

One Hundred Years of Economics at Swarthmore

Joshua Hausman¹
Swarthmore class of 2005

This paper presents a history of the Department of Economics at Swarthmore College from the founding of the college until 1970. Two themes dominate this narrative. First, the history of economics teaching at Swarthmore is one of nearly continuous growth and professionalization. When political economy was first offered at Swarthmore in 1872, there was only a single year-long course in the subject. It was taught by Maria Sanford, whose post-secondary education was at a Normal School, and who doubled as the sole professor of history at Swarthmore.² In 1972, in contrast, the Swarthmore Economics Department offered twelve semester-long economics courses and eight seminars. It had eleven full and part-time members, seven of whom had economics Ph.Ds. And members of the Department were specialized teachers, usually teaching only a couple subject areas within economics.

Despite this dramatic growth, there is a notable continuity in the history of economics at Swarthmore: a devotion to Quaker causes and social justice that often superseded purely theoretical interests. Maria Sanford, for example, would become famous for her commitment to progressive causes; after leaving Swarthmore, she gave public lectures that promoted the University of Minnesota. In the 1930's, Patrick Malin, a member of the Department from 1930 to 1950 and a devout Quaker, worked unsuccessfully to make Swarthmore admit African-American students. Malin left Swarthmore in 1950 to lead the American Civil Liberties Union. Sanford and

¹ Research assistant in the Division of International Finance of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Professor John Caskey, Swarthmore College Department of Economics, instigated this study and provided extensive guidance. The Pierson Fund, established in 1978 by Walter and Marge Scheuer in honor of Swarthmore professor of economics, Frank Pierson, provided financial support for this research. I am also indebted to Professors Helen Hunter, Charles Gilbert, David Smith, Frederic Pryor, and Bernard Saffran for graciously agreeing to be interviewed for this project. The views in this paper are solely the responsibility of the author and should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

² A Normal School trained primary school teachers.

Malin were characteristic of the Swarthmore Economics Department. In part because of Swarthmore's Quaker roots, to a notably greater extent than the American economics profession as a whole, members of the Swarthmore Economics Department have combined teaching and academic research with a commitment to the social issues of the day. Thus the Swarthmore Economics Department has generally fallen on the more progressive and less theoretical side of divisions among American economists. From the 1890s through the 1920s, this meant a close association with Richard T. Ely and the German Historical School of Economics. In the 1970s, this meant resistance to the introduction of math into the curriculum, as well as an emphasis on the role that governments can play to ameliorate social problems such as poverty, public health, and unemployment.

The story of the Swarthmore Economics Department begins in 1872, when 'Political Economy' is first listed as a course in the College Catalog. At this time, political economy was becoming established at other American colleges. In a study of twenty-eight American universities and small colleges, John B. Parrish (1967) finds that between 1870 and 1880, the average number of political economy courses offered per year rose from a little less than one to just over one (p. 6). Many teachers of political economy at American institutions did not accept the more pessimistic aspects of classical British political economy (Barber, 1988a, p. 7). They rejected the Malthusian view that population growth would inevitably lead to economic stagnation and doubted that class conflict was unavoidable (Barber, 1988a, p. 7; Jones, 1988, p. 100). Often features of the United States were used to justify departures from classical economic orthodoxy. For example, Barber (1988a) notes that most prominent 19th century American political economists believed that the availability of land in the Western United States meant that an increase in the amount of land cultivated would not necessarily result in the cultivation of less productive land (p. 6-7). Despite these objections to classical economics, it was common for

American political economy courses to use John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* as a text. In the 1870s, it was used at Swarthmore and at Harvard, Brown, Yale, Columbia, and the University of Virginia (Jones, 1988; Barber, 1988b; Barber, 1988c; Rozwadowski, 1988; Snavely, 1967, pp. 66, 70). After 1877, students at Swarthmore also read what the college catalog refers to as Henry Charles Carey's "Lectures." This may refer to pamphlets published by Carey containing some of his lectures and letters (Carey, 1858-1879). Whatever the exact texts read, Carey (1793-1873) would have provided quite a contrast to Mill. Probably the most prominent American economist of the mid-19th century, Carey criticized European classical economics and argued that protectionism would benefit all sectors of the American economy (Barber, 1988a, p. 8-9).

Maria Sanford (1836 – 1920) taught political economy at Swarthmore (Kohlstedt, 1999, p. 262).³ Sanford's formal post-secondary education was at New Britain Normal School, and before coming to Swarthmore, Sanford taught at various local schools in Connecticut and Pennsylvania (Kohlstedt, 1999, p. 262; Whitney, 1922). Sanford was an extremely popular teacher; more than thirty years after taking a class with Sanford, a student commented, not atypically, "no memory of my early schooldays abides so vividly still in my mind as that of this alert, vigorous, and stimulating teacher" (Clifford, 1989, p. 54-55). Sanford also gained a reputation as a public lecturer on topics such as "The Value of Moral Power in the Classroom" (Kohlstedt, p. 262). During her time at Swarthmore, she would frequently leave to give lectures at teachers' institutes (Whitney, p. 93). Her frequent absences occasioned resentment among some members of the college community and resulted in a cut in her salary in 1878 from \$2,000 to \$1,500 (Whitney; Clifford, p. 58).⁴ Perhaps more upsetting to Sanford, by September 1875 she

³ Maria's first name was pronounced "Mariah." For pictures of Sanford, see <http://ispy.mnhs.org/00000000/00000345.JPG> and <http://www1.umn.edu/urelate/kiosk/2.00text/sanford.jpg>.

⁴ \$2000 in 1878 is the equivalent of \$33,770 in 2004 (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>; <http://minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/index.cfm>). (This adjustment for inflation uses changes in the

and Swarthmore's president, Edward Magill, had fallen in love (Whitney, p. 103).⁵ Magill was already married, and it seems that they did not have an affair (Clifford, p. 60). The situation tortured Sanford. She wrote thoughts to herself such as: "Put all your soul into your work" and ". . . it is the rugged path that leads upward always" (Whitney, pp. 104, 106). By 1879, Sanford was ready to leave Swarthmore. Her final decision to resign came after a dream in which she saw her dead mother beckoning her across a fog-shrouded bridge (Whitney, p. 109).⁶

After leaving Swarthmore, Sanford, with Magill's help, obtained a job as a professor of English at the University of Minnesota (Clifford, 1989, p. 50). Again she was quite popular. Sanford taught rhetoric, a class required of all freshmen, and she thus taught more students than any other member of the Minnesota faculty (Clifford, p. 55). She also prepared seniors for compulsory commencement orations and started the college debate team. Sanford's activities made her almost a cult figure to many female students, according to a later member of the Minnesota English Department (Clifford, p. 55-56). As she had in Pennsylvania, Sanford also gained a reputation in Minnesota as an inspiring public lecturer. Geraldine Clifford (1989) reports that Sanford's lectures to teachers, farmer's wives, and civic groups were viewed as critical to creating public support for the University of Minnesota (p. 53). Sanford also devoted her time to progressive causes such as civic beautification and health care for the poor; she encouraged Minneapolis children to plant flowers and helped fight a trachoma outbreak among Blackfoot Indian children in Montana (Whitney, p. 159; Kohlstedt, p. 262).

consumer price index (CPI). Because goods bought by consumers in 2004 are different from those bought by consumers in 1878, this comparison is of limited value. For lack of a simple alternative, however, throughout the paper we shall use changes in the CPI to adjust nominal salaries for inflation.)

⁵ "September 24, 1875, was ever after to [Sanford] and [Magill] a day to be referred to again and again as a wonderful day" (Whitney, p. 103). For a picture of Magill, see http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/University_Library/exhibits/education/images/magill.jpg.

