engineer who had served as associate director of the navy's Underwater Sound Laboratory at Harvard during the war, doing remarkably similar work to Harnwell, and then brought a peacetime version, the Ordnance Research Laboratory, to Penn State with Office of Naval Research funding.¹³⁴ This trend was also visible in other areas of the country, as evidenced by the ascent of Arthur Compton and Lawrence Kimpton to head universities.

¹³⁴ Elliott C. Kulakowski and Lynne U. Chronister, *Research Administration and Management* (Sudbury, MA, 2006), 18.

On the other hand, many of the most elite private institutions chose humanistic scholars as presidents during this era. Indeed, among institutions of this type that hired one president between 1949 and 1956—Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Penn, Princeton, Stanford, Yale—all but Penn chose a humanist (although philosopher Kimpton at Chicago had helped administer a wartime physics lab). In addition to Sterling at Stanford and Kirk (technically a social scientist, but with a humanistic bent) at Columbia, notable cases included the historian A. Whitney Griswold at Yale in 1950 and the classicist Robert Goheen at Princeton in 1956. Both situations involved a university elevating one of its brightest young faculty stars; Griswold was forty-four and Goheen just thirty-seven. The most prominent election of a humanities scholar to a presidency in this era occurred at Harvard, which shocked many observers by choosing Nathan Pusey, the president of Lawrence College in Wisconsin, to replace Conant in 1953. Pusey earned high marks at Lawrence for faculty recruitment and for standing against Senator Joseph McCarthy, a native of Appleton (where Lawrence is located), but the Lawrence board chair “reported that Pusey had done little fund-raising for the college, and noted his cool personality and lack of popularity with students despite his manifest skill as a teacher.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the governing board, the Harvard Corporation, loved his character and ideals. Perhaps most important, according to Morton and Phyllis Keller’s history of Harvard, is that Pusey—a humanist, religious, not interested in public life, and more of a teacher and administrator than a scholar—was so different from Conant.¹³⁶ This quality of Harvard’s search mirrored the one at Penn, where Harnwell contrasted starkly with his predecessor.

In addition to the trend of selecting a humanistic scholar as president, all seven of these institutions hired either an alumnus or a current member of the faculty or administration. None of these searches elected a candidate who was president of another university (although Penn tried). While hiring an insider as president has been common during many eras in the history of American higher education, it is striking that the uppermost echelon of universities practiced it so thoroughly in a period often reputed to be one of rapid change, perhaps even *the* great period of change in that history. Once in office, Harnwell himself often

¹³⁵ Keller and Keller, *Making Harvard Modern*, 173–74, quote on 173.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 174–78.

enunciated the magnitude of this change.¹³⁷ Why did so many of the top universities hire humanistic insiders as presidents during this period of rapid change headlined by the physical sciences? If archival resources of similar quality to those available for Harnwell exist for the other six searches, future research should probe this issue, which could have interesting ramifications for our understanding of elite research universities in the postwar years.

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¹³⁷The best known statement of a dramatic change in the postwar research university is Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, MA, 1963).