

PITZER COLLEGE

The Participant

SPECIAL SPRING 2012 EDITION



A Tribute to
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ATHERTON

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Above: Pitzer College President John W. Atherton with Pitzer College founder Russell K. Pitzer and Virginia Atherton during the presidential inauguration and dedication of Scott and Sanborn halls, November 6, 1964.
 Preceding page: President Atherton in 1964. The caption on the back of the photo says, "Construction—President Atherton surveying his Kingdom with his back to Scott Hall."

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Pitzer College is a nationally top-ranked undergraduate college of the liberal arts and sciences. A member of The Claremont Colleges, Pitzer offers a distinctive approach to a liberal arts education by linking intellectual inquiry with interdisciplinary studies, cultural immersion, social responsibility and community involvement.



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Atherton, September 17, 1965.

A note from President Laura Skandera Trombley

This very special edition of *The Participant* is the product of love and loyalty on the part of three people all crucial in the history of Pitzer College: Lee Munroe and Ronald and Janet Macaulay. They provide a beautiful, holistic, factual and amusing look into the College's past and share the origins of the unique practices, unusual traditions and colorful history of the liberal arts institution we all know and love today.

The first time I read the blue line for this issue, I became emotional and extremely inspired. I do so wish that I had met President John Atherton, who passed away just six weeks before my arrival at Pitzer in 2002. I was, though, most fortunate to call Virginia Atherton, "Ginny," my friend. She was wise, possessed a dry humor and was unswervingly loyal to her friends. I miss her terribly. As we approach the College's 50th anniversary, it is time for us to recognize our innovative past and look forward to the future with the eager eyes, great hopes and kind of bravery that our faculty, staff and students had at Pitzer's very beginnings.

For your seven years of loyalty, leadership and commitment to Pitzer College, John and Virginia, thank you. We are forever in your debt.

Provida Futuri,

Laura Skandera Trombley
President



From the Editors

This issue of *The Participant* celebrates the role that John and Virginia Atherton played in the development of Pitzer College in the years 1963-70. Although there have been many changes since then, their contribution was crucial to the creation of the unique character of the College. The part both Athertons played in those early years is set out in tributes to them and in articles on various aspects of the College's development. We have included excerpts from memoranda and other communications written in those early years that give a glimpse of the excitement and involvement of students and faculty members in so many aspects of that development. There were many contentious issues but they were usually resolved without rancor and with an understanding of the importance of achieving consensus. We hope these pages will give some sense of the positive attitude that contributed to the emergence of college governance. It was a hectic, exhilarating time to be involved in the creation of a new Claremont college.



We are grateful to Carolyn Atherton, Woody Dike, Steve and Sandy Glass, Jim Jamieson, Micah Huang '13 and Carrie Marsh for their assistance with this issue.

Janet Macaulay, faculty wife
Ronald Macaulay, emeritus professor of linguistics
Lee Munroe, founding faculty member and research professor of anthropology

“

John Atherton's was an intelligence free of cant, free of both the garbage of specialized academic verbiage that disguises a lack of thought and the 'can't do' of administrators who fear the brave step guided by honest inquiry and see 'no' as power. We met frequently at the library when he was doing research on trains, a love that spurred some of his mature work. His sense of what is right, good, desirable and true inspired his actions, his research and his writing, which included fine poetry. It is no wonder that



John W. Atherton in 1964.

such a man would love and be loved by his splendid partner, Ginny (Virginia). They are to this day diamonds in the crown of Pitzer College, examples and sources of inspiration for those of genuine good will and intelligence, with a desire to advance knowledge and learning on as high a level as possible. We should strive to have deserved them.

—Albert Wachtel, professor of English and creative studies



Virginia Atherton (middle) at a discussion on November 6, 1964, the day of the presidential inauguration and dedication of Scott and Sanborn halls.

The Cornerstones: Questions, Committees and Commitment

On the day of his inauguration in the fall of 1964, John W. Atherton surveyed the rocky rough draft of the campus he would lead for the next six years. There were two buildings and about as many trees. Pitzer College was still covered in construction dust when Atherton asked the faculty, students and staff gathered for his inauguration to join him in “that constant search for truth and freedom begun ages ago when man first lifted his eyes from the earth and asked a question.” With those words, spoken shortly after he was sworn in as the College’s first president, Atherton made eternal inquiry part of the Pitzer College creed.

At that point, he had already overseen the rapid and sometimes raucous organization of the College. He had been appointed president in 1963 and was given 17 months to construct a campus, find professors and enroll students before the first day of classes in the fall of '64. He would later say of that period, “We had to have participation whether we liked it or not,” with trustees wanting to pick courses, faculty wanting to pick trustees and everyone wanting to play architect.

“And, of course, when the students arrived they wanted to start over completely, happily pointing out flaws in the curriculum, faculty, trustees, campus plans and the president,” he said.

The institution that emerged from what Atherton called “a marvelous atmosphere of anticipation, innocence, idealism and general pandemonium” was a women’s college specializing in the social and behavioral sciences. It consisted of 11 full-time faculty members and 153 students.

In the beginning, some thought it unusual that a school emphasizing the social sciences was going to be run by a poet. But Atherton was an English professor who couldn’t be pigeonholed. Born in 1916 in Minneapolis, he studied with Robert Frost at Amherst College and his poetry was published in *The New Yorker*. He served as a Navy torpedo

and gunnery officer in World War II and remained in the Navy reserves for much of his life. This military man was also a Victorian scholar with a PhD in literature from the University of Chicago who painted, collected art and had a soft spot for the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. Founding faculty member Lee Munroe once said he knew Atherton for decades and couldn’t remember the avid reader and vivid raconteur ever repeating a single story.

Atherton met Virginia Richards in Geneva, Illinois. She shared his dry wit, love of classical music and taste for travel. They married in 1941 and had three children, John Jr., Carolyn and Thomas. They moved to Claremont in 1949 when Atherton took a job as a professor of English at Claremont Men’s College (now Claremont McKenna), eventually becoming the college’s dean of faculty. Two months after Pitzer was incorporated in February 1963 he was appointed the first president of a new college that was still more of an idea than an institution.

When Atherton left Pitzer in 1970, there were about four times as many buildings, faculty members and students as on the day of his inauguration. The College had created a Black Studies Center and was on the verge of going coeducational. Through a multitude of meetings, committees and councils, the administration created a style



John W. Atherton and Virginia Richards were married in 1941 in Geneva, Illinois.



of school governance *Time* magazine called “tumultuously democratic.”

Atherton gave his last speech as president of Pitzer during commencement ceremonies in June of 1970. Once described by the *Los Angeles Times* as “a merry elf of a college president,” Atherton had led the College during one of our country’s most volatile periods. Reflecting on the school he and Virginia helped shape during those times, Atherton described Pitzer’s unique, boisterous beginnings as contributing to the College’s character and purpose.

“If Pitzer’s brief life has shown us anything, it has shown us that genuine education—education that can bring concerned intelligence to bear

on the ever-present forces of bigotry, racism, ignorance and repression—can only occur in an open community which encourages free inquiry and stimulates individual development and social responsibility.”

Atherton delivered this speech only a month after the shooting at Kent State University. The campus and the world looked very different than they had at the time of his inauguration. The man who had once asked the College’s first students to join him on a constant search, now asked the Class of ’70 to continue the school’s “common quest for truth, justice and love in a world desperately in need of them all.” Almost 50 years since its founding, Pitzer College carries on that quest as part of the legacy of the College’s first “first family.”

Atherton stands in chalked outline of Fletcher Hall, March 27, 1965.