⁶ In his auto-biography, Magill is mostly concerned with his teaching career and does not discuss his relationship with Sanford. He mentions Sanford only in the context of a two page description of her teaching, which he describes as "inspiring" (Magill, p. 176).

Although customarily frugal, in the late 1880s, a student inspired Sanford to invest in Minneapolis real estate (Whitney, p. 132). Not only did Sanford invest her own money, she also convinced many of her friends to let her invest their money for them. According to Helen Whitney, a friend of Sanford's: "Miss Sanford's idea was not to get rich but to help others; and she asked some of her Quaker friends in Pennsylvania and other friends in Connecticut, some of whom were elderly and had a small amount of means, to invest their money in her enterprise, in the hope of providing for their old age" (p. 132). Unfortunately for Sanford, the real estate market collapsed, and she lost everything she had invested – roughly \$30,000.⁷ Despite the council of her friends, Sanford refused to declare bankruptcy. Instead, she lived in poverty for decades while paying off her debts. During this period, in 1899, Magill's wife died, and Magill then "pleaded with [Sanford] to become his wife" (Whitney, p. 108). Sanford refused. Whitney suggests that Sanford did not want Magill to be burdened with her debts (p. 108-109). Sanford received numerous posthumous honors for her services to Minnesota. Most notably, in 1958, a statue of Sanford was placed in the U.S. Capitol by the Minnesota Legislature.⁸ The State Legislature's wish was to honor "Minnesota's outstanding woman educator, whose life was an inspiring example of heroic American womanhood" (State of Minnesota, 1960, p. xvi).

Sanford's resignation left Swarthmore scrambling to find someone to teach political economy (Hull, [1939]). From 1880 to 1886, political economy was not always offered at Swarthmore, and teachers of the subject came and went (Hull). After 1886, William P. Holcomb, a professor of history and political science, taught political economy.⁹ Holcomb obtained his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins in 1886. His sole academic publication was a fifty-one page history of

⁷ In 2004 dollars, Sanford invested about \$600,000 (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>; <http://minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/index.cfm>). Although biographies of Sanford give no exact dates, the real estate market collapse almost certainly came during the panic of 1893.

⁸ For a picture of Sanford's statue, see <http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/images/sanford.jpg>.

⁹ Holcomb also taught political economy while at Swarthmore for one year in 1882-83.

borough government in Pennsylvania. Entitled *Pennsylvania Boroughs*, this work was probably Holcomb's Ph.D. thesis – evidence that Holcomb's degree was in history or political science. It is certain that Holcomb did not obtain a Ph.D. in political economy, because Johns Hopkins awarded no political economy Ph.Ds between 1878 and 1888 (Parrish, p. 7). Still, while at John Hopkins, Holcomb might well have taken courses in political economy.

With Holcomb on the faculty, Swarthmore offered one or two political economy courses each year. The texts for the political economy course were Carey's and Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* and "additional reading." Starting in 1886-87, Francis Amasa Walker's *Political Economy* replaced Mill's and Carey's texts. Walker's textbook was a popular college economics text for twenty years (Adelstein, 1988, p. 302). On policy matters, Walker had a moderate reputation; he championed free markets, but believed that government intervention in the economy was sometimes necessary (Coats and Williams, 1999). In addition to reading Walker, "topics [were] assigned requiring reading in Mill, Thompson¹⁰, Roscher, List, Marshall, Laveleye, etc" (Swarthmore College Bulletin, 1886-87, p. 31). Thus students were exposed to a variety of different views of political economy. John Stuart Mill gave students the classical British perspective, while Wilhelm Roscher provided an example of the early German historical school. From Georg Friedrich List, students would have read that tariffs should be erected to stimulate American industry. Emile de Laveleye, a Belgian political economist and politician, was strongly in favor of state intervention in the economy. These varied texts suggest a serious, balanced economics course. In an unfinished history of Swarthmore College, however, Holcomb's successor, William I. Hull ([1939]), argues that Holcomb's political economy course was more about the history and politics of the United States and England than it was about economics (p. 6).

¹⁰ Thompson may refer to Thomas Perronet Thompson (1783-1869) or William Thompson (1785-1833).

Trade issues probably figured prominently in Holcomb's teaching. Much of 19th century academic debate among political economists concerned the merits of free trade versus protectionism, and this issue was a particularly sensitive one in Philadelphia. Led by men such as the metals manufacturer Joseph Wharton (1826-1909), the Philadelphia manufacturing was vociferously protectionist (Sass, 1988). Joseph Wharton called free trade "a 'fungus . . . which healthy political organisms can hardly afford to tolerate'" (qtd. In Sass, p. 227). As a condition on his gift of \$100,000 for the founding of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, Wharton insisted that students be taught the virtues of protectionism (Sass, p. 227).

Wharton was also president of the Swarthmore Board of Managers, and, starting in 1888-1889, Holcomb became the "Joseph Wharton Professor of History and Political Science."¹¹ It would not have been surprising if Holcomb felt compelled to emphasize the merits of protectionism in order to please Wharton. Hull ([1939]) anticipates this question and argues that even after Wharton endowed Holcomb's position, Holcomb's classes continued to treat the free-trade debate in a balanced way. As evidence, Hull cites the use of Francis Amasa Walker's text. In his textbook, Walker (1888) argues that tariffs cannot create wealth (p. 508):

That which is called "protection" operates only by restraint; it has and can have neither creative power nor healing efficacy. All the energy that is to produce wealth exists before it and without respect to it; and just to the extent to which protection operates at all, it operates by impairing that energy, and reducing the sum of wealth that might be produced if protection did not exist.

I say, might be produced, not that *would* be produced. The latter point may fairly be disputed between the free-trader, who should rather be called the free-producer, and the advocate of the system of restricted production.

Walker's non-dogmatic support of free trade would be echoed in the Swarthmore Economics Department in future years.

¹¹ Robinson J. Hollister is currently the "Wharton Professor of Economics." His views on free trade are not published.

Holcomb taught political economy until 1892, when William I. Hull (1868-1939) became Swarthmore's first associate professor of "Political Economy and Social Science." Like Holcomb, Hull obtained a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins. Hull's doctorate was in History and Political Science, and in 1891, Hull studied history at the University of Berlin.¹² Although not his major at John Hopkins, political economy was Hull's "minor" or "1st Subordinate" subject. We know from his class notebooks that Hull took at least the following four courses in political economy: "Political Economy," "Money and Bi-Metallism, Banking," "Finance," and "History of Political Economy." Richard T. Ely, the founder of the American Economic Association, taught these courses.

Ely was a harsh critic of the attempt by classical economists to make political economy a positive science akin to the natural sciences. Ely believed economists should concern themselves with understanding and recommending solutions to social problems (Barber, 1988d, p. 214). Ely's views were a result of time he spent studying in Germany; there, Ely was exposed to a tradition of political economy that emphasized history more than natural laws (Barber, 1988d, pp. 209-211). In the late 19th century, as today, debates on economic methodology were not always civil. When Ely published a paper outlining his views on economics in 1884, he ignited a violent debate among American economists (Barber, 1998d, p. 214). In a line that could be taken from a New Classical economist today, Ely's principal antagonist, Simon Newcomb (1884, p. 300), criticizes Ely's school for not starting with assumptions about individual behavior:

The one fundamental principle of [Ely's school] is, that instead of beginning with certain hypothetical principles of human nature it professes to start from the great facts of history and statistics. Starting in such a way would be as bad as commencing the study of geometry by instructing the pupil in land-surveying, or commencing physics by taking the student around to see all the machinery in a city at work.

