

Current Uses

The Amphitheater is also home to commencement each year when about 350 graduating seniors receive their diplomas. David W. Fraser, 12th president of Swarthmore, candidly called commencement a “curious ritual of donning gowns and marching out into

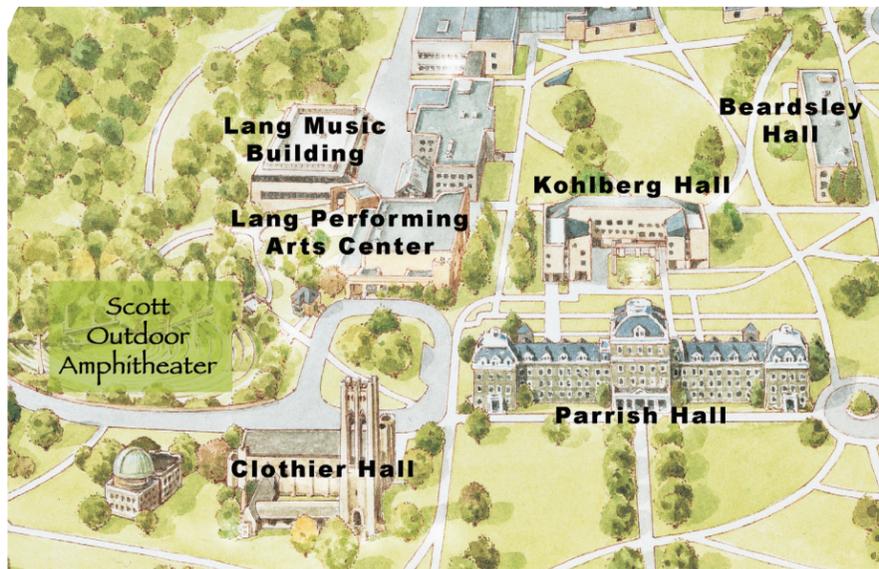


the middle of the woods.” In 1983, after a night of continuous rain with thunder-squalls in the forecast, the ceremony was relocated to the Lamb-Miller Field House. It was the first time commencement would be held indoors since the completion of the Scott Amphitheater in 1942. As recorded in *Swarthmore College: An Informal History*, president Fraser recalled the event:

“The seniors were glum. Small groups pleaded to have the decision reversed. Muttering was heard up and down the ragged line of graduates as they formed in preparation for 10 am ceremonies. Our decision was looking especially suspect because it had stopped raining. One more group of students cornered me and Professor Paul C. Mangelsdorf, Jr. '49, marshal for the commencement exercises, asking that they be allowed to march up to and through the Scott Amphitheater so they might at least see it on graduation day.... So without warning the faculty, Board, or assembled parents (or many of the seniors), we went to the head of the seniors' line, executed a U-turn out of the Field House and marched up the hill. Paul...led them down the steps to the places where they would have sat on a sunnier day and I stepped up on the platform: By the power vested in me by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Board of Managers...

The seniors were absolutely still. I knew my lines but was not at all certain that the Board had vested this power in me – after all, members of the Board were all down in the Field House. When I finished the seniors shouted and cheered. They had trudged up the hill to the Amphitheater but they now skipped back down it. It was more importance than a newcomer might have at first suspected that a Swarthmore tradition – in this case, of graduating outdoors – remained unbroken.”

Swarthmore has had a policy of “rain or shine” for its commencement ever since.



About the Scott Arboretum

The Scott Arboretum is a green oasis uniquely situated on the Swarthmore College campus. Over 300 acres create the College landscape and provide a display of the best ornamental plants recommended for Delaware Valley gardens.

Established in 1929 as a living memorial to Arthur Hoyt Scott, Class of 1895, through a bequest from his family, the Arboretum continues to thrive today. There are over 4,000 different kinds of plants grown on the campus, selected for their outstanding ornamental qualities, ease of maintenance, and resistance to disease. Major plant collections include: flowering cherries, crabapples, hollies, lilacs, magnolias, tree peonies, rhododendrons, hydrangeas, conifers, vines, summer flowering shrubs, viburnums, and witch hazels.

Maps and specialized brochures on plants growing on the campus are available at the Arboretum headquarters, which also houses a horticultural reference library. The Arboretum grounds are open from dawn to dusk year-round. Admission is free.

The Arboretum is supported in part by the Associates of the Scott Arboretum, a membership group. Join today and enjoy an array of fun and educational events year-round.

For additional information, call 610-328-8025, Monday through Friday, 8:30 to noon and 1:00-4:30 pm.