“

We met day and night—literally—with agendas and ideas, with debate, polite and impolite, with argument and with affection, in sub-committees, in plenary sessions, over lunch and ice-tea, between martinis and hors d'oeuvres, before breakfast and after midnight, we designed a new college.

—John W. Atherton

”



John W. Atherton and the Shaping of an Institution

An idea of the new college envisioned by John W. Atherton can be seen in his interview, “My Years at Pitzer College, 1963-1970.” He had wanted “a really open and participatory system,” and said that it was “far better to have a younger faculty that wanted to do this”—that it was “harder to get a diversity if you start with any large number of older faculty members whose careers, in essence, have already been made.” (The quest for diversity was not yet the clichéd term it has become and the goal was certainly unusual in the years of Atherton’s presidency.) Atherton accomplished his purpose by choosing, himself, the entire faculty during Pitzer’s first two years. Those faculty members were indeed youngish and only three of the 25 came to the school with a title higher than that of assistant professor. None came as full professors and no one was offered tenure to come.

The Early Faculty

Reviewing the achievements of members of that first set of faculty seems to validate Atherton’s contention that diversity would be beneficial. In that original group there were four future deans of faculty (E. Sampson, J. Rodman, A. Schwartz and



Atherton at his desk, 1960s.

R. Macaulay) and a college president (R. Duvall). (Not all achieved these things at Pitzer, but none did it before Pitzer.) There was an individual who received—for outstanding teaching and overall excellence—the signal honor of being awarded the first distinguished chair in the history of the College (S. Glass). Some of the initial faculty members went on—usually, but not always, at Pitzer—to publish in the prestigious journal *Science* (D. Guthrie); to write influential articles in the leading psychology journal, *American Psychologist* (R. Albert, E. Sampson); to receive The Lyman H. Butterfield Award for documentary editing (B. Palmer); to develop the John R. Rodman Arboretum (J. Rodman); to be named an Honorary Fellow of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (R. Munroe); or to be awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia (V. Levy). Another has published four books in the past six years and is well on his way to completing the next one (R. Macaulay).

The diversity that arose from Atherton’s early faculty hiring decisions was also manifest in ways that can best be seen in comparison with the other undergraduate Claremont Colleges.



Atherton examining a model of Pitzer College.

Opposite page:
Atherton at the first
faculty conference,
June 13, 1964.

“

During the founding years of Pitzer College we knew the faculty well. By and large, we called them by their first names; that is, of course, unless the debate was hot. At those times, ‘Ruth’ would change to ‘Dr. Munroe.’ Such rules of language and protocol were not the same for our president. To most of us, he was always President Atherton. However, although he treated us as women, possibly foreseeing the battles many of us would face in our futures, he always—even in the *Los Angeles Times*—called us his ‘girls.’

”

—Deborah Deutsch Smith '68



About half the faculty at Pitzer belonged to some discipline within the sociobehavioral sciences (anthropology, linguistics, psychology, sociology), and nothing approached this elsewhere in Claremont. Moreover, almost a third of the Pitzer faculty were females, whereas under 15 percent within the other Claremont Colleges were women. And individuals of ethnic-minority status (including Jewish faculty members) made up only a tiny percentage of faculty in the other colleges, yet at Pitzer the number was above 25 percent. Atherton also ignored the anti-nepotism policies of the Colleges by hiring and keeping a husband and wife team.

Finally, and more subtly, if we undertake to measure breadth of perspective or outlook, we find that about half the graduate degrees attained by faculty at the other colleges came from the western United States (mainly California) while the proportion was only about one-quarter at Pitzer, where degrees from the international scene and from the East Coast were more often found. (I once listened to an early discussion in which some puzzled faculty members from the other colleges were trying to figure out the number of hours in time difference between the West and East coasts.) Even among the trustees at Pitzer, one member “was looked upon with grave suspicion by the other board members because he was not from Southern California.”

A Word About the Students

Many of those original faculty members were attracted by the exciting thought of helping to create a completely new institution—in Atherton’s words, of *wanting* to do this. Undoubtedly a number of high school students who had heard of such a place felt a similar pull, and so it is not surprising that many in that original student body also have carved out important career accomplishments. For lack of space I cannot do more than mention that Pitzer’s first small entering class (which subsequently graduated in 1968) now make up fewer than two percent of all Pitzer graduates over the years, yet among them were two (of the total of eight) who have been awarded the College’s Distinguished Alumni Award (H. Crosby and D. Smith). Harriett Crosby, only a month after classes started, began to form



Students in Scott Hall, still under construction, August 15, 1964.

a landscape committee with John Atherton’s support. Thus today’s attractive mall (the Mounds) at Pitzer is partially the product of a student’s interest. (Read more about this in the section called “The Pitzerscape.”) Something of John Atherton’s instinctive readiness to let people try out new things comes through in this episode, and at the time of completion of his presidency he said he had been “consistently surprised with the way in which individuals can rise, especially students, and grow when they are given genuine responsibilities.”

A Continuing Influence

After the first two years it was not John Atherton but the initial faculty members who began to take on the recruiting of new teachers. Yet as before, no tenure would be offered, and more young people were chosen as they began their careers. And that initial faculty then began to pick, in the words of one of those first faculty members, “people with a basic complexion very much like us.” Somewhat paradoxically, “much like us” meant that over the years these faculty members and some administrators were likely to come up with creative research projects, institutional innovations, or new teaching strategies, and try to implement them—and they did so. In a representative sample of almost 200 colleges and universities across the country, Pitzer in 1995 was named in the journal *Change* as one of only 11 higher educational institutions that promoted and excelled at both research and teaching.



Atherton in his office, April 2, 1966.

Of course, the diversity inevitably brought us some mistakes, sometimes the fault of the school and sometimes that of the person. This obviously happens at any college, diverse or otherwise. But the comment quoted above assumes that, overall, a somewhat mysterious Pitzer style was being sought in new appointees and that, moreover, it was being found. To me, this style contained an identifiable whiff of the '60s and, in my judgment, it remains salient at the school today. One part of the style has resulted, as the phrase goes, in "a herd of independent minds" on certain issues. John Atherton recognized this himself when he alluded to a controversy of his time in which "coercion [was] masked in the seductive guise of moral righteousness."

But the other part was well described recently by Stephen Glass, the last member of the original faculty to retire, when he said, "Pitzer is a college where invention and beginnings are one with its heritage." And this all stems from a first president who deliberately sought something off and away from the standard system. One administrator was asked, in his exit interview, "Do you think Atherton had a certain kind of predilection for off-the-wall types?" The reply was, "He seemed to hire those." The source of John Atherton's tendency to make out-of-the-ordinary choices remains unknown. What we do know about, however, is

his absorbed interest in literature, and it may be significant that for many years—as we see instanced in Valerie Levy's essay—he urged upon people the Kingsley Amis novel *Lucky Jim*. The book's satire on academic life with its wonderful misfit James Dixon embodies an idea Atherton may have seriously entertained: that instead of avoiding the endlessly interesting but "different" Jim Dixons, you hire them (young) and wait to see what happens.

Ultimately, how different was John Atherton in his own thinking? To this I would respond with another question: How many college presidents would be willing to say, as did John Atherton, "[W]ithin the individual [Claremont] College each faculty member would have thirteen advisees and maybe no classes whatsoever. And simply meet with these students, and they would then utilize the resources at the Claremont Colleges and report fairly regularly to their advisor for the work that they do. This is what I feel the colleges could do here."