¹² Until around 1900, it was common for American graduate students (including political economists) to study, and sometimes obtain Ph.Ds, in Germany (Parrish, 1967, p. 3-6).

Ely's students tended to be on Ely's side of this debate (Barber, 1988d, pp. 216-218), and Hull was likely no exception. Evidence comes from the 1893 Swarthmore President's report (pp. 15-16):

The especial advantage of economic and social sciences as knowledge is, that they deal with the most useful data of a large part of our daily life. They reveal the facts, tendencies, and laws that underlie a large part of the social, business, and commercial activity of the people. They furnish the best possible preparation for mastership in business, as compared with the clerkship, for which the commercial schools prepare. . . . The tendency of the old mathematical training was to make the student attempt to solve intricate problems in economics, politics, morals, or sociology, with a few axiomatic general principles for premises. This method is valid in mathematics, where all factors entering into a problem can be precisely determined, but it has less value in determining, for instance, whether free trade or protection, double or single standard of coinage, centralization or decentralization, will best promote the welfare of the country. The conditions of such problems are so intricate and numerous that the mathematical method of treatment is wholly inadequate. . . . Instead of proceeding deductively from general principles to facts, the economist now takes the facts as he finds them, studies their significance, and finally draws his conclusions after weighing them in all their relations. This is precisely what the practical man must also do.

It is unclear whether Hull wrote this section of the President's report, but as the only teacher of political economy at Swarthmore, his views were no doubt similar to those in this report. Also, in the 1892-93 academic year, Hull offered a course on "History of Economic Theories; Social Problems" with a discussion of "such topics as Charity; Penology; Women Wage-Earners; The Labor of Children in Factories; The University Settlement Idea and its Extension, including Toynbee Hall and allied movements." The emphasis here on social problems and solutions is further evidence that Hull fell on Ely's side of the late 19th century division in academic economics.

With the addition of Hull to the faculty in 1892, Swarthmore offered four political economy courses rather than one or two, and for the first time majors could devote their entire junior and senior years to "Political Economy and Social Science." Majors spent one semester studying each of the following topics, in the following order: "General Principles of Political

Economy,” “Protectionism and Free Trade; Money and Banking,” “Finance and Taxation; Socialism,” and “History of Economic Theories; Social Problems” (see description above). Political economy majors probably spent their first two years studying history. Between 1895 and 1897, however, political economy majors spent the first semester of their senior year studying “Primitive Culture and the Philosophy of History” and “Sociology” (Catalog, 1895-1896, p. 44). Also, between 1895 and 1898, Hull taught “Protection and Free Trade” to “History and Political Science” majors, but not to “Economics and Social Science” majors. Particularly at Swarthmore, where mathematical economics was not in favor, boundaries between the social sciences were fluid.

In offering more political economy courses in the 1890s than it had in the 1880s, Swarthmore was following a nationwide trend. John B. Parrish (1967) argues that in the last thirty years of the 19th century, political economy moved from the periphery to the center of American academia. In his sample of 28 colleges and universities, Parrish (1967) finds that the average number of political economy courses offered per year rose from five to eleven between 1890 and 1900 (p. 9). Concurrently, far more students began to leave graduate schools with economics Ph.Ds. American institutions granted eleven economics Ph.Ds in the 1880s and 95 in the 1890s (Parrish, p. 11). Fortunately for the graduating economists, the 1890s also saw more academic jobs open to economists (Parrish, p. 11). Although not until after 1900, Swarthmore would soon be part of the growing demand for trained economists.

First Swarthmore had to change. The college was still very much a Quaker institution at the end of the 19th century. To insure its Quaker character, the Board of Managers often micro-managed college life. In 1897, the Board refused to let Swarthmore students attend off-campus religious services, overruling the faculty’s recommendation (Leslie, 1977, p. 241). Despite the board’s efforts, or perhaps because of them, Swarthmore found it increasingly difficult to

compete with richer, more prestigious colleges for Quaker students: in 1900, only one half of Swarthmore's student body was Quaker (Leslie, p. 241). Swarthmore was also in financial trouble, in part because it made little effort to obtain alumni donations (Leslie, p. 242).¹³ These problems led the Board of Managers to appoint Joseph Swain as Swarthmore's president in 1902 (Leslie, p. 247). Swain agreed to be president on the condition that Swarthmore increase its endowment in three years from \$400,000 to one million dollars (Magill, p. 280). He also demanded more power over faculty hiring. The Board of Managers agreed to these conditions, and Swarthmore entered a period, not of academic excellence, but of "conformity" with other American colleges (Hunt, 1963, p. 10).

Prior to 1904, Swain did little to change the Department of History and Political Economy. Until then, Hull continued to lead the Department and to teach political economy as well as history. But in 1904, the Department of History and Political Economy split into two departments: the Department of History led by Hull, and the Department of Economics and Political Science led by Robert C. Brooks (1874-1941), a new professor. Hull continued to teach history at Swarthmore until 1939, the year of his death. During these years, Hull became a prominent pacifist; he was an official observer at the writing of the covenant of the League of Nations, and testified against the expansion of the American Navy at a 1928 congressional hearing (Friends Historical Library, 1990). Although Hull never published academic work on economics, he published numerous books and articles on international relations and Quaker history.

Hull's replacement by Brooks was a step towards a more professional Swarthmore Economics Department. Brooks received his A.B. from Indiana University in 1896, and his Ph.D. from Cornell in 1903. He was also "President White Traveling Fellow" at the Universities

¹³ Of course, because Swarthmore did not open until 1869, in 1900 there were few alumni.

of Halle and Berlin during the 1898-99 academic year.¹⁴ Although the Swarthmore college catalog does not specify what subject Brooks studied in graduate school, it might well have been economics. Brooks was an “Assistant in Economics” at Cornell in 1899-1900, and he led the Cornell Department of Civics and Economics during summer sessions in 1902 and 1903. While at Swarthmore, Brooks published extensively on both economics and politics. In 1905, for example, Brooks published an article entitled “Berlin’s Tax Problem,” and in 1906, he wrote a review of C. A. Conant’s *Principles of Money and Banking* (Swain, 1906, p. 31-32).

During Brook’s first year at Swarthmore, 1904, he was forced to teach English classes, and therefore was only able to offer one economics course: “Elementary Economics and Public Finance” (Swain, 1906, p. 29). The textbooks used were Frank A. Fetter’s *The Principles of Economics, with Applications to Practical Problems*, and Winthrop More Daniel’s *The Elements of Public Finance, including the Monetary System of the United States*. It is unsurprising that Brooks used Fetter’s textbook: at Cornell, Brooks had taught the elementary economics class under Fetter’s supervision (Brooks, 1906a, p. 87). Evidently, Brooks expected he would have to make the elementary economics course easier for Swarthmore students. Brooks (1906a) wrote, “I had presumed that some modification of this work in the way of rendering it more elementary in character would be needed in order to adapt it to conditions at Swarthmore” (Brooks, p. 87). Brooks was pleasantly surprised; he goes on to write that Swarthmore students were able to handle the unmodified Cornell course.¹⁵

Beginning in 1905-06, Swarthmore no longer needed Brooks to teach English, so he was able to offer multiple economics courses. Brooks taught three economics courses in 1905-06: “Elementary Economics and Railroad Transportation,” “Practical Questions in Economics,” and

¹⁴ Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918) was the first president of Cornell University.

¹⁵ Brook’s observation also applies to a political science class that he taught in 1904-1905.

