



Everybody Comes to Exeter

From Robert Frost to Robert Oppenheimer, a century's worth of distinguished visitors.

It's a lineup that would do Carnegie Hall—or the halls of Congress—proud. Between 1905 and 2005, poets and presidents, scientists and civil rights leaders, musicians and military leaders have made the trip to Exeter, to speak or perform, to sit at the Harkness table or stand at the Commencement podium. Here, a highly abridged list of luminaries.

Government

Many presidential candidates have passed through Exeter over the years, but none who compare in stature to **Abraham Lincoln**. While his 1860 visit to Exeter came some 45 years before the *Bulletin* began publication (and seven months before his election as president), Lincoln has been the subject of several *Bulletin* articles, including a vivid first-person reminiscence by Marshall S. Snow, class of 1861, published at the time of the Lincoln centennial in the September 1909 issue.

"We boys in the Academy were greatly excited by [the prospect of Lincoln's address at Exeter Town Hall on March 3]," wrote Snow, who went on to become a history professor at Washington University in St. Louis. "We had, to be sure, heard much of Mr. Lincoln's famous debate with Judge Douglas, in the race for the senatorship in Illinois two years before; but our greatest eagerness, after all, was to see the father of Robert Lincoln, 'Bob' as we always called him. Bob Lincoln was a very popular young fellow, a gentleman in every sense of the word; quiet in manner, with a certain dignity of his own."

Snow and his friends were not a little baffled when Lincoln strode onto the town hall stage. "I saw a man whose face impressed me as one of the most interesting as well as one of the saddest and most melancholy faces that I had ever seen," Snow recalled. "His hair was ruffled, his neckwear was all awry, he sat somewhat bent in the chair." That disappointing first impression vanished as Lincoln "rose slowly, untangled those long legs from their contact with the rounds of



Basie



Kearns Goodwin



Khan



Frost at the Harkness table in 1956

the chair, drew himself up to his full height of six feet, four inches, and began his speech. Not 10 minutes passed before his uncouth appearance was absolutely forgotten by us boys, and, I believe, by all of that large audience."

That night, Snow was struck less by the speech's content ("after which I read with great care among his published addresses") than by the character of the man delivering it. "His face lighted up and the man was changed; it seemed absolutely like another person speaking to us," he wrote. "There was no more pity for our friend Bob; we were proud of his father, and when the exercises of the evening were over ... we were the first to mount the platform and grasp him by the hand. I have always felt this was one of the great privileges of my life."

Commencement Day 1966 was notable for at least two reasons. As the August 1966 *Bulletin* pointed out, "it was the first time in anyone's memory [that] the exercises were held out-of-doors." The other reason is clear from the magazine's cover, which shows Principal Richard Day and former **President Dwight D. Eisenhower**, "who came first to see his grandson [David Eisenhower '66] receive his diploma and secondly to accept the invitation of the school to address the graduating class." The President spoke on the importance of character, "presenting the seniors with clear and sometimes stern admonitions concerning what he called the 'stones of life's foundation.'"

"Democracy requires pluralism," the 1974 Exeter Commencement speaker told his audience, "an interchange of ideas and with it a constant challenge to accepted principles." As the attorney who argued a series of landmark desegregation cases before the Supreme Court, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, and then as an associate justice of that court from 1967 to 1991, **Thurgood Marshall** understood this better than most, as he did the possibility of achieving change within a democracy. "No matter what devil you seek to exorcise, be it hunger, or poverty, or injustice," he told the graduates (including son Thurgood Marshall Jr.), "the law provides a way to achieve your goal. In the battle for social justice, the lasting victories have been won not on the streets but in the halls of the legislature and the chambers of the court."

Other government and military leaders whose visits have appeared in the *Bulletin* include **General John Pershing P'27**, who came in 1924 accompanied by his aide, **Colonel George C. Marshall** (later secretary of state); **Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal P'45**, who made a wartime appearance on May 13, 1944, as part of a student conference on politics; **Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach '39**, morning chapel speaker of January 30, 1965, two days after he was nominated to serve as U.S. attorney general; **Secretary of State Dean Acheson GP'68**, speaker at the 1968 Commencement, just a few days after the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy; and **General Charles C. Krulak '60**, the commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, who received the 1997 John Phillips Award.

