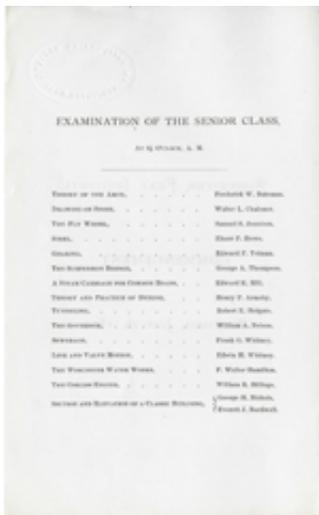


Celebrating 150 Years

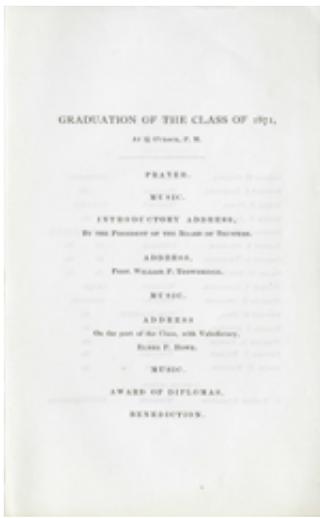


WPI Commencement through the Years

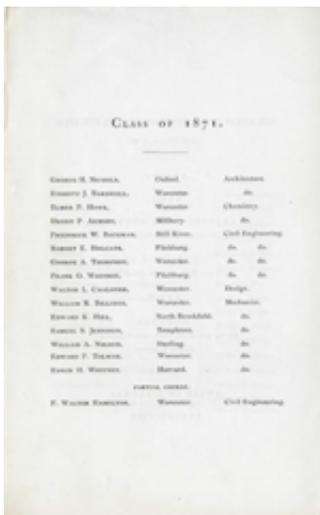
On July 26, 1871, sixteen students took part at the first Commencement ceremony of the Worcester County Free Institute of Industrial Science. Commencement exercises were held in the Chapel at Boynton Hall.



In the morning, each student read his thesis out loud to a public examination committee made up of experts from the four departments in which diplomas were conferred—Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Chemistry, and Architecture. The committee examined each thesis and wrote a report about it that was printed in local papers. As class sizes grew larger, this process was gradually reduced, and in 1893 the examination committee was abolished.



In the afternoon, an introductory address was given by Stephen Salisbury, President of the Board of Trustees. Professor William P. Trowbridge of Sheffield Scientific School gave the Commencement Address on the subject, "What are the principles and merits of the applications of science to active business?"



Graduates in the class of 1871, as well as those in the classes of 1872-4, were given diplomas instead of bachelor's degrees. By mandate of the Board of Trustees, graduates would receive their degrees after they had demonstrated proficiency through four years of professional work. This rule proved to be problematic for graduates seeking to continue their education and was changed in 1875, when all graduates were given degrees at Commencement—the first four classes also received their degrees retroactively.

The sixteen students in WPI's first class took diverse career paths. Perhaps the most famous alumnus was Henry Prentiss Armsby, the class valedictorian, who went on to attend Yale University and become a well-known professor and researcher of animal nutrition. Other accomplished alumni include George Herbert Nichols, a psychology professor at Harvard who received the first Doctor of Philosophy degree from Worcester's Clark University; Edwin Herbert Whitney, an inventor and designer who held 22 patents; and Walter Lewis Chaloner, a well-known water color artist. Other graduates became engineers, lawyers, and business executives.



At the Institute's second Commencement in 1872, students started what became known as Class Day exercises. This series of ceremonial events took place after graduation exercises and brought together the classes of '71 and '72. The valedictorian from '71 gave a speech while the class of '72 planted a tree on campus. These exercise continued in various forms throughout the years and was later signified with the graduating class making their gift to the university.