“Money, Credit, and Banking.” The elementary economics course continued to use Fetter’s textbook, along with Emory R. Johnson’s (1904) *American Railway Transportation*. Johnson’s text on the American railway industry might be considered an industrial organization case study today. Johnson’s analysis of the railway industry often vividly illustrates neo-classical microeconomic theory. Johnson explains, for example, that large fixed costs mean that railroad companies continue to operate for some time even if they are losing money; as long as their revenue is greater than their operating costs, railroad companies do not shut down in the short run (Johnson, p. 222). At times, Johnson also uses verbal microeconomic analysis similar to that found in contemporary microeconomic textbooks. He writes, for instance (p. 5):

As far as rent depends upon location, the determining factor is transportation, and every improvement or change in the facilities or costs of transportation services must have an influence upon the total amount of “rent” received by the owners of natural agents and must readjust the distribution of that form of income among its recipients.¹⁶

The attention paid to railroads in Course I is one example of how the economics course curriculum was devoted to understanding business institutions and current economic issues. Even the class on money and banking, the first at Swarthmore, had an emphasis on the practical and institutional, as well as the theoretical. The course description was: “A study of the economic theories underlying money, credit, and banking, and of the history and practical workings of financial institutions. Visits to the mint, clearing house, and banks in Philadelphia; practical talks by alumni engaged in banking.”

Economics classes taught by Brooks were quite popular. In 1906-07, 121 students were enrolled in an economics course, with 44 students taking elementary economics.¹⁷ Three hundred and ten students attended Swarthmore, and thus more than a third of the student body took

¹⁶ Arthur O’Sullivan’s (2003, pp. 170-173) contemporary textbook on urban economics contains a very similar account of the determination of land rent in the context of a discussion of bid-rent functions in a monocentric city.

¹⁷ The college computed the total number of students taking economics by adding up the number of students enrolled in each economics course. Thus students who took more than one economics course were double-counted.

economics. President Swain, however, wished to expand the Economics Department further. In his 1906 report to the Board of Managers, Swain writes (p. 26):

Additional courses should be presented in the department of Economics, such as accounting and other subjects useful to a student preparing for a business career. There are 121 students now enrolled in the department. The number would be larger if we had the courses suggested.

The Economics Department did not offer accounting until the mid-1920s, but Brooks taught a course on “Modern Business Practice” in 1906-07. This course was intended “to present in a concrete and simple manner various business institutions and practices with which students will come into contact after leaving college. . . .” (Catalog, 1906-1907, p. 124).

Brooks continued to teach economics at Swarthmore through the 1907-08 academic year, after which he left for the University of Cincinnati. He returned to Swarthmore in 1912 as a professor of political science, and although he was in charge of the Economics Department in 1925-26, Brooks never again taught an economics course at Swarthmore. In 1908, Louis N. Robinson (1880-1952) replaced Brooks as the leader of the Economics and Political Science department. Robinson received his undergraduate degree from Swarthmore in 1905 and his Ph.D. from Cornell in 1911. And as a “Joshua Lippincott Traveling Fellow of Swarthmore College” in 1906-07, he studied at the Universities of Halle and Berlin. Unfortunately, the Swarthmore College course catalog does not state what subjects Robinson studied at Cornell or in Germany. The catalog reports, however, that Robinson was a “Fellow in Economics and Statistics” at Cornell, suggesting that he studied economics.

Robinson was assisted by three instructors from the Wharton Business School: Scott Nearing, J. Russell Smith, and Frank D. Watson. Scott Nearing (1883-1983), who received his economics Ph.D. from Wharton in 1909, eventually became a well-known pacifist, socialist, and environmentalist. With the help of Nearing, Smith, and Watson, the Swarthmore Economics Department was able to offer six courses in 1908-09 and nine courses in 1909-10. Robinson

taught the more theoretical courses: Elementary Economics, Money and Banking, and Public Finance. The three instructors from Wharton were devoted to progressive causes, and the courses they offered reflected this (Nearing, 1972). In 1909-10, for example, Scott Nearing taught a course on “The Social Cost of Economic Maladjustment.” The course description was an outline of progressive concerns (College Catalog, 1909, p. 87):

A discussion of the development of the idea of Social Cost and the existence of Economic Maladjustment, followed and illustrated by the intensive study of the Dependence of Women, Low Wages and Standards, Congestion, Housing in Cities, High Death Rate and Short Life, Bad Working Conditions, Industrial Accidents and Unemployment. In each case, an analysis of the problem will be made to show (1) that it is a maladjustment; (2) that its effects are economic; (3) that it is remediable. The course will be rounded out by a final discussion of the methods of overcoming maladjustment.

This course reflects Nearing’s belief that, in his words, “If there was exploitation and corruption in the society I should speak out against it” (Nearing, p. 56). Nearing was influenced by Simon Patten (1852-1922), the leader of the Economics Department at the University of Pennsylvania from 1888 to 1917 (Nearing, 1972; Saltmarsh, 1991). Like his good friend Richard T. Ely, Patten criticized classical economics and felt that economists should advocate social change: “The economist’s proper task [Patten believed] was to educate and energize middle-class opinion” (Henderson, 1988, p. 326; Sass, 1988, p. 236). With something like this in mind, Nearing co-authored an economics textbook with Frank Watson for use in the University of Pennsylvania’s introductory economics course (Nearing, 1972, p. 53-54; Sass, 1988, p. 237). Written under Patten’s watchful eye, *Economics* points out both problems of capitalism and possible solutions (Nearing, 1972, p. 53).

At the same time that Nearing taught courses at Swarthmore, he also taught at the University of Pennsylvania and devoted attention to social issues outside the classroom, particularly child labor. He led the Pennsylvania Child Labor Committee, and frequently lectured on the subject (Sass, 1988, p. 238). Nearing’s lectures on this and other topics did not please the

University of Pennsylvania administration or powerful members of the Pennsylvania business community, and in an unusual act, the trustees of the University of Pennsylvania fired Nearing in the summer of 1915, two years after he gave his last course at Swarthmore (Sass, 1988, p. 238). John Saltmarsh (1991) reports that Joseph Grundy, a wealthy Pennsylvania wool manufacturer who opposed efforts to ban child labor, probably used his political connections to stall state appropriations to the University of Pennsylvania until Nearing left (p. 97). Although the trustees may have feared public protests, many wished to see Nearing go (Saltmarsh). One trustee “admitted that Nearing was a problem because ‘he advocated the ruthless redistribution of property’” (Saltmarsh, p. 97).

Perhaps for reasons similar to those that motivated the University of Pennsylvania trustees, President Swain wanted Nearing to leave Swarthmore in 1911/12. But Swain did not count on Nearing’s willingness to work for free. Nearing (1972, p. 59) recalls:

When it came to planning for the third year, President Swain called me into his office, thanked me for helping out, and regretted that no money was available in the budget to continue my teaching at Swarthmore for a third year.¹⁸ “Don’t worry about money,” I told him. “I can live on my University [of Pennsylvania] salary. I would like to spend one more term here finishing up a project with a group of students.” With issues then getting warmer at the University of Pennsylvania I had an idea that President Swain would have been just as glad to have me off his campus. But since I was willing to teach a term without a salary, even paying my own traveling expenses, I was allowed to round out my work satisfactorily before leaving Swarthmore.

Nearing is the only Swarthmore economics professor ever to have taught without compensation.¹⁹

¹⁸ College course catalogs indicate that Nearing actually taught at Swarthmore for five years (Catalog, 1908-1913).