In preparing this article, I have relied on Pitzer undergraduate Micah Huang '13 for his careful recording of information about Pitzer and the other colleges in Claremont. Incidentally but not accidentally, Micah exemplifies the Pitzer/Atherton spirit with his plan to major in "Music as a Means to Social Change." While such a major is probably unique, it will also be among the very many at Pitzer that have met John Atherton's ambitious hope for our students—that they should discover and then pursue whatever has truly interested them.

—Lee Munroe



Professor Stephen L. Glass with President Atherton at a reception, November 6, 1964.

Opposite page: Professor Lee Munroe and President Atherton, November 6, 1964.

“

The Pitzer at which I arrived in 1966 was a bud of a campus, brand spanking new, with not even enough room to house us all, and I lived at Franklin Hall at Scripps. That dorm was so new that my address was New Dorm, North Wing! The Pitzer of old had a pioneering spirit and gusto hard to describe. We were united in creating a school that was special and unique, for us and by us. John Atherton was on the same team. We were marvelously big for our britches.

”

—Elizabeth “Betsy” Brown Braun '70





Memories of JB

I met John Atherton in October 1963, shortly after my arrival in Claremont. My husband was to teach at Pomona College and I dreaded the prospect of being a “faculty wife.” I heard that a new college, Pitzer, would be opening and I rang to make an appointment to be considered for a position on the faculty.

JB, as he was known to his family and friends, was nothing like I expected: He looked like a genial leprechaun and warmly welcomed me. He asked me what I wanted to teach and when I replied that English literature was my field, he asked, “Have you read *Lucky Jim*?” I said that I hadn’t, and he suggested I do so, and leapt up to locate his copy of Kingsley Amis’ novel on his bookshelf. He gave it to me and said I could return it to Madeline Frishman, his secretary, when I finished it and that he would be in touch. That was my interview.

I returned the book to Madeline and heard nothing. On the morning of November 22, I, like everyone else, was glued to my television, watching the events in Dallas. When I heard that the President was dead, I tried to call my husband in Pearsons Hall at Pomona, where he was to teach at 11 a.m., but couldn’t get through. I walked to Pearsons to wait for his class to end. He came out, grinning. I wondered how he could be smiling when the President had been killed. He was waving a thick envelope at me, and I realized he didn’t know.

“I tried to call you, but the lines were all busy from here,” he said.

“Kennedy has been killed,” I said.

As his smile died, he handed me the envelope. “It was thick, so I thought that was good news.” I took the envelope, opened it and found my contract for



a position to teach English at Pitzer. I never knew whether it was due to Kingsley Amis, but I was, in fact, employed.

JB used similar methods of employment with many of the first faculty members of Pitzer College. He asked me to phone my friend, Ronald Macaulay, when I suggested him as a linguistics teacher. When I phoned North Wales (because I knew Ronald taught there and didn’t have a phone), it took a day for Ronald to be contacted and to ring back.

“You would like it here. Nothing goes according to plan,” I told him.

“What’s the weather like?” Ronald asked.

“Warm and sunny.”

He told me he had just tramped his way through snow and slush to get to the university. “I’ll take the job,” he said.

Such employment methods would never make it past our more rigid procedures now, but it may explain how a college president, following hunches, collected an interesting faculty.

JB was the best loved employer I have ever known, maybe because he would always take a risk where people were concerned. I will miss him, always.

—Valerie Levy, founding faculty member and assistant professor of English

Atherton in his office, September 26, 1968.

Opposite page: Atherton during Parents Day, March 11, 1967.

Founding faculty member Valerie Levy, September 21, 1964.





Virginia Richards Atherton

Virginia Richards Atherton came to Claremont in 1949. She brought with her a sensibility we might today call traditional, and she maintained her standards and her tastes during the years of John Atherton's presidency at Pitzer, and beyond. There were almost numberless dinners at her home, frequent contact with students, a close attention to the campus and its development, and yet an obviously determined abstention from any attempt to influence the academic direction of the College. As well, throughout this time (some of it in the pre-Pitzer era), Virginia also volunteered at the Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center, the Casa Colina Centers for Rehabilitation and the Los Angeles County-USC Hospital, driving back and forth as needed. It can be said that she kept to her ways long after things had changed in the larger society.

Later, after more than 15 years away, she and John Atherton returned to retire in Claremont in 1987. John attended meetings of the Pitzer Board of Trustees and worked on a book, and Virginia again began her very frequent entertaining and her tireless volunteer work, this time with recent immigrants to the US. It was during those retirement years in Claremont that I came to know Virginia on a more personal level. If one made any gesture for her, she returned the favor with a gift, a note, or—in more recent days, her sight diminished—with a phone call. When not the hostess, she seemed ready on all occasions to go out for the evening or for lunch; and when no longer able to drive, she took care in distributing her requests for help among her many friends. As her health problems increased in later years, she would sometimes discreetly mention her discomfort to an acquaintance as an outing began, but the problem would not be mentioned thereafter. Other times, she would treat an issue with her sharp humor, as when she was briefly confined to an assisted-care center and commented, "I call this my new jail," and judged some of the food there as "the most horrible, tasteless, runny Cream of Wheat I've ever had."

Virginia also renewed her association with the College when she returned here. Over the past quarter-century, the presidents of Pitzer—Frank Ellsworth, Marilyn Massey, Laura Skandera Trombley—have consistently acknowledged and praised her contributions to the birth and early maturation of the institution. They also have valued her continuing interest in the school. She attended events, made known her likes and dislikes about the College's plans, and tried to stay fully engaged. She did not appreciate being left out. I once mentioned an event that had taken place without her knowledge, and she stated her displeasure about not being informed. When I told her it was definitely not anything she would have been interested in, she said that the point was to have been invited, and she had not been. She summed it up to me, "You don't understand the feminine mind."

Aware of her traditional inclinations, Virginia called herself a conservative person. This label tends to be interpreted in political terms, and because her attitudes in that sphere changed a good deal over time, I believe a more accurate characterization would be to call her "private." I knew her for more than 40 years before she told me the reasons her husband had resigned as president. (They were not the reasons I had thought or that others from the early years had thought.) On a much smaller scale, she disliked being called "Ginny" by those who did not know her well, and this particularly included young administrative people at Pitzer who would call her on the phone. But whatever her irks about the school, there was no doubt about her deep feeling for it. When she saw the last perpendicular piece of Sanborn Hall, one of Pitzer's two original buildings, about to go down to make way for new things, she said, "It makes me want to cry." And not very long ago, while being driven around and looking over the College, she said—and said it only the once in the years I knew her—"I love this place."

—Lee Munroe

A Class Act

I never quite figured out Ginny—as family and close friends called Virginia Atherton—and I suspect she wanted it that way. Although we became much closer in her later years, long after her stint as the “President’s wife,” there was always an air of mystery about her. For example, she quarreled with someone I knew and unlike the rest of us who might have tried to justify our ire, Ginny always said, “I won’t talk about that.” Her discretion was laudatory, as was her loyalty: if you were one of Ginny’s people, she didn’t cross you off her list no matter how cross with you she was.

I met her in 1963, shortly after being appointed to the first faculty of Pitzer College by John Atherton. At that time, when most women I knew well were working out their own identities as separate from their husbands, Ginny was defining herself according to her role as JB’s wife. For me, she re-defined the concept and status of the wife who had chosen her role, rather than being forced into it because of her husband’s position.

We always looked forward to the (at least) annual dinner invitation and spent many recurring conversations trying to figure out her method

of choosing the guests: there were always outsiders (non-Pitzer people) at her dinner parties, and always a different mix of Pitzer faculty and staff. We never experienced the same guest list twice. The food was also memorable: nearly 50 years later, I remember the charlotte, made from lady fingers, soaked in something alcoholic, surrounding a round tin filled with some coffee/chocolate mixture. This is not to trivialize what she meant to so many of us, but rather to appreciate her warmth and hospitality, which was unstinting.