Literature

Poet **Robert Frost's** frequent visits—which began in 1916, not long after the publication of his first books of poetry (and of poems like "Mending Wall" and "The Road Not Taken") and continued every few years until

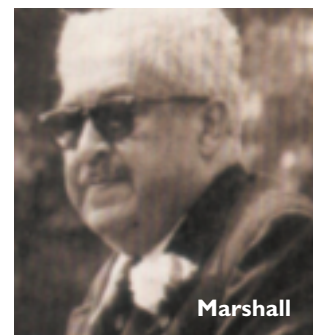
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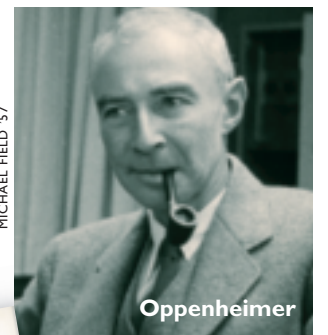
Teagarden



Mead



Marshall

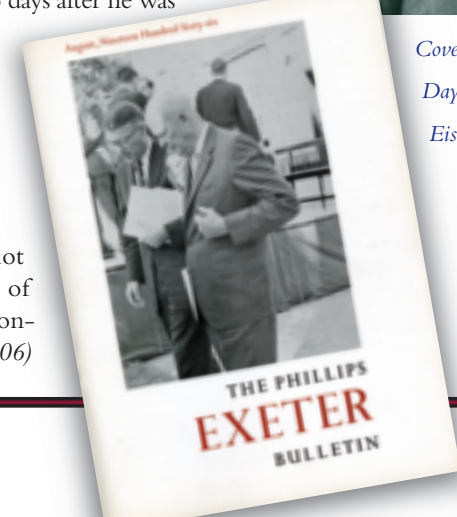


Oppenheimer

Cover story: Principal Dick Day with President Eisenhower



Cover story: Lincoln's 1860 visit



MICHAEL FIELD '57

Everybody Comes to Exeter

(continued from page 35)

1960—testify to his great fondness for the Academy, and for English instructors like Frank Cushwa, George Richardson and George Bennett '23. According to writer Olive Tardiff, whose survey of Frost's public readings and classroom visits (perhaps as many as 15 in all) ran in the February 1979 *Bulletin*, that fondness didn't prevent this one-time teacher from preaching an educational philosophy somewhat at odds with the Academy's. "He delighted student audiences by suggesting they ignore their instructors," Tardiff wrote. " 'Do what you feel is right,' he often said. 'Don't conform ... but expect to pay for your difference.' "

Another major 20th century poet who stopped by Exeter on a snowy evening (February 18, 1951, to be precise) was **W.H. Auden**, who delivered a talk on "Style and Hero in Modern Poetry," and then met with students at an open house arranged by the Lantern Club, Exeter's literary society. This tradition has only grown in recent years thanks to the Academy Library's Lamont Poetry Series, established by Corliss Lamont '25. Beginning in 1983 with **Jorge Luis Borges**, the Lamont Poetry

Series has brought some of the world's leading poets to Exeter to give a public reading and to meet with students in and out of class. Past Lamont poets include **Seamus Heaney** (1985), **Gwendolyn Brooks** (1987), **Joseph Brodsky** (1990), **Derek Walcott** (1991), **Donald Hall '47** (1991), **Maxine Kumin** (1991), **Allen Ginsberg** (1992), **Amy Clampitt** (1993), **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** (1996), **Robert Pinsky** (1999) and **Billy Collins** (2005).

Music

Under director of music Arthur Landers, Exeter became known as a "singing school." Between 1937 and 1942, it was also a "swinging school," thanks to a remarkable series of big bands that played at the Academy, beginning with **Count Basie**, who played the 1937 Fall Dance with a group that included tenor saxophonist **Lester Young**. Much of the credit goes to the ever-resourceful Hammy Bissell '29, a big band aficionado who in 1938 became chair of the School Dance Committee, an experience he recounted in the fall 1985 *Bulletin*. Together with a prominent Boston concert promoter, he brought many up-and-coming bands to Exeter, including **Glenn Miller** (the 1938 Fall Dance), **Harry James** (the 1939 Southern Club Dance) and **Jack Teagarden** (the 1940 June Ball). The sound of Teagarden's 16-piece band "playing for the Tea Dance, which was then held on the lawn beside Dr. Perry's house, was one of the great musical thrills of my time," Bissell wrote.

Bissell was also responsible for a now-legendary October 31, 1948 concert featuring blues great Huddie Ledbetter, a detailed account of which appeared in the winter 1993 *Bulletin*. **Leadbelly**, as he was

better known, mesmerized his student audience with songs like "Ain't Going Down to the Well No More" and "Rock Island Line." "The boys' cheering," history instructor Henry Bragdon later wrote, could be heard "close to half a mile away."

Leadbelly came to Exeter through the Loewenstein Fund (founded in memory of George Loewenstein '23 to promote the arts at the Academy), which also made possible visits by two seminal figures in classical music: French music teacher **Nadia Boulanger** and Russian-born composer and pianist **Igor Stravinsky**. "Of all the artists who have come to Academy in recent years," opined the July 1939 *Bulletin*, "Mlle. Boulanger seemed to make the most lasting impression on the boys. On February 19, this great teacher of music composition gave a talk on 'How to Listen to Music,' illustrated by herself at the piano and by the singing of three assistants who came with her."