¹⁹ After he was fired from the University of Pennsylvania, Nearing taught and served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the Toledo University in 1916-17, but was fired once again because of his anti-war views (Saltmarsh, 1991, pp. 109, 122). The next year, after he authored an anti-war pamphlet, *The Great Madness*, Nearing was arrested and indicted by the U.S. Government under the Espionage Act (Saltmarsh, p. 145). He was acquitted by a jury in 1919. Despite numerous publications, Nearing was unable to find employment in academic institutions and became a free-lance lecturer and writer. He joined the Socialist Party in 1917, and in 1918, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress on the Socialist ticket against Fiorella LaGuardia. Because its leadership persisted in denouncing the Soviet Union, Nearing resigned from the Socialist Party in 1922. He joined the Communist Party in 1927, but

Nearing is also the only Swarthmore professor to have taught eugenics in an economics class. He omits his past interest in eugenics from his 1972 autobiography, but the Swarthmore College Catalog printed the following description of Nearing's 1910-11 and 1911-12 "Current Economic Problems" course:

This course is designed to emphasize the economic factors which through their effect on individuals as such contribute to race progress. After an analysis of the determining factors in race progress, three current problems are considered in detail: (1) Changes in the economic status of the American home; (2) changes in the economic status of women; (3) the development of the new science of Eugenics as a means of insuring race progress.

In a 1912 book, *The Super Race: An American Problem*, Nearing develops his ideas on race and eugenics. He describes one element of his desired policy (p. 40):

The first step in Eugenics progress – the elimination of defects by preventing the procreation of defectives – is easily stated, and may be almost as easily obtained. The price of six battleships (\$50,000,000) would probably provide homes for all of the seriously defective men, women and children now at large in the United States. Yet with tens of thousands of defectives, freely propagating their kind, we continue to build battle-ships, fondly believing that rifled cannon and steel armor plate will prove sufficient for national defense.

For Nearing in 1912, preventing some members of society from reproducing was closely linked to a progressive program that included the redistribution of income, the elimination of war, and the "emancipation" of women (Nearing, 1912). Nearing's thought on eugenics was not unusual during the Progressive Era. "[E]ugenic treatment of those deemed biologically inferior," Thomas C. Leonard (2003, p. 688) argues, "was promoted *as a means* to the end of uplifting the industrial poor." Simon Patten, Nearing's teacher at the University of Pennsylvania, believed that

attempted to resign in 1930 when it refused to publish an essay that he had written. The Communist Party would not accept Nearing's resignation. Rather, it declared that Nearing's ideas were out of line with true communist doctrine and expelled him. By the 1930s, Nearing had become bitter that he could not get a teaching job or find outlets in which to publish. He wrote (1972, p. 160) in his autobiography, "I have had the 'right' to teach, but no university or school in the country would accept me. I could speak, but few public forums would allow me on their platforms. I could write, but my books were not published by recognized firms..." In the early 1930s, Nearing and his second wife moved to Vermont, where they lived a nearly self-sufficient life as farmers while advocating environmentalism and pacifism. After living in relative obscurity for several decades, in the 1960s, Nearing was rediscovered by Vietnam War protesters and environmental advocates. Nearing died in 1983. Many of his papers are located in the Swarthmore College library's Peace Collection.

societal progress necessitated the “eradication of the vicious and inefficient” (qtd. in Leonard, p. 694). Otherwise, productivity increases would allow the unfit to reproduce in ever-larger numbers (Leonard, p. 693-694).

Interestingly, unlike many Swarthmore economics courses in the early 20th century, Nearing’s course on eugenics was more popular with women than it was with men. The Swarthmore Presidents Report (1912) published the following statistics on economics course enrollment in the 1911-12 academic year (p. 28):

	Men	Women
Elementary Economics	28	20
Criminology	14	10
Money, Credit, and Banking	11	3
Practical Problems in Economics and Government	12	5
Current Economic Problems*	13	33
National Efficiency* ²⁰	13	28
Total	91	96
Students at Swarthmore	176	227

(* Taught by Nearing)

We do not know why Nearing’s courses attracted so many more women than men. Perhaps Nearing’s emphasis on social problems and social change appealed to female students at the time. During the First World War era, economics classes on Criminology and Philanthropy also attracted more women than men.

In 1912, during Nearing’s time at Swarthmore, the Economics Department finally split from political science to become its own department.²¹ Louis Robinson led the Department for

²⁰ From the college catalog: “The course on Current Economic Problems (118) deals with some of the economic factors which affect progress through the individual. The present course aims to include those economic factors which affect progress through the group. The elements in National Efficiency are discussed, and four specific problems are analyzed to show their bearing upon the general topic: (1) Conservation of Natural Resources; (2) Maintenance of Efficiency Through Normal standards of Living; (3) Conservation of the Working Life; (4) Education as a Means of Promoting Efficiency.”

²¹ It is possible than in some years before 1912, economics and political science majors could choose to take only economics courses. Thus even before economics became its own department, there may have been de facto economics majors.

its first six years, usually with the help of one or two ‘assistants’ or ‘acting instructors.’ Often those helping Robinson had only a B.A., and may not have had teaching experience. Joseph H. Willits (1964, p. 22) briefly describes how he was hired by Robinson to teach political science in 1911: “[Louis Robinson] gave me a teaching assistantship at Swarthmore to cover my expenses during my first year of graduate work. I taught a course in city government, a subject I had never studied!” Although Robinson had assistants to teach some classes, he taught much more than Swarthmore professors do today. Most semesters Robinson taught four or five courses or roughly ten to thirteen hours a week. This is almost double the current Swarthmore teaching load of three two-and-a-half hour courses in one semester, and two in the other semester. Despite his teaching load, by modern standards, Robinson was paid little. In the 1917-18 academic year, Robinson received \$2,000, or about 29,230 2004 dollars (Robinson to Swain, 2/27/1917; <http://minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/index.cfm>). This compares to an average salary of \$109,760 for full professors at Swarthmore in 2003-04 (Swarthmore College, 2003). The salary difference is even larger when one considers that in 1917, an academic salary had to support an entire family, whereas in today’s households, there is often a second wage earner.²²

Robinson was not always pleased with the combination of hard work and low pay. On February 22, 1918, President Swain wrote Robinson “to offer [Robinson] the position of Professor in Economics in Swarthmore College for the academic year July 1, 1918 to July 1, 1919 at a salary of Two thousand dollars (\$2,000.)” Robinson replied on March 7th: “I am willing to accept thy²³ offer of \$2000, providing it does not mean more than nine hours of work

²² As mentioned above, the usefulness of the consumer price index for adjusting nominal salaries for inflation is limited. Instead, one can ask what material comforts a family could afford in 1917 on \$2,000 dollars a year. The answer: not many. According to Peixotto (1927, p. 250), in 1922, “recognizing that a simple, middle-class, professional standard of consumption is permissible and necessary for this academic group, ‘no due care in spending’ can make three thousand dollars pay for the needs of a professor’s family. (\$3,000 in 1922 was the equivalent of \$2,290 in 1917.)

²³ The use of ‘thee’ instead of ‘you,’ ‘thy’ instead of ‘your,’ ‘First-day’ instead of Monday and so on, was a Quaker mannerism.

[a week] for me. I am giving at the present time at least fourteen, and in view of this fact and the smallness of the salary I feel that I am not making any exorbitant demands on the college.” This was unacceptable to Swain and he wrote back to Robinson:

I understand thy letter of March 7th to be a declination of the offer made thee for next year, in my letter of February 22nd, of the Professorship of Economics in Swarthmore College. Under the present conditions, I believe the Professor of Economics should teach at least twelve hours [a week] each semester.

There is a meeting of the Board next Third-day. If thy letter of March 7th is not intended as a resignation, please let me have a definite answer in writing, on or before next Second-day . . .

After a “conversation” with Swain, Robinson accepted Swain’s offer (Robinson to Swain, 3/11/1918). But his acceptance was short-lived. On May 29th, Robinson informed Swain that he had received and would be accepting an offer to be the Chief Probation Officer at the Philadelphia Municipal Court. This job paid \$5,000, two and a half times his Swarthmore salary, so it is no surprise that Robinson accepted the position.