Ginny was also Lady Bracknell. She never hid her disagreement with the majority over politics, and she and JB were often very funny over Ginny’s conservatism, but war never quite broke out because he simply adored her. When she supported Barack Obama in the last election, I wished that JB could have seen it, but perhaps she wouldn’t have given him the satisfaction. Her voice was legendary, a cross between Lauren Bacall and a shouting truck driver. She was funny, combative, smart and surprising. A class act.

—Valerie Levy



John and Virginia Atherton greet new students at orientation and opening day, September 21, 1964.

The “Non-Working” Working Wife

I arrived at Pitzer as a faculty wife in 1965, a time when many wives were thinking hard about their role in the blazing light of the texts and debates about the feminist movement. I wanted to work professionally and admit to having had some tinges of arrogance about “non-working” wives. In retrospect, I realize the depth of my error.

Virginia Atherton was the “non-working” wife *par excellence*. Her non-work covered a wide field. In the early years of the College, she entertained small groups of trustees, parents, students and administrators three or four times a week at her and President John Atherton’s house.

At the same time, she seemed to work full-time on campus, according to Jim Jamieson, then the vice president and assistant professor of political studies.

“At that time I was in charge of buildings and grounds and probably three or four mornings a week she’d be there to say that one area of the campus needed water or we needed to change the annuals,” Jamieson said. “She worked with the decorators and she met with students a lot, and the students felt that the place was more like their home. Ginny was always there looking in on things. If anything got broken, she made sure it got fixed right away. So she was just a full-time person there.”

Virginia Atherton also took care to get to know faculty wives and our children. She entertained stunningly well, without any hint of her fulfilling a possibly tiresome duty. She showed her style in every aspect of her public life, from her careful and lovely garden to her welcoming rooms that had beautiful furniture and works of art she and John collected on their travels.

After John stepped down as Pitzer’s president, Virginia maintained an active connection with the College. When the Athertons returned to



Claremont to retire in 1987, Virginia made a point of entertaining recipients of the John W. Atherton Scholarship and the Esther Stewart Richards Scholarship, which was named after her mother. In her retirement here, she once again regularly brought together past and present members of the Pitzer community and her personal friends, with deeply pleasing hospitality.

I have had to conclude that being a “non-working wife” for Virginia Atherton meant having a remarkably fine and full career by which Pitzer College and many members of its community have been enriched.

—Janet Macaulay

Virginia Atherton (left) with President Atherton and Assistant to the President for Development William Frenaye (right), 1964.

The Pitzerscape

As a result of John Atherton's strong commitment to community involvement in every aspect of the development of the College, a group that included the landscape architect Woody Dike, John Atherton, Virginia Atherton and Harriett Crosby '68 began work on the design of Pellissier Mall in 1964.

Crosby, one of the College's first students, remembered President Atherton's reaction to her description of swimming in a pond in the woods of Vermont. "He jumped on the idea of a swimming hole and wanted to have one incorporated into the Mall he was beginning to think about," she said.

In an October 1964 edition of Pitzer's community newsletter, *Sound Off!*, Crosby wrote that President Atherton had given students permission to work on plans for "the Mall"—today's Pellissier Mall, home to the Mounds and the fieldstone fountain. At the time, the campus was nothing but a clean, albeit rather stony, slate.

Crosby invited students to join a newly formed landscape committee "to achieve the most beautiful campus possible." She eschewed clipped and aligned walks, hoping to compensate for Pitzer's sad lack of grand mature trees by careful and imaginative planning. She warned students that if they didn't get involved, the campus might end up "with perfect symmetrical rows of trees, straight concrete paths running the length of the Mall."



Crosby wanted something a little more natural. "We could have rolling hillocks with a stream running through, dropping over a waterfall into a swimming hole, or a pond with fish and ducks," she wrote. "We might have a lush green woods with different kinds of tall trees. There is no limit as to what could be done with what we have except our imagination and ingenuity."

An orange tree was presented to President Atherton on behalf of the student body during his inauguration and the dedication of Scott and Sanborn halls on November 6, 1964.

Even though the waterfall and swimming hole did not quite make it into the final plans, Crosby's views were similar to those of the planning committee which she joined and profoundly influenced, showing that student voices were heard, loud and clear, from the very beginning.

Opposite page: Future site of the Pellissier Mall, 1964 (top); the Mall today.

Seeing the Forest in a Tree

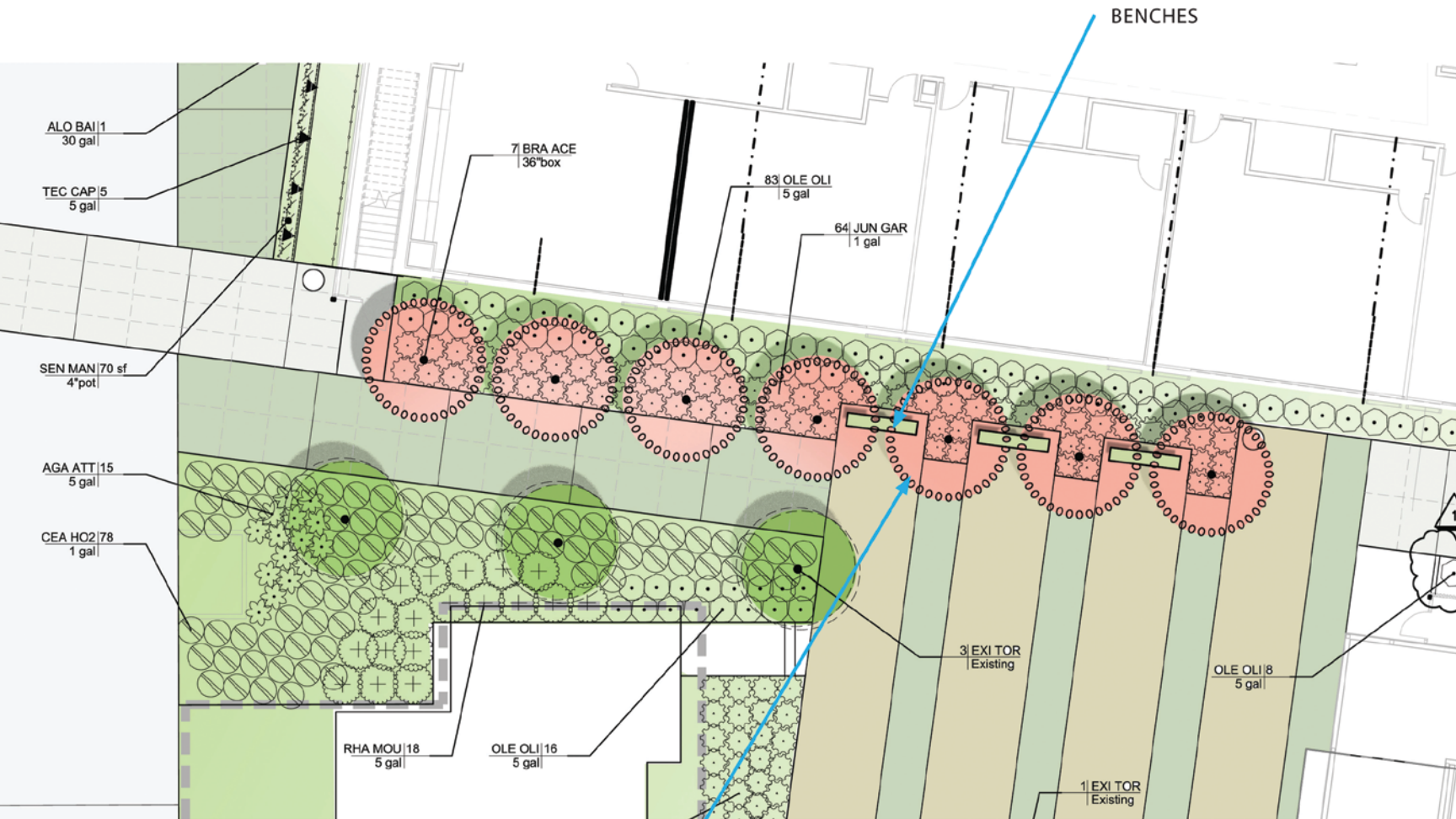
In the October 1964 edition of *Sound Off!*, Crosby described a plan for the student body to present an orange tree "to grow on campus a symbol of us all." That tree, she wrote, might be the first of many, creating a "natural, green, wooded area we are hoping to have as part of the campus to provide a place for seclusion, meditation and seeing things in proportion." The orange tree was the first step in the next important development of our landscape, the John R. Rodman Arboretum, which now covers most of Pitzer's 33-acre campus.