Boulanger must also have been favorably impressed with Exeter, because she helped make arrangements for Stravinsky's visit on March 17, 1940. "The climax of the evening," according to the April 1940 *Bulletin*, "was a performance by Mr. Stravinsky and Miss [Adele] Marcus of the *Concerto for Two Pianos*, composed by Mr. Stravinsky. Exeter should feel honored that Mr. Stravinsky appeared here, as he has accepted no engagements in schools or colleges except Harvard University."

Later that same year, students enjoyed the sound of some very different music when the **Trapp Family Singers** performed a December concert, their second appearance at the Academy. "Again they captivated an audience which overflowed onto the stage and out into the corridors," raved the February

1941 *Bulletin*, "[with] a program that ranged from 16th century motets and madrigals, through chorales to Austrian, English and American folk songs."

History and Social Science

Interest in both history and current affairs has brought a steady stream of authors and academics to the Academy, including, in 1940, "**André Maurois**, the brilliant French author and critic, [who] spoke in the Academy Chapel, on Sunday, November 17, on 'Lessons of the War,'" the February 1941 *Bulletin* reported. Maurois' prophetic visit came just months after France surrendered to the Nazis, but a year before America entered the war.

Following the war's end, the Academy launched a lecture series on contemporary race relations with speakers that included two well-known cultural anthropologists. **Eslanda Robeson**, author of *African Journey* (and like her husband, Paul Robeson, a political activist), spoke on "The Negro in World Affairs," on January 13, 1946, while "Getting Over Racial Handicaps in Our Thinking" was the topic of **Margaret Mead**, who came to Exeter on January 26, 1947, according to the spring 1947 *Bulletin*.

The Academy welcomed one of its own when historian **Arthur Schlesinger '33** spent two days at Exeter in November 1954, a visit noted in the December *Bulletin*. Then a professor at Harvard, Schlesinger spoke on "The Presidency—Too Big for a President?," a question he would ponder anew when, seven years later, he became a special assistant to President John Kennedy. The April 1965 *Bulletin* carried news of another academic who would later

double as a presidential adviser (to Presidents Nixon and Reagan) and, in 1976, win the Nobel Prize: University of Chicago economist **Milton Friedman**, who delivered that year's Ingersoll lecture and met with students.

A pair of Pulitzer Prize-winning historians helped the Academy mark two recent milestones: **Doris Kearns Goodwin**, whose works include *No Ordinary Time*, a biography of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, was the featured speaker at a gala celebration marking the 25th anniversary of coeducation at Exeter in September 1995, while **David McCullough** (*Truman* and *John Adams*) gave an audience gathered to celebrate the October 30, 2004 launch of The Exeter Initiatives a preview of his latest book *1776*, and of John Adams' reflections on the central role that education plays in the formation of a democracy.

Science and Engineering

Two men whose lives and work are intertwined with World War II both spoke at the Academy. "**Igor I. Sikorsky**, noted designer and builder of airplanes, gave the first Sunday night lecture of the Winter Term, January 12, on the subject 'The Present and Future of Aviation,'" the April 1941 *Bulletin* reported. Just two years earlier, Sikorsky had designed the first successful American helicopter, and the Sikorsky S-47 became the first mass-produced military helicopter.

As director of the Manhattan Project, physicist **Robert Oppenheimer** headed up America's development of the atomic bomb, only to lose his security clearance during the McCarthy era amid allegations that he was a communist sympathizer. Those allegations were

later discredited, but perhaps that's why the *Bulletin* contains only a passing reference to Oppenheimer's November 1955 visit to the school. "The *Manchester Union* was apoplectic that he was at Exeter," recalls Michael Field '57 (who took the photo on page 35 during Oppenheimer's visit). "I don't know if Professor Oppenheimer discussed politics when he was at Exeter. He did give a couple of formal talks, but mostly he was available for informal discussions, where we asked him questions about science and science fiction."

Architecture

Following the war, Exeter welcomed two giants of 20th-century architecture. The first was the one-time director of the Bauhaus, the German design center that was to exert such an influence on modern architecture, who had immigrated to America prior to the war. "On April 30, **Dr. Walter Gropius**, distinguished architect and Harvard professor, gave a lecture entitled 'Modern Architecture and Planning,'" the July 1952 *Bulletin* reported.

The visits of the second architect were more frequent, and his presence continues to be felt to this day. **Louis Kahn**, who received the commission to design the Academy Library in November 1965, made his first visit to Exeter in January 1966 (and his first appearance in the *Bulletin* in the summer 1967 issue). Rodney Armstrong '68 (Hon.), the Academy's librarian emeritus, recounted how Kahn came to design the library in the spring 2004 issue. "His library fulfilled our dreams and hopes, and did indeed shift the center of our school world," Armstrong wrote. "Immodestly, I add that it is the greatest secondary school library, here or abroad." ●