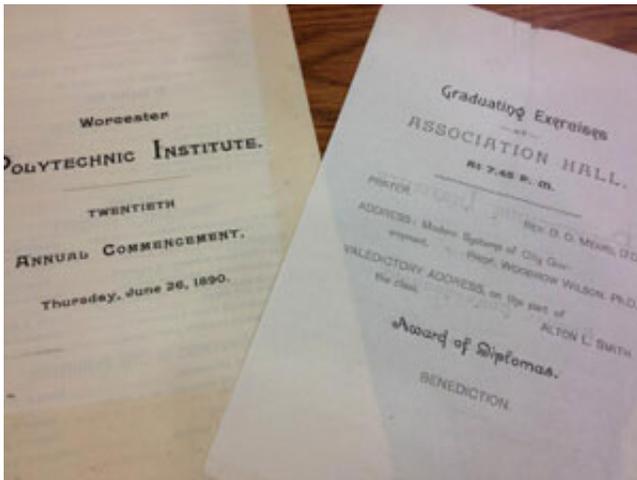
Graduates from the class of 1873 were the first to wear the Institute's official colors of steel-grey and crimson at Commencement. The grey was selected by students who won a rowing competition on Lake Quinsigamond and crimson was added later. Reportedly, students at the previous year's Commencement exercises had worn white with a blue badge bearing the emblem of the arm and hammer.



As the size of graduating classes increased, Commencement exercises were moved to larger and larger venues. From 1885 to 1889 they were held at Mechanics Hall, and in later years they were held at locations including the YMCA Hall on Elm Street, the Worcester Memorial Auditorium, Tuckerman Hall, Alden Memorial Hall, Harrington Auditorium, the Alumni Gymnasium, and the WPI Quad.



In 1887 the Institute changed its name from the Worcester County Free Institute of Industrial Science to Worcester Polytechnic Institute. From then on, graduates received diplomas bearing the Institute's new name.



In 1890, the Commencement address was given by Professor Woodrow Wilson of Princeton University. Wilson, who would later become the 28th President of the United States, gave his speech on the subject of "Modern Systems of City Government."

WPI's first advanced (graduate) degrees were conferred at the 1898 Commencement. At this time the degree of Master of Science was conferred on four graduates, and the degree of Mechanical Engineer was conferred on one. The degree of Doctor of Science was first awarded to one candidate in 1904.



In 1893, WPI held its first Baccalaureate ceremony as part of Commencement activities. The Baccalaureate is typically organized by students and offers a quieter, more intimate opportunity to pause and reflect on this rite of passage, hear faculty members offer advice to the graduating class, and enjoy students' musical talents. The first Baccalaureate sermon was delivered on the evening of Sunday, June 18, by Reverend Daniel Merriman in Worcester's Central Church.



In 1907, Commencement exercises were moved to the newly constructed home of the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department, Atwater Kent Laboratories, to commemorate the new building. Commencement festivities kicked off with a lecture on electric railroad engineering by Professor Albert S. Richey.



1907 also brought the first Tech Day festivities, a day-long series of athletic competitions, including contests in track and field and basketball, and an entertaining baseball game between graduating students and faculty members.



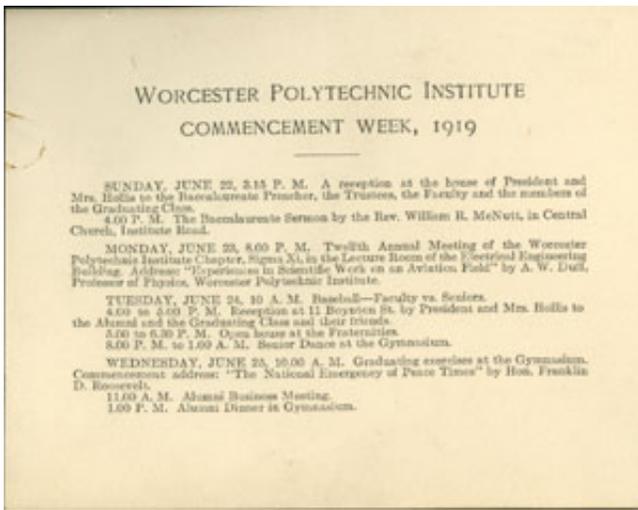
The class of 1914 was the first to wear academic robes to Commencement—faculty members refused to wear robes until the following year.