In keeping with Pitzer's spirit of community involvement, the movement which led to the



Students plant the tree presented during the College's dedication.





GROVE PLAN

Grove - flowering specimen trees.
Brachychiton acerifolius (Flame Tree)

Grove - flowering specimen trees.
Brachychiton acerifolius (Flame Tree)

Three benches representing the Athertons' three children.



Plans for the environmentally innovative residence halls currently under construction include a grove of seven trees to commemorate the seven years of the Athertons' contributions to Pitzer College.



GROVE ELEVATION



Harriett Crosby '68 presented an orange tree to Atherton, November 6, 1964.

arboretum was begun by John R. Rodman, professor of political studies and environmental studies, together with other faculty, staff and students. Arising out of the culture of environmental awareness, the environmental studies (now environmental analysis) program was established in the '70s and led to a series of gardens suited to the alluvial scrub habitat of Southern California. The arboretum also includes the small citrus orchard, a tribute to the founding trustees and the history of our area, and provides a fine setting for the Grove House, a restored Southern California bungalow, preserved from the citrus growing era.

Rodman once described the arboretum as difficult to sum up in a phrase. "Perhaps the core is a search for a third way between the two traditional American paths: the exploitation of nature and the worship of a sacred, untouchable nature," he said. "(It's) a search for patterns of interaction that are beneficial to both nature and people, patterns of stewardship and restoration that take us beyond 'social responsibility' to 'ecological responsibility.'"

In 2010, the *Los Angeles Times* described the arboretum by saying, "Pitzer has a glorious, sustainable landscape." The campus that earns such praise today began almost 50 years ago with the involvement of the whole Pitzer community and one small orange tree.

First Lady Foresight

When it came to designing the campus's open spaces, Pitzer College's first "first lady" believed in following nature's lead. Landscape architect Woody Dike remembers Virginia Atherton's suggestions to the landscaping committee.

"One of her ideas was to understand (with the aid of an aerial photo) the pattern of trails already existing," Dike said. "Mrs. Atherton recommended the use of things common to the area, particularly local trees."

A gifted gardener herself, Virginia wanted to create natural spaces where students could gather for events or be alone. It is fitting, therefore, that plans for the new environmentally responsible dorms include a grove of seven trees to be planted in honor of John and Virginia Atherton, whose enlightened and forward-looking influence, together with assiduous follow up once a project was underway, was brought to bear on the creation and growth of the unique setting of Pitzer College.

—Janet Macaulay



Virginia Atherton and Woody Dike, 1968.

The Mindful Origins of a College Motto

I am certainly not alone in thinking that John Atherton was one of the most instantly likable men that most people had ever encountered. Part of that likability lay in the charming way he had of skirting an occasional dicey question about Pitzer's origins. "It was a long time ago and I don't really remember" was his customary mantra of avoidance. In doing some research many years ago on the origin of Pitzer's official motto—*provida futuri*—I came across some startling evidence suggesting that John's memory may have been, at least on occasion, as fallible as he claimed it to be.

What moved me to examine the motto in the first place was a nostalgic article for *The Participant* written by John after he left Pitzer. In the article, he observed that "Steve Glass gave us our motto." Being Steve Glass himself, I knew that this simply wasn't true: the motto, in fact, was already in place on early replications of the Pitzer seal (on napkins and such) when Pitzer's first faculty met in June of 1964 to deliberate the nature of the college we were about to open. Since the motto was in Latin, one might suppose that it was only natural to assume that Pitzer's sole classicist might have had a hand in its devising, but the truth of the matter is more difficult to assess, and made more curious still by the fact that John was himself personally involved in the motto's invention.

The easy part of all this is *provida futuri* itself. *Provida* is a feminine—Pitzer began life as a women's college—adjective meaning "mindful of," in the sense of being intelligent enough to prepare for something to come. *Futuri* is the genitive singular of the neuter noun *futurum*. Construed with words like *provida* it means "of the future." So, taken together, *provida futuri* means "mindful of the future." It does *not* mean, as it is frequently misconstrued by those with small Latin, "provide for the future," even though that may be the ultimate intent of the sentiment expressed.

In early January 1964, six months before the

initial meeting of the first faculty alluded to above, John personally asked an old navy buddy of his, Robert B. Palmer, professor of Classics at Scripps College, to assist in the formulation of Pitzer's official motto. Palmer responded in a letter that he was privileged to be asked and further remarked that "a motto without Latin is no motto at all, and that a college without a suitable Latin motto is doomed to start with."

In that same letter, Palmer proceeded to suggest several options, keying evidently on hints from John that any motto should speak of the unarguable link between past and future. Palmer's suggestions were as follows:

praeterita sciens, provida futuri—"knowing the past, mindful of the future"

praeterita reverens, provida futuri—"honoring the past, mindful of the future"

praeterita sciens, prudens futuri—"knowing the past, heeding the future"



Founding faculty member and Professor of Classics Stephen L. Glass, 1964.



The Pitzer seal on Scott Hall.

Palmer then reminded John of the wisdom of Solomon from the Vulgate, a late 4th century translation of the Bible: "... *et si multitudinem scientiae desiderat quis, scit praeterita et de futuris aestimans.*" That is, "those desiring an abundance of knowledge know the past and assess the future."

In a letter of January 29, 1964, John wrote Palmer, thanking him for his "superb list of elegant Latin mottoes," adding that "after considerable consideration and faced with the terrifying prospect that I might on some occasion have to read our motto, we have decided to use: *praeterita sciens, de futuris aestimans.* We like it particularly because it has a root not only in the Bible, but in Solomon's wisdom, and I don't know how we could do better than that."

Palmer responded, "I am delighted you have chosen my motto. I have not checked to see whether any other college sports this, but I rather doubt it since I dredged it out of the Vulgate and not out of a list of mottoes." That letter of January 30, 1964 constitutes the last apposite document on the motto *per se*. Atherton's letter of January

29 was copied to Tom Jamieson, a supremely talented Claremont graphic artist, who had been appointed to design the official Pitzer seal.

The questions remaining are obvious:

What happened to all of those notions of *praeterita* (the past) that were present on every proposed variant that John and Palmer discussed? What happened to *praeterita sciens, de futuris aestimans* that was John's formally announced choice? I asked John himself, but, not surprisingly, he resolutely declared that it was a long time ago and he couldn't remember. Palmer himself, when questioned, maintained he was mystified, and Jamieson could not recall what happened between his original charge and the final version of the seal.