Robinson requested that he be granted leave from Swarthmore; he hoped to return in one or two years to teach classes on criminology and philanthropy. In his absence, Robinson suggested Swain hire an assistant to teach economics. Swain refused. He wished, “to appoint a strong man who will give his chief energies to the work of the department” (Swain to Robinson, 6/1/1918). To find his man, we know that Swain wrote to the University of Wisconsin. (He may have written other schools as well, but if so, there is no evidence from Swain’s papers.) Richard T. Ely, who had been a leader of economics instruction at the University of Wisconsin since 1892, suggested Thomas K. Urdahl (1869-1940), a graduate of and professor at Wisconsin, to Swain.²⁴ Ely explained that Urdahl’s wife was in insane asylum near Madison. He believed that, “Under a change of associations [Urdahl] would work to far greater advantage” (Ely to Swain,

²⁴In 1915, Urdahl had a Spanish Colonial house built for himself in Madison that received a 2004 “Preservation Award” from the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation (see http://www.madisontrust.org/awards/04_urdahl.html for a picture of the house).

6/7/1918). Swain was concerned that Urdahl's wife's insanity would impair his teaching. But Ely reassured him (Ely to Swain, 6/13/1918):

Professor Urdahl is forty-nine years of age and strong and vigorous. I think that is a very good age for you. . . . You ask if the fact about his wife's insanity will not so color his life that he will be less useful than formerly. This has an adverse influence upon him only while he is in Madison. He goes to see her when here, and this is bad for her and bad for him.

Urdahl visited Swarthmore, and was pleased with what he saw. But, as with Robinson, pay was an issue. If Urdahl had remained at the University of Wisconsin, he would have earned \$3,500, and he could augment his income by teaching summer school.²⁵ Swain offered Urdahl only \$3,000 to teach twelve hours a week. Urdahl took the job, perhaps because of his wife's insanity, perhaps because the job at Swarthmore would make it easier for him to continue work he was doing at the Federal Trade Commission.

At 49, Urdahl was the oldest economics professor that Swarthmore had yet hired. Holcomb, Hull, Brooks, Robinson, and Nearing all began teaching economics at Swarthmore before or immediately after receiving their Ph.Ds. By hiring Urdahl, Swain deliberately hired an established economist, and this was an expensive choice. Urdahl was paid one third more than Robinson would have been. For the extra money, Swain did not get an economist who published extensively. At the 1917 American Economic Association meeting, Urdahl was on a panel that discussed "Loans and Taxes in War Finance." The transcript of the discussion was printed in the *American Economic Review*, and this was the only work by Urdahl ever published in an academic journal.²⁶ Despite his lack of published work, Urdahl's association with the Wisconsin Economics Department must have made him seem to Swain to be a safe choice. Not only was

²⁵ Adjusted using the CPI, \$3500 in 1918 had the purchasing power of \$43,370 in 2004 (<http://minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/index.cfm>).

²⁶ No other publication by Urdahl is listed in the American Economic Association's *Index of Economic Journals*. During his time at Swarthmore, however, Urdahl helped write government documents for the Federal Trade Commission. In 1921, he contributed to the "The Report on the Packing Industry." Urdahl may also have written parts of government documents before coming to Swarthmore.

Urdahl a professor at Wisconsin from 1910 to 1918, he had also chaired the Department (Lampman, 1993, p. 261). Urdahl's association with Ely's economics was likely also attractive. Urdahl was Ely's colleague at the University of Wisconsin, and he studied closely with Ely in graduate school.

During his seven years at Swarthmore, Urdahl regularly taught courses on economic theory, philanthropy, and business. Perhaps as Ely would have, Urdahl combined elements of theoretical, practical, and progressive economics in his classes. It would be difficult, for example, to classify Urdahl's class on "Corporation Finance and the Problems of Business" as purely a business course. The college catalog described it (1919-20, p. 79):

The historical development, the changes in structure, the organizing, the financing, the management, the economic and social problems of business are considered in detail.

In the early 1920s, it was common for courses in economics departments to fall on the border between economics and business. Tipton R. Snavely (1967, pp. 123-124) notes that in the early 1920s, the separation of courses at the University of Virginia between the Economics Division and the Business Administration Division "was often based on expediency as well as logic."

Urdahl, like Robinson before, had help from an "assistant." The assistant sometimes helped Urdahl teach elementary economics, but other economics courses were probably taught by Urdahl alone.²⁷ There were obvious limits to the size and professionalization of a one-man department: no more than six or seven courses were offered, and Urdahl could not concentrate on teaching one area of economics. In 1922, these limits became more severe when Frank Aydelotte, who replaced Swain in 1921, started the Swarthmore honors program. The honors program put students on two tracks during their last two years: honors and course. For honors students, classes were replaced by weekly seminars. At the time of the honors program's

²⁷ An exception was "Business Law," which was listed as an economics course from 1919-20 through 1936-37. Claude Smith taught business law from 1919 to 1926.

inception, there was no separate economics honors major. Instead, honors economics students were social science honors majors; they spent their last two years studying philosophy, history, political science, and economics. Urdahl, of course, provided instruction in economics.

Urdahl was not well liked by students or Aydelotte. In the spring of 1923, the honors social science students wrote President Aydelotte to complain about the 6,739 pages of reading assigned by Urdahl, and the “disunity of the present semester’s work in economics.” They noted that these problems were “due not so much to subject matter as to the methods of the man in charge.” Aydelotte also found Urdahl to be disorganized. In the spring of 1923, he wrote Urdahl (5/10):

You may remember that you promised to bring me on May 2 a careful outline of topics and readings in Economics. I have not yet received this and yesterday Professor Brooks was inquiring about them with some anxiety . . .

Urdahl made himself unpopular at Swarthmore even before Aydelotte arrived. In the spring of 1920, a concerned president Swain wrote letters to people around the country to learn more about Urdahl. Swain had heard from a Swarthmore alum that some members of the University of Wisconsin faculty were surprised that Swarthmore had hired Urdahl. The Wisconsin faculty members had “criticized [Urdahl’s] scholarship and his ability to work without friction with other people” (Swain to Glover D. Hancock, 3/29/1920). From his inquiries, Swain received mostly positive reports on Urdahl. Nevertheless, there were hints of problems. John R. Commons, the Wisconsin economist, implied that Urdahl unjustifiably held grudges against Wisconsin faculty members (3/23/1920):

I found [Urdahl] bitter towards certain individuals whom he suspected of undermining him. My view then was, as I said to him, that nobody was undermining him, that everyone of us had tried that big class in elementary economics and had made a failure of it . . .

And a University of Wisconsin dean criticized Urdahl’s interpersonal skills (3/27/1920):

Urdahl, although a man of fairness and goodness, has a peculiarity which has hampered him; that is, as I see it, a certain captiousness, or perhaps I should say a certain touch of truculence of tone when dealing with others.

These criticisms are vague and Swain took no action against Urdahl.

Aydelotte had higher standards, however. On February 28th, 1924 he threatened to fire Urdahl:

I feel that we must, between now and next year, take up very seriously the question of your continuance in the Department. I do not feel that the work of the Department at present is up to the standard which must be maintained in so important a subject in this college.