The Commencement of 1915 was a special occasion because it marked WPI's 50th anniversary. In celebration of its semicentennial the school undertook a week-long series of events leading up to Commencement. Nearly 700 alumni were present for activities including the dedication of the entrance gates to Alumni Field, a gift of the class of 1887, and the laying of the cornerstone of the school's new gym.



During the 50th anniversary celebration, the Commencement Address was given by Richard C. Maclaurin, the president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute was also a surprise speaker who delivered an eloquent address about the transformation of the freedman that had occurred in the fifty years since WPI's founding in 1865.



The 1919 Commencement was a bittersweet event. The graduating class was at its lowest number in nearly two decades—just 44 graduates—due to casualties from World War I. The war had ended in November 1918, and WPI president Ira Hollis wanted a Commencement speaker who was a wartime executive with a peacetime message. The school chose Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy and later the country's 32nd President. Roosevelt delivered his address on the subject, "National Emergency of Peace Times."



At the 1921 Commencement, WPI awarded its first ever honorary doctoral degree. The degree was given to Dr. Henry Prentiss Armsby '71, a member of WPI's first class who was on campus to celebrate his 50th reunion.



The Commencement of 1926 brought two notable events: the first spade of earth was dug to begin construction of WPI's first residence hall, Sanford Riley; and radio pioneer Atwater Kent, a member the class of 1900 who left WPI before finishing his undergraduate degree, was given an honorary doctoral degree.



The Commencement of 1940 marked WPI's 75th anniversary and saw the school's largest graduating class to date. The class of 1940 was also the first to walk over the Earle Bridge, which had recently been completed. Their Commencement exercises took place in the newly constructed Alden Memorial Hall.



During World War II, WPI participated in the Navy's V-12 program, training 767 naval officer candidates over the course of three years. Students during those war years attended classes year-round and graduated in three years. Because of this accelerated cycle, WPI held extra Commencements in 1944 and 1946.



Since WPI's first Commencement, when graduates planted a tree on campus, the senior class has presented a gift to the university. The Class of 1943 gave what would become one of the most memorable class gifts: the crimson beech tree that has now grown to over 100 feet tall and serves as a beloved campus landmark.



Commencement exercises were held outdoors for the first time in 1959. They wouldn't be held outside again until 30 years later in 1989.



At WPI's 100th year anniversary Commencement in 1965, 245 students graduated. The speaker was Massachusetts state attorney general Edward. T Brooke.

Leslie Small became the first woman to earn an undergraduate degree at WPI at the 1972 Commencement.

Small, who earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics, was one of just two women who were admitted to WPI in 1968—by the time she graduated, more than 60 female students had enrolled in subsequent classes.



Many graduates at the 1974 Commencement were among the first group of students to complete their degrees under the pioneering WPI Plan. Officially adopted in May 1970, the Plan replaced the traditional rigidly-prescribed undergraduate curriculum with flexible, well-rounded, and hands-on learning experiences. During the first few years of the Plan's implementation, students had the option of choosing the traditional curriculum or the Plan.



Many students at the 1999 Commencement achieved a new first for WPI—they graduated with both a major and a minor. In 1995, the WPI faculty had officially voted to allow students to pursue minors.



In 2002, at WPI's 134th Commencement, Dean Kamen '73 gave an inspiring address on his list of one hundred things a person needs to succeed. He stated, "First - find an important problem to work on. Your education at WPI gave you the tools, now you get to pick the problem. The second is don't ever give up. And the other 98 things just don't matter."

The 2007 Commencement marked the debut of new academic regalia for students, trustees, and the president. Bachelor's and master's degree candidates wore black robes and PhD candidates wore crimson, both of which featured embroidered WPI seals on the front. Undergraduates receiving honors wear crimson (distinction) or gray (high distinction) cords. The new presidential and trustee robes were crimson.



Nearly 1200 students received degrees at WPI's 146th Commencement on May 17, 2014. The Commencement address was given by Bernard Amadei, the founder of Engineers Without Borders. Incoming WPI President Laurin Leshin also spoke to graduates and urged them to stay connected with each other and the university after graduation.