All of the above may prove to be little more than a reflection on the vicissitudes of human memory in general, but, though it was a long time ago and nobody remembers why, Pitzer College, contrary to John's original stated intent, still sports, in *provida futuri*, but half a motto.

—Stephen L. Glass, *emeritus professor of Classics*

Orange Glory: The Pitzer Flag

On the day of John W. Atherton's inauguration and the dedication of Scott and Sanborn halls, Atherton stood at a podium on the top of a flight of stairs, addressing the audience with the American flag on his right and the Pitzer flag on his left. Yes, Pitzer once had a flag. In an interview with founding faculty member Werner Warmbrunn in 1988, Madeline Frishman, Atherton's secretary, described how the Pitzer flag came to fly.

Frishman: I think it must have been at commencement time in 1964 that it became apparent that we didn't have a flag yet, because Mr. Atherton was asked to be on the stage of the baccalaureate or something at Pomona where they had the flags of each college behind where the president of that college was to be seated. So we had to make one in a hurry. Ann Maberry, the registrar, and I decided because we couldn't get an official flag made that soon that we would just go down to the Home Silkshop at Pomona near Sears and buy some sort of orange silk material in the

color we wanted and white fringe to put around it. So between the two of us we got it made and we thumbtacked it down to the top of this long pole. I was sent down to Scripps College to measure how tall their flag was. So not knowing what I was doing, I went over and I measured it and I had the pole cut to the proper size as it was to be on the stand at Bridges Auditorium. Anyway, Ann and Mr. Atherton started out, he holding the banner out of the open window of the car to put it in its place. When the baccalaureate was over, the next day he called me in and said, "How come Pitzer's flag was shorter than all the rest?"

Warmbrunn: But you measured it.

Frishman: I had measured it with the thing down not standing up. I didn't know him well enough to say this but I said, "Maybe because Pitzer's president is shorter." But anyway we had a good laugh. I can still see him with Ann starting out in her car holding the banner waving in the breeze.



Pitzer flag, 1964.

Opposite page: Founding chairman of the Board of Trustees Robert J. Bernard during the dedication of Scott and Sanborn halls on November 6, 1964.

“

(Pitzer) understands the deadening influence of prejudice and fear. Its purpose as a college is to inspire the discovery and the dissemination of truth, in a spirit of free and responsible inquiry.

—Robert J. Bernard, founding chairman of the Board of Trustees

”



Sound Off!

S*ound Off!* was a mimeographed bulletin that began to circulate during the fall of 1964 at Pitzer. Harriett Crosby '68 attributed the origins of *Sound Off!* to President John W. Atherton's openness and unusual administrative attitude which championed discussion and didn't mind dissension.

"He would pick up on our new ideas and ask us to act on them right away," Crosby said. "That's how we started *Sound Off!*. He encouraged us to do it. So we found a mimeograph machine in the office and made copies for each student and faculty and put it in their mailboxes. Things happened quickly in those days. We wanted all the incoming classes to feel like they were founders of Pitzer College, recreating the college anew each year."

Below are a few excerpts from *Sound Off!* from the fall of 1964.

! THERE WILL BE A TOWN MEETING IN
! SCOTT HALL 7:00, TUESDAY THE 29TH. WE
WILL DEFINITELY FOLLOW PARLIAMENTARY
PROCEDURE (ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER). ANN
WILLCOX WILL MODERATE.

Also to discuss:

1. Point out lack of honor.
2. Proposal of acceptance of temporary rules until everything is final.
3. The need of more courtesy (QUIET HOURS).

Please bring pencils and paper.

—September 28, 1964

! Twenty years from now, Pitzer will be a
! known and established college. But what
is established is up to us. It can be the Finch
College of the West or it can be the Goucher
or Bennington of the West, but you will be
subjected to its reputation wherever you are and
whatever you are doing.

MORAL: Dating is nice
But weekends suffice.
Wednesday too, I trust
If you must...

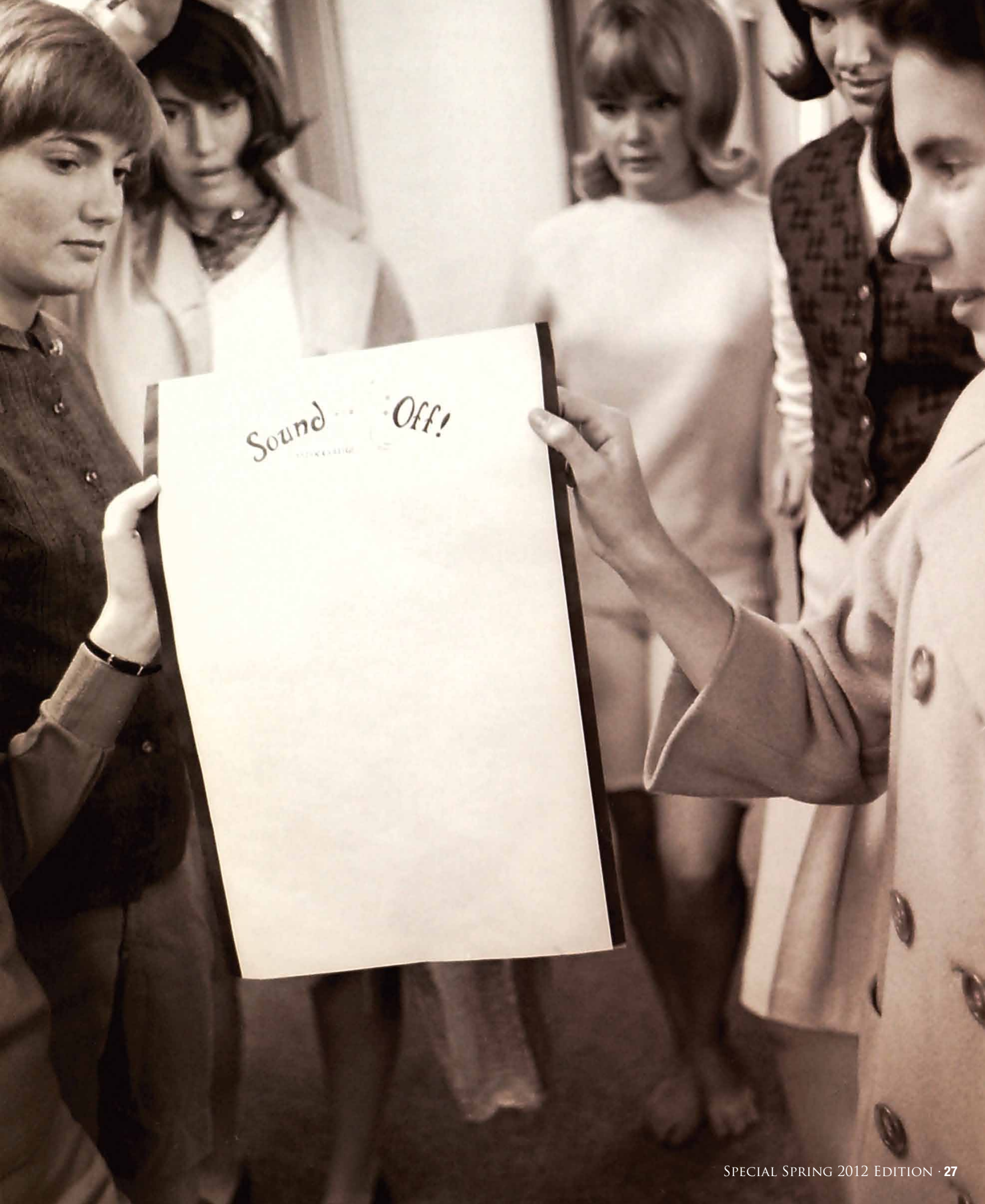
—Valerie Levy, assistant professor of English,
October 20, 1964

! Pitzer is an institution which was originally
! set up to be dedicated to the study of man.
It is an experiment in higher education in that
it is trying to find the most effective ways to
stimulate and develop a love of learning for the
essence of learning, to stimulate an intellectual
curiosity into constructive areas. Pitzer wants
to achieve this through the meeting of different
ideas and insights held by all its members:
students, faculty, and administration—through a
dialogue, a give and take. Pitzer has become an
experiment in itself—studying its effects on its
members and the results.

