

# Report on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Gamma Chapter of Massachusetts (Williams College)

Williams College, the Gamma Chapter of Massachusetts, celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its Phi Beta Kappa chapter with a small conference on campus on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015. In addition to celebrating this happy occasion with many friends from campus, we were fortunate to have several distinguished visitors give talks and join in the discussions, including President Kate Soule and Secretary John Churchill from the national office, our visiting scholar Williams Arms from Cornell, the president of the NY PBK Association Jacques Ohayon, Ellen Hurwitz (former president of multiple institutions and a senior consultant at Stevens Strategy), and (fittingly remotely) Kathy Pugh, Vice President of Education Services at EdX. The main theme was the directions liberal arts and learning are moving, with topics ranging from the role of libraries in the future to the use of technology in the classroom and beyond; all talks are available online at [http://web.williams.edu/Mathematics/sjmillier/public\\_html/pbk/](http://web.williams.edu/Mathematics/sjmillier/public_html/pbk/). We gratefully acknowledge support from the national office and Williams College (especially the Sterling Fund and Dining Services).

The first event of the day was a lecture by Bill Arms on “The Early Years of Academic Computing”; this was open to the public and attended by students of Math/Stats 341 (Probability) and CS 136 (Data Structures & Advanced Programming). Most of the students (as well as many of the faculty!) in the audience were unaware of the pivotal role colleges played in the development of much of the internet and computing infrastructure; it was fascinating to hear about the differences in business and education needs for computing, and how that helped drive development.

After adjourning for informal conversations, the program continued with a lively lunch discussion, led by Arms, on “Experiments in Higher Education”. Over 30 people participated, representing many varied communities. Guests ranged from our current (Adam Falk) and a previous (John Chandler) president, to our Sports Information Director Dick Quinn (who proudly shared that, to our knowledge, Williams is the only college to produce a Division I head men’s basketball coach, Dave Paulsen ’87, who is a member of PBK), to students from all divisions and years of study.

The day concluded with six talks. We began with welcoming remarks by Kate Soule, who finally had a chance to say some of the words she had prepared for the bicenquasquigenary anniversary of the Dartmouth Chapter, but which Hurricane Sandy had prevented. We continued with John Churchill talking about Phi Beta Kappa’s National Arts & Sciences Initiative, and then Kathy Pugh skyped in to talk

about the work EdX is doing, Jacques Ohayon discussed the projects and activities of the NY PBK association, and Steven Miller (faculty chapter president at Williams) talked about posting his lectures online (this allows recent graduates to continue their academic involvement with their college, and leads to increased mentoring and interaction between former and current students; it also allows students to take two classes that meet at the same time, and scheduling problems like these are a serious issue at small colleges). We concluded with Bill Arms describing academic libraries in the digital age. We then adjourned for cake and wine, several bottles of which will be stored for the terquasquicentennial, bicentennial, bicenquasquigenary and bicenquinquagenary celebrations to come (the leftover cake was given to students preparing for midterm exams).



--Steven Miller, Faculty Chapter President of Gamma of Massachusetts, PBK '96 of Alpha of Connecticut