Discussion between Aydelotte and Urdahl did not resolve the issue, and on June 24, 1925, Aydelotte fired Urdahl. Although Urdahl received both a fully paid leave of absence in 1925-26, and Aydelotte's promise to help him find work thereafter, Urdahl was deeply unhappy to lose his job. He replied to Aydelotte on July 7th, 1925:

Your letter informing me of the decision of the Board of Managers came while I was confined to my bed with a serious infection of the inner ear. I was unable to answer at the time, and this is my first attempt to write since I was taken sick over five weeks ago, and I am only able to sit up a few hours each day. I cannot express my worry and sadness over your decision, as I had hoped to be allowed to spend one more year, instead of taking leave, to prove to you and to the students that I can run my courses, in such a way that they would be entirely satisfactory. I have not had a chance to write to any of my former students, or to friends concerning another position, and have no hope of any position for next year; The doctor informs me – I can probably not exert myself for several weeks; as I may have a set back at any time – I regret this rambling and unsatisfactory letter – yours sincerely T.K. Urdahl.

In an attempt to keep his job at Swarthmore, Urdahl enlisted several former students and at least one former colleague to write in his support to Aydelotte. Aydelotte did not change his decision, but he did keep his promise to help Urdahl find another job. Despite Aydelotte's help, during the late 1920s Urdahl did not find stable work. And in 1931, Urdahl lost his bank deposits when his bank folded (Urdahl to Miller, 10/13/1931).

Urdahl's problems were a sad outcome of Aydelotte's efforts to raise Swarthmore's academic standards. These efforts brought about revolutionary changes in the college, many of which were positive. According to a later economics professor, Clair Wilcox, in the early 1920s, Swarthmore was a "quiet little country college" and "intellectually undistinguished." Aydelotte's arrival was like an "earthquake," as he gave the college "new purpose" and hired new faculty (Wilcox, 1962, p. 3).

These statements could apply equally well to the Economics Department alone. Urdahl's departure allowed Aydelotte to form a larger, more stable, and more intellectually distinguished department. Urdahl was fired too late for these changes to occur in 1925-26. That year, economics instruction was mostly given by lecturers hired from the University of Pennsylvania.²⁸ Louis Robinson also returned to give a class on criminology, a course he would continue to teach until 1937. In 1926, Aydelotte hired Herbert F. Fraser (1890 - 1953) as a permanent replacement for Urdahl.²⁹ Fraser had attended Phillips Academy and the University of Aberdeen. Fraser never earned a Ph.D. After attending the University of Aberdeen, Fraser worked with his father in business and taught history and math at Phillips Academy. But Fraser was a well-respected economist. In 1927, Fraser published *Foreign Trade and World Politics*. The book received a favorable review in the *New York Times* (Harding, 1927):

Professor Fraser is a redoubtable economist. He subjects such loosely held conceptions as the common American assumption of the economic independence of this nation to a scrutiny which reduces it at the first impact of his logic to the reduction to absurdity principle, only resistible by the dense cuticle of popular ignorance and political expediency.

²⁸ The 1926 economics honors exam is worth mentioning. It consisted of general questions for all students and specific questions for individual students. One student was asked: "Is the negro racially inferior to the white man? Discuss this from a scientific standpoint, giving the judgment of leading scientists on the question" (Brooks, 1927, p. 156). We do not know which lecturer worked with the student who studied this topic.

²⁹ Fraser was paid \$4250 (\$44,930 in 2004) in 1926-1927, \$4500 (\$48,390 in 2004) in 1927-1928, \$4500 (\$49,240 in 2004) in 1928-1929, \$4800 (\$52,520 in 2004) in 1929-1930, and \$5100 (\$62,780 in 2004) in 1931-1932.

More professional evidence of Fraser's status comes from a letter he wrote to Aydelotte while on leave in London. Fraser told Aydelotte that Lionel Robbins arranged for him to get a cubicle at the London School of Economics and was "genuinely friendly" to him (10/28/1932). Fraser had "numerous talks" with Robbins and through Robbins met Friedrich A. Hayek. Fraser was impressed with Hayek (Fraser to Aydelotte 10/28/1932):

After the luncheon [Hayek] and I took a long walk up the Lincoln Inn Fields way and down toward the Thames, to swap ideas and conclusions. His is one of the keenest minds in Economics that I have ever rubbed against. A book of his has recently been translated into English, and Robbins, who read the galley proofs, gave the proof to me. I am sure that it will challenge attention, as it has done on the Continent, with its new theory of the business cycle. At least it has given me some new ideas to try out at home.

In 1927, Fraser was joined by Clair Wilcox (1898 - 1970), and for the first time the Economics Department had two full-time professors.³⁰ Fraser remained at Swarthmore until 1951 and Wilcox until 1968.³¹ Wilcox was almost certainly hired because Louis Robinson recommended him to Aydelotte. On February 14th, 1927 Robinson had written Aydelotte:

You may remember that I called your attention to [Wilcox] last spring and suggested him as a possible candidate for a position in the Economic Department of Swarthmore. He has been an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania for two or three years and I expect to see him made assistant professor this spring, as he will have completed his doctor's thesis and received his degree. He has shown genuine ability and I regard him as one of the brainiest young men whom I have met recently.

Wilcox was born in Cuba, and obtained his B.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Before coming to Swarthmore, Wilcox taught at Lafayette, Ohio Wesleyan and, as Robinson notes, the University of Pennsylvania. In 1926-27, he also served as secretary of the

³⁰ Wilcox was paid \$4000 (\$43,000 in 2004) in 1927-28. His salary increased quickly; in 1931-32, Wilcox was paid \$5100 (\$62,800 in 2004).

³¹ Fraser was the first economics professor to teach for more than twelve years. Robinson taught at Swarthmore for longer, but after 1926, he taught only criminology.

Pennsylvania State Parole Commission. It was probably through his work on the parole commission that Wilcox met Robinson.

Aydelotte was wise to follow Robinson's recommendation and hire Wilcox; Wilcox's academic work and public service made him one of the most eminent professors to ever teach at Swarthmore. In 1930, three years after coming to Swarthmore, Wilcox co-authored a petition against the Smoot-Hawley tariff (Douglas, 1972, p. 71). The petition predicted that the Smoot-Hawley tariff would cause economic and political disasters and was signed by 1,028 economists.³²

During his time at Swarthmore, Wilcox published work on industrial organization and international trade. His best known publication is *Public Control of Business*, a college textbook. In the 1930s and 1940s, Wilcox also did extensive work with the U.S. government. In 1942-43, he was director of the Industrial Materials division of the Office of Price Administration. And from 1945-48, Wilcox led the Office of International Trade Policy at the Department of State. Wilcox learned from government work (Wilcox, 1971, pp. ix-x):

. . . that business cannot always be expected so to govern itself as to serve the public interest, but must be subjected to external discipline; that competition affords a more effective discipline than public regulation; . . . that the price system is one of the greatest achievements of civilization and that governmental action, however necessary, is at best a poor substitute.

Wilcox took a subtle, typically Swarthmore, view of the advantages and disadvantages of regulation.

After World War II, Wilcox served as chair or vice-chair of the American delegation to the world trade conferences that led to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

³² Wilcox co-authored the petition against the Smoot-Hawley tariff with Paul Douglas, the Chicago economist and later senator who formulated the Cobb-Douglas production function with Charles Cobb. Aydelotte had asked Paul Douglas to come to Swarthmore in 1930 to carry out a study of unemployment, for which Swarthmore had secured funds from S.S. Fel, a Philadelphia soap manufacturer (Douglas, p. 70). The result of their study was a book entitled *The Problem of Unemployment*.