—Item from *The Planning Board*,
November 3, 1964

! It is my opinion that too many Pitzer students
! do not yet put enough of themselves and
their time into academic work. This opinion
is based partly, but not exclusively, on the
observation that only a few students have
taken advantage of the study space in Scott
Hall at night, although complaints continue
that it is difficult in the dormitory. The obvious
conclusion is that most students do not feel the
need to study at night.

—Werner Warmbrunn, professor of history,
October 14, 1964



Sound Off!
THE KATE SPADE

Pitzer in the News: The Atherton Years

As Pitzer prepared to open its doors as a women's college in 1964, it hit the headlines. Articles appeared in publications ranging from the *Claremont Courier's* announcement of a "New College for the Ladies" in 1963 to *Time* magazine's summary of "Claremont's Sixth" in 1964.

Pitzer's championing of free-wheeling, participatory school governance continued to make news throughout John W. Atherton's tenure. "Pitzer students, faculty and administrators are involved in a hurly-burly of innovation and self-examination that makes Pitzer a kind of democratic forum in higher education," wrote the *Los Angeles Times* in 1965.

After Atherton announced that he planned to step down in June 1970, the *Claremont Collegian*, the former newspaper of The Claremont Colleges, declared, "Within the Claremont cluster, Atherton has been one of the most progressive and most popular of the college presidents. Pitzer and Claremont will certainly miss him."

Below are some additional excerpts from media coverage of Pitzer during the Atherton years.

“(A)t California’s intensely informal Pitzer ... the teachers lecture in shirtsleeves, barefoot girls pad into class carrying Cokes, and the janitor speaks his mind at faculty-student meetings...”

— “Claremont’s Sixth,” *Time* magazine
November 6, 1964

“Pitzer is confidently planning to turn out graduates who are independent, creative thinkers with the desire for leadership and service in the community.”

— “Adventure Awaits at Pitzer College,”
Los Angeles Times
November 22, 1964

“If there is one thing Pitzies will know after their experience at the college, it will be politics. More than a taste of the forms of politics will be a continuous part of their life on the growing campus on the east side of Mills Avenue.”

— “Pitzer in the Year 2,”
Claremont Courier
September 22, 1965

“The man who left a men’s college to become founding president of a woman’s college may help guide it along coeducational lines as one of his last duties. Pitzer College President John W. Atherton ... said there is a possibility the newest of the Claremont Colleges will become coed by the fall of 1970.”

— “Pitzer President Says College May Go Coed by 1970,” *Los Angeles Times*
1969



DR. JOHN ATHERTON
"... important time for change."

Pitzer President Says College May Go Coed by 1970

CLAREMONT—The man who left a men's college to become founding president of a woman's college may help guide it along coeducational lines as one of his last duties.

Pitzer College President John W. Atherton, whose resignation will take effect in June, 1970, said there is a possibility the newest of the Claremont Colleges will become coed by the fall of 1970.

Atherton was dean of faculty at Claremont Men's College when he was selected for the Pitzer presidency in 1963. He said at that time he

did no more t

The student comme in Sept "I ha of trus June. decision indicat tion an it."

He a male st not be "Pitz though" The st there a this is

CLAREMONT — Naval officer, poet, former college track man, Victorian scholar, John W. Atherton brings a variety of training and experience to the challenging job of first president of Pitzer College.

The qualifications have added up to success. After one year in existence, Claremont's new women's college is a going, growing concern, successful in its ambitious plans during the first year, and hoping for greater success in greater aspirations for the coming years.

Atherton is a genial extrovert with a pleasant wit and a ready laugh. What little time he steals from his administrative duties he spends at his home on Via Zurita with his wife, Virginia. They are the parents of John Jr., Thomas, and Carolyn.

Atherton's hobbies include bridge and classical music, and he has a passion for Gilbert and Sullivan, which he will carol at the den of a baton.

portant posts. In a coed school, girls usually hold secondary positions, but in a girls' school they can't avoid the important positions. The student community government — faculty and students — works on all phases of student life — academic, administrative, and social."

"Girls ask different kinds of questions," he said dryly, "but it isn't all that significant."



John Atherton Appointed Pitzer College President

CLAREMONT — Dr. John W. Atherton, dean of the faculty at Claremont Men's Col-

lege, was appointed president of Pitzer College today.

He takes over July 1 to prepare for the opening of the college in September of 1964. Pitzer will be a women's college, the sixth of the Claremont group.

"We want to start moving as rapidly as possible," Dr. Atherton said. "We are expecting an entering class of about 100 girls and hope to have at the time of opening a dormitory and academic building."

Dr. Atherton's appointment was announced by George Stone, acting chairman of the new college. He said the selection committee conducted a nationwide search for a search-administrator to fill the position.

The new president is a graduate of Amherst College and the University of Chicago. He is a poet and a specialist

in Victorian literature. He has been a professor of English in Claremont since 1949. Previously he was at Iowa State College and the University of Chicago.

His poetry has appeared in many magazines, including Saturday Review, The New Yorker, Yale Review and American Scholar.

Dr. Atherton was director of admissions at CMC during the Korean War, was Fulbright lecturer in American literature at Tokyo University of Edu-

Boulder, and ant comm Reserve.

In disc ment as P Atherton

"Our p very much ences—psy ogy and s life scienc particular area, while college is manities.



JOHN ATHERTON



PITZER PRESIDENT—Dr. Robert J. Bernard, chairman of the Pitzer College board of trustees (right), congratulates Dr. John W. Atherton who was inaugurated as first president of the new women's college in ceremonies held in Claremont Friday. (P-B photo)

Claremont Collegian

Wednesday, March 19, 1969

Page 2

Editor: Steve Gettinger

Managing Editors: Paul Resnick, Barry Siegel, Kathy Mikkelsen

Atherton Creates Change at Pitzer, then Changes Jobs

It is with mixed emotions that we note Pitzer President John W. Atherton's decision to retire in 1970. Within the Claremont cluster, Atherton has been one of the most progressive and most popular of the college presidents. Pitzer and Claremont will certainly miss him.

But the reasons for his retirement...

Sixth School of Higher Learning

New Pitzer College Joins Claremont

By JOSEPH H. FIRSIAN
P-B Staff Writer
CLAREMONT — Pitzer College officially took its place

and your wife have devoted your lives to higher education. I charge you to develop this college for distinguished

"We have reached a state in civilization where the pursuit of happiness is no longer the pursuit of private gratification..."

A President Speaks About His Girls

dent-faculty relationships have caused ferment in other colleges and universities across the nation.

"What an opportunity!" Atherton exclaimed. "To have something brand-new just when the whole country is seething with the question of faculty government. The students ask themselves, 'Can't we do better in creating an active, relevant student government?' The whole process of building a new college becomes one of its most important educational features.

"In this eight-ring circus of the Claremont colleges, we are growing and changing at a fantastic clip. Every new college has been a new kind of catalyst to the group, and Pitzer is no exception. We move and exist by a combination of cooperation and competition."

