The Dedication of Distler House

Saturday, October 1, 1977

Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania
Dr. Theodore A. Distler

Dr. Theodore A. Distler, known to his friends and to alumni as "Prexy", came to the presidency of Franklin and Marshall in 1941 with an already distinguished career in the field of higher education. He added luster to that career during a presidency which firmly placed Franklin and Marshall on a course of recognized excellence as one of the nation's foremost private liberal arts colleges.

Dr. Distler graduated, cum laude, from New York University in 1922. He remained at the institution as a faculty member, Director of Student Welfare, and Director of Admissions until 1934. While working at N.Y.U., he earned a master's degree in 1932. The University conferred upon him an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree in 1947.

He left his native New York City in 1934 to become Dean of Lafayette College and a citizen of his adopted state, Pennsylvania. He remained at Lafayette until his appointment as President of this College.

The years of his presidency were marked by growth and enrichment. The size of the faculty doubled, enrollment was raised to record levels and the net worth of the College nearly tripled to $8.89 million. North Museum and additions to Fackenthal Laboratory were among major construction projects completed. He guided the College through the difficult World War II years, and in the post-war years paved the way for the future the College enjoys today through curriculum reforms, expansion of graduate programs, introduction of adult education programs, and the adoption of cooperative programs in such fields as engineering, journalism and forestry.

Dr. Distler retired as president in 1954, but has remained very active as an advisor to his successors, as a consultant in development and alumni affairs, and a faithful and vigorous supporter of the institution's well being.

Following his tenure at Franklin and Marshall, Dr. Distler and his family moved to Washington D.C. where he became Executive Director of the Association of American Colleges until 1965. Out of his affection for this county, he and his wife returned to Lancaster in 1965. They divide their time between their home here and one in Avalon, N.J.

Prexy has been an active participant in the affairs of Lancaster, serving on the boards of Lancaster Redevelopment Authority, the Lancaster Rotary Club, the Lancaster Bicentennial Committee, the Heritage Center, the Lancaster Symphony Orchestra, and many others. In 1969-70 he served as interim director of the Lancaster Cleft Palate Clinic. He also has served on the boards of five colleges and universities.

Program

Welcome
Remarks
Unveiling of Portrait of Dr. Theodore A. Distler
Response
Dedication

Keith Spalding
President of the College

Nathaniel E. Hager '21
Honorary Trustee of the College and Chairman, Distler Portrait Committee

Mary Alice Distler
Theodore Eliot Distler

Dr. Theodore A. Distler
President of the College, 1941-1954

Keith Spalding
President of the College

Theodore A. Distler
Distler House

The building being dedicated today as "Distler House" originally was built in 1891 at a cost of $7,000. It was the College's first gymnasium. One history of the College notes that, "The bowling alley (in the building) was supplied by the liberality of Mr. H.S. Williamson, who has taken great interest in athletics and from whom Williamson Field derives its name."

The building served as the College's gym until 1924 when Biesecker Gymnasium was constructed at the site of the present Mayser Center. The "old gym" was converted a year later into a student commons, largely through student initiative, and was given the name of "Campus House" by the students. The facility became a center for student organizations, meetings, and social events, such as proms and dances. A snack bar was added in later years, and in 1959 the College Bookstore moved into the Campus House. It formerly was housed in Diagnothian Hall.

By the time the College Center building was opened in June, 1976, the Campus House was serving as the location of the Bookstore on the upper level and an automated snack bar on the lower level. Both of these services, in expanded and more modern surroundings, were moved to the College Center.

In September, 1976, work began to convert the Campus House into new quarters for the offices of the Controller, the business staff, the Registrar, the Recorder, the Director of Financial Aid, security services, and the Classics Department. These renovations were completed in the Spring of 1977.

In October, 1976, the College's trustees voted to name the renovated facility "Distler House" in honor of Dr. Theodore A. Distler, president of Franklin and Marshall College from 1941 to 1954. The decision was made "enthusiastically in warm appreciation of Prexy Distler's long years of service and concern for the College."