This brochure was updated in April 2012 by Laura Stiebitz. Photos by D. Mattis, R. Maurer, R. Robert.



THE SCOTT ARBORETUM
OF SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

500 College Avenue, Swarthmore, PA 19081

www.scottarboretum.org

Scott Outdoor Amphitheater



THE SCOTT ARBORETUM
OF SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

History

Amphitheaters have been designed and built for entertainment for 2,000 years, originating with the Greeks who first developed amphitheaters at the feet of hillsides for song and oration.



The Scott Amphitheater was built in 1941 when Thomas McCabe, Class of 1915, financed the project as a gift to the College in honor of Arthur Hoyt Scott, class of 1895. Scott had been the president of Scott Paper Company from 1920 until his passing in 1926. McCabe was Arthur's hand-picked successor. The amphitheater was dedicated in 1942 as a tribute to Mr. Scott's lifelong interest in nature, which is continued in the work of the Scott Arboretum, also named for him.

The Scott Amphitheater was built on the site of the old "Magill Outdoor Auditorium" which had been dilapidated and all but vanished. The new design, at a cost of \$700, was drawn by noted landscape architect Thomas W. Sears of Philadelphia. Sears was a graduate of Harvard's Landscape Architecture program in 1906. He designed private residences, schools, playgrounds and parks, cemeteries, and urban housing developments, particularly in the Philadelphia region. His work can also be seen locally at Chanticleer in Wayne, Pennsylvania and Mt. Cuba in Greenville, Delaware, which were previously private estates and are now public gardens.



Design

The Amphitheater was completed, for a total cost of \$16,572, in time for the 1942 commencement exercises. At that ceremony, C. Stuart Gager accepted the 4th Scott Medal and Award and, in his acceptance speech, he noted: "...every friend of Swarthmore College is under special obligation to Mr. Thomas B. McCabe of the Class of 1915, whose generous interest in the College and in the promotion of all that is best in life, has made this theater possible as a memorial to Arthur Hoyt Scott."



Built into a heavily wooded steep natural slope, the amphitheater is minimally and elegantly formed entirely of natural materials. It is truly a blending of nature and man. The columns are formed mainly by the trunks of tulip poplars (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) that are named after their flowers which resemble tulips. The trees' canopies provide a living "ceiling." Surrounding the amphitheater is a screen of evergreens consisting of American holly (*Ilex opaca*), oriental spruce (*Picea orientalis*), and red cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*). Hundreds of rhododendrons have been planted at the edges of the Amphitheater. This was the testing ground for rhododendron breeding carried out by the late John C. Wister, the first director of the Arboretum from 1930-1969. He originally planted seedlings from his hybridization projects in an effort to find rhododendrons that would bloom during mid-June Commencement ceremonies. Commencement is now held at the end of May, missing the results of his efforts.

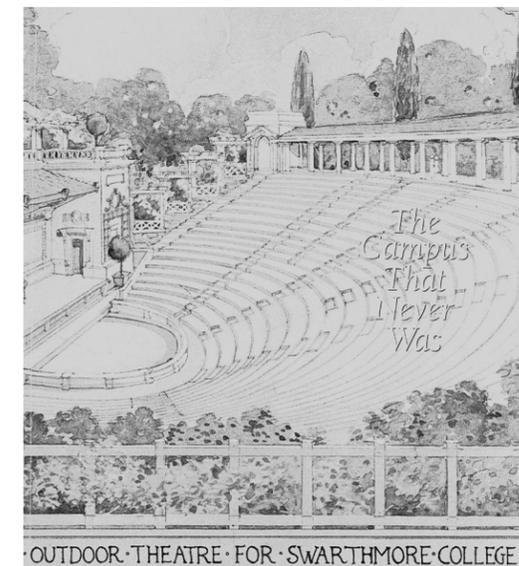


The Amphitheater is 220 feet long from side to side and 110 feet from front to back. The 8 tiers are each about 2 feet tall and 7 ½ feet wide and there is about a 23-foot drop in height from the top tier to the front of the stage. During events, the tiers can hold a total of 2,000 chairs. One of the delights of this space is that it is virtually hidden until one enters the pathways to find the large open, inspiring space with its views into the Crum Woods behind the stage.



What Might Have Been

The respect for place shown by Sears' design can be better appreciated by looking at a drawing of an alternate design proposed to the college by architect E. L. Tilton.



This drawing was reproduced in an article titled "The Campus that Never Was" in the Swarthmore College Bulletin, September 1998.