



Building America's First University: An Historical and Architectural Guide to the University of Pennsylvania

George E. Thomas, David B. Brownlee

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Building America's First University tells the story of the University of Pennsylvania, a story that begins with Benjamin Franklin's transcendent notion that learning ought not to be restricted to a leading religion or class. Rather than looking back toward antiquarian knowledge, Franklin set his college's course toward the world of the present and the future by focusing on modern languages, the natural sciences, and contemporary literature. His goals were soon reflected in the addition of a course in medicine, the first in the New World, and, by the end of the century, a course in law. This broader definition of education was celebrated after the American Revolution when the College was renamed the University of Pennsylvania, the first American institution to carry that all-encompassing title. In the intervening centuries, Franklin's vision has become the model of American higher education.

Since its founding the University has adapted to reflect the values of the community that has supported it, charting a course between innovation and convention. These changes are evident in the architecture and character of the three campuses that have been its home. From Franklin's adaptation of a nonsectarian chapel as the institution's first quarters to Frank Furness's innovative University Library and Louis Kahn's momentous Richards Medical Research Laboratory, Penn's buildings can be seen as illuminating the evolving intentions of the University's leaders.

Written by architectural historians George E. Thomas and David B. Brownlee, *Building America's First University* uses the physical evidence of Penn's campuses and buildings to illustrate the development of this landmark institution in American education. Part 1 recounts the history of the University, with three of the five chapters devoted to the evolution of the current campus. The historical chapters weave together the often conflicting interests and goals of trustees, administrators, alumni, and students that have shaped the institution of today. Part 2 presents a gazetteer to the campus in its present form—two hundred and fifty years after Benjamin Franklin wrote his "Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania." Here the authors describe every significant building on campus, with at least one photograph of each. Coming at the end of forty years of massive growth, this is the first comprehensive architectural history of the University since the early twentieth century.

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