Pitzer opened in the fall of 1964 with 12 faculty members

and 150 students. Under the guidance of its hard-working, dedicated president, it has grown to 350 students and a faculty of 26, and next year will have 450 students and 36 teachers. And all — administrators, trustees, faculty, and students — are learning as they build.

"The college is a sort of a laboratory project in institutional development," Atherton said. "We started from scratch—and our people, being interested in social and behavioral sciences, were delighted with the unlimited horizons for development.

"We are educating students and faculty alike in the process of building a new institution."

Page 11, Progress-Bulletin, December 24, 1965

PITZER COLLEGE

June 4, 1970

TO:

THE PITZER FACULTY AND STAFF
President Atherton

FROM:

Thank you for your wonderful party. I appreciate your continuing interest in innovative education. I shall long treasure, and keep in a safe damp place, the superb portrait you gave me.

You will be delighted to hear that Mr. Jamieson reports that 95% of the faculty and staff consumed 98% of the cold meat and eggs, and that 100% of the faculty and staff drank 110% of the grain neutral spirits. As a result, the President's Office has increased its aspirin appropriation by 15%.

I am also happy to report that Ginny has purchased an even larger map of up-State New York. And further, due to the unprecedented rifling of the President's confidential files, that Madeline Frishman's normal two weeks contract has been reduced to two hours terminal notice.

Because of the dittoing of this memorandum the Instructional Budget is overdrawn by 17%.

After June 10th the President and Mrs. Atherton will be unreachable at any address.

Love, Pesce -

Ginny

and

J.B.

JWA:mf

RE: Everything

Sound Off! was far from the only form of written communication flying around the halls of Pitzer during the Atherton years. Countless memos filled the mailboxes in Scott Hall.

Below is a very small sampling of the very many memorandums produced by Pitzer faculty and staff.

RE: Variation A.
The Dean is appointed for life. [In the case of the appointed person being immortal a limitation of 100 years will be enforced]

Variation B.
The Dean is appointed for 2 hours.
This would make it possible to keep close check on his activities, rendering the administration of Pitzer College absolutely knowledgeable about the operations of the dean's office

—From an undated memorandum suggesting changes in the organization of the Office of the Dean of Faculty



Atherton in the Scott hallway.

RE: Mr. Pellissier, the chairman, and Mr. Frenaye showed and discussed three possible operating budget projections for the years 1965-66 through 1971-72. They pointed out that the most significant variables in such projections are student-faculty ratio, faculty salaries, and student financial aid. Mr. Pellissier noted that the Committee need not discuss faculty salaries, for we can all assume that salary scales at Pitzer must be among the highest in America if the College is to fulfill its aims.

—Excerpt from the minutes of the Master Plan Committee, October 1965

RE: Only in its second year, the College is in a fluid stage. Curriculum, procedures, the internal government of the institution, the educational philosophy, orientation, goals, the “style” of the College are all still in the making. For some people, a situation of this sort is disturbing; we are trying to find people (faculty, students, administrators) who revel in the chances for creative action which this situation offers.

—From Arthur Feraru, dean of faculty and associate professor of political studies, to the faculty, January 1966.



RE: Pitzer has the chance to develop an exceptional program in the areas of its special emphasis, which have been stated to be the social and behavioral sciences. A reasonable interpretation of that emphasis would put anthropology, history, psychology and sociology in the position of leading disciplines. Other social sciences would be represented but for economics and (to a lesser extent) political studies Pitzer would rely upon its close relationship to the other Claremont colleges. In the same way, it would rely for variety in its programs in literature and the arts upon courses offered elsewhere in the Claremont cluster. But the distinctive emphasis of Pitzer would set very clear demands upon all of its faculty.

—From George Park, founding faculty member and professor of social anthropology, to the faculty, November 1965.

RE: Beloved Pitzer friends, warmly regarded Foes, honored Colleagues all: how often during the last one-to-three years have we all and each rolled up our eyes and said THIS cd happen only at Pitzer! Tones can range from rage to joy, but what I particularly love is that a certain under-overtone always exists, namely MIRTH. Admit, we are a humorous and laugh-loving lot: horrible though we all are, we can't help enjoying ourselves in each other's company. The Warmbrunns' opening-gun party this fall was a mad thing; the party last night was a mad thing; Pitzer is a mad thing, and WHERE ELSE would they give me a punch-party and a stuffed owl and a whirl, at the end of a spring so exhausting that everyone is worn to a nubbin ... only they ... don't look now ... are NOT worn to a nubbin, but are dancing about the place, roaring with laughter, guzzle, guzzle, gorge, gorge, brandishing stuffed owls and making speeches about Flying in the Twilight which leave me, of all people, speechless. Where else...

—The “Absolutely Last Memorandum” of Esther Wagner, founding faculty member and assistant professor of English, to the faculty, June 1967.



RE: “The educational objectives of Pitzer College will be fulfilled in a graduate who is able to take her place in community and professional life, with wisdom, competence, and grace.” —Pitzer College Bulletin: 1965-66 Catalog, page 41

I am sure it was not intended, but this has a rather static sound to it, as if we were reassuring parents that Pitzer would not make their daughters adventurous, but rather would prepare them for fitting into conventional “places” in the existing social system. I hope we are more subversive than that, and that our objectives will be fulfilled in a graduate who doesn't just “take her place” but helps rearrange the places somewhat.

—Excerpt from a memorandum from Professor John R. Rodman, professor of political studies and environmental studies, to the faculty, December 1965.



Atherton hosted his last
Pitzer Commencement,
June 6, 1970.

Opposite page:
Virginia Atherton.



Continual Commencement

When John W. Atherton spoke to the crowd gathered for his inauguration and the dedication of Pitzer's first and only two buildings, he urged the audience to see not only potential but purpose in the campus' incompleteness.

"The danger to education never lies in discussion and change," he said. "It lies in silence and completion."

During their time at the College, John and Virginia Atherton shaped Pitzer, helping build it from blueprints. They also instilled in the institution the notion of inception—of commencement. At Pitzer, Commencement would become not only a ceremony for graduating students, but a ritual of renewal, the promise that "discussion and change" will make the College rarely silent and ever evolving.



Pitzer has now had almost 50 commencements. The first in 1965 was held for only three students, the last, in 2011, for 229 students. Today, professors continue to pioneer new fields of study. The College offers more than 40 majors and is again under construction, with four mixed-use residence halls that were designed to meet the highest LEED standards slated to open in the fall of 2012.

The Athertons' influence is everywhere on the campus. One of the recent residence halls that opened in 2007, designed to be among the most environmentally responsible and energy efficient in the country, bears the Atherton name. The John W. Atherton Scholarship helps support seniors with financial need who are majoring in English and world literature. The Esther Stewart Richards Scholarship, named to honor Virginia Atherton's mother, was the first endowed scholarship at Pitzer.

When Atherton left Pitzer and returned to teaching at SUNY Brockport in New York, it was the end of an era and another of many beginnings. As the College looks ahead to its 50th birthday and beyond, it will continue to build on the cornerstones the Athertons established almost half a century ago, preparing students to mind the future and change the world.

Virginia Atherton at Commencement, 1970.





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Mindful of the future. In that lovely first year we were all so busy in the present building the future that we forgot we ever had a past. But, like the orange tree that Harriett Crosby presented on behalf of the student body, our roots drew strength from the accumulated experience of The Claremont Colleges, and from those early pioneers who produced orange blossoms from the rocky soil that lay beneath the Pitzer campus.

—*John W. Atherton, Pitzer College founding president*