Thomas Zeiler (1999) argues that like many State Department administrators, Wilcox was a free trade idealist. In 1945, Wilcox wrote, “[w]e are busy writing new lyrics to the song of nineteenth century liberalism and we shall no doubt get them sung back to us – while we pay out dollars” (qtd. in Zeiler, p. 56). Susan Ariel Aaronson (1999) suggests that Zeiler’s characterization of Wilcox is too narrow; Wilcox may have been more concerned with full employment than he was with free trade. Whatever his exact objectives, in pursuit of them Wilcox could display a serious dedication to work. Wilcox opposed a decision at the 1947-48 Havana world trade conference to take off New Years. He declared: “We’ve had adequate time to play, I propose that we keep at work” (Associated Press, 1971).³³ Despite Wilcox’s efforts, American attempts to reduce barriers to free trade met with implacable British opposition (Zeiler). Wilcox worried, correctly, that Britain “had no intention of making concessions that involve[d] any real progress . . .” (qtd. in Zeiler, p. 108). The result was an agreement (GATT) that fell far short of Wilcox’s hopes. Still, GATT was an impressive achievement: it “successfully policed the world commercial system for decades after the Second World War” (Zeiler, p. 197).

In 1930, Aydelotte hired a third professor who would remain at Swarthmore for two decades. Patrick Malin (1903-63) arrived at Swarthmore with only a B.S. from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.³⁴ Malin was also a graduate student in economics at Columbia from 1925 to 1932; presumably he failed to earn his doctorate because he did not write a dissertation. Indeed, Malin never published a page on economics.³⁵ Malin had other interests. In the words of J. Rolland Pennock and Clair Wilcox (1965), “Pat never thought of himself as a scholar; he was so busy, all his life, making the world a better place to live in that he seldom

³³ By “adequate time to play,” Wilcox is referring to the two days that the world trade conference took off for Christmas (Associated Press, 1971).

³⁴ Malin was married to Caroline Biddle, a member of the Biddle family that helped found Swarthmore (Pennock and Wilcox, 1965).

³⁵ Malin (1934) did coauthor, with Fraser and Wilcox, the introduction to a collection of speeches on the New Deal.

paused to put on paper the wisdom that he communicated so skillfully and so gracefully by word of mouth.” Pennock and Wilcox were not only kind, they were also correct: Malin devoted much of his life to charitable causes. A devout Quaker, Malin served as vice-chairman of the American Friends Service Committee from 1936 to 1938. At this post, Malin helped provide relief to both sides of the Spanish Civil War, even traveling to Spain in the summer of 1937 (National Cyclopedia, p. 621). And from 1940 to 1947, Malin was on leave from Swarthmore working at a succession of different war related jobs. Between 1943 and 1947, for example, he served as vice director of the International Committee on Refugees.³⁶

Malin left Swarthmore permanently in 1950 to become the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). During his time at Swarthmore, Malin had been sensitive to civil liberties issues. He wrote a friend in 1933 (Malin to Dillingham, 11/1/33):

My chief shame these days is that Swarthmore refused admission in this year’s freshmen class to two qualified Negro men. I’ve spent my spare time on it ever since February, and shall continue to do so until we win.

At the ACLU, Malin reversed his predecessor’s policy of centralized control and encouraged the growth of local ACLU affiliates (Princeton University Library, 2001). The result was a six-fold increase in membership during Malin’s twelve-year tenure. In 1950, the ACLU had 9,000 members, in 1962 it had 60,000 (Princeton University Library). As director of the ACLU, Malin won the affection of groups and individuals around the country. In 1957, he received an honorary degree from Howard University along with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jackie Robinson.

Fraser, Wilcox, and Malin formed the stable core of the Economics Department during the 1930s. In this decade, the Department had an average of 6.4 members listed in the catalog, with the balance made up of lecturers, instructors, and visiting professors. It was deliberate

³⁶ By 1943, Malin had experience with refugees. In 1940, he supervised the rescue of 80 mostly Jewish refugees who had landed in Curacao, a Caribbean island 45 miles off the coast of Venezuela.

policy not to hire other permanent faculty members – permanent faculty members were much more expensive than temporary instructors.

Ironically, one of the most prominent economists to ever teach at Swarthmore, Wolfgang F. Stolper (1912-2002), was hired on a temporary basis. With Patrick Malin on leave, Swarthmore needed an economics professor. Stolper must have seemed ideal to Wilcox. Stolper grew up in Vienna and Berlin and studied with Schumpeter in the 1930s at the University of Bonn and Harvard.³⁷ Stolper arrived at Swarthmore with a glowing recommendation from Schumpeter:³⁸

Dr. W. F. Stolper is an excellent all-round economist and should make an extremely valuable acquisition for any University or College. His research work has been of the first order, his doctor's thesis only just missing the Well's Prize in an unusually well contested competition. He is a successful and popular teacher, in fact quite a favorite with undergraduates. His upright and amiable character should make him also a popular colleague wherever he goes. He is so here. He is qualified to teach, besides general economics, also international trade, money and banking, business cycles, government control of business, public finance.³⁹

Stolper's others references echoed Schumpeter's praise of Stolper's teaching, but some doubted Stolper's abilities as an economist. One reference wrote (Stolper's C.V., 1940):

A better than average mind though not brilliant. He would make a good government servant or a fine teacher at an institution like Ohio State, Bowdoin, Colorado University, etc.

And John D. Wilson wrote Frank Pierson from the Department of Commerce (4/9/1941):

Stolper is not an outstanding original theorist, and I doubt if he would make any significant original contributions to the field.

³⁷ Schumpeter supervised Stolper's thesis, which was entitled *British Monetary Policy and the Housing Boom, 1931-1935, a Study in the Lower Turning Point*.

³⁸ Stolper was Jewish, and his family left Germany in 1933 when Hitler came to power (Heertje, 2002, p. 5; Uchitelle, 2002). Stolper was almost certainly the first Jewish economics professor hired by Swarthmore. Swarthmore was not always friendly to Jews. In 1933, there were objections when the number of Jews grew to six percent of the student body. It was suggested that Swarthmore take fewer students from high schools with large Jewish populations (Rakoff and Wright, 2003, p. 6).

³⁹

This sort of opinion of Stolper's ability probably prevented Stolper from obtaining any job better than the temporary one at Swarthmore.

It is ironic that some doubted Stolper's ability as a theorist; in 1941, Stolper and Paul Samuelson published "Protection and Real Wages," one of the seminal articles in international trade theory. In "Protection and Real Wages," Stolper and Samuelson prove that in an economy that produces two goods with two factors of production, free trade will lower the absolute income of the scarce factor. This became known as the Stolper-Samuelson Theorem. The theorem suggests, for example, that in the United States, where labor is relatively scarce, tariffs might raise real wages. Stolper and Samuelson were careful to make clear that their theoretical treatment of the two factor, two good case does not directly apply to the real world of multiple factors and multiple goods. They also did not dispute the traditional view that free trade increases national income. Even if free trade were to reduce real wages, redistribution could thus be used to make labor better off.

Stolper and Samuelson's contribution was remarkable, because it resolved what had been a seemingly intractable debate. Before 1941, economists had argued that nothing definite could be said about the effect of tariffs on real wages, since although tariffs would raise nominal wages in some industries, they would also raise prices. Thus the effect on the real wage appeared indeterminate. Stolper and Samuelson avoided this so-called index number problem by using the amount of output (goods) allocated to labor to measure the real wage.

"Protection and Real Wages" was also notable for its use of an abstract, formal mathematical model. In marked contrast to the work of Fraser and Wilcox, whose books contain few equations or graphs, multi-variable calculus and Edgeworth-Bowley box diagrams are essential to Stolper's and Samuelson's exposition. Although Stolper and Samuelson's formal mathematical approach produced obvious dividends, it was unusual in 1941. Indeed, the editors

of the American Economic Review rejected “Protection and Real Wages,” deeming it to be “a very narrow study in formal theory, which adds practically nothing to the literature of the subject with which it is nominally concerned” (Homan, 1941). Paul Krugman (1994, p. 277) argues that the subsequent success of Stolper and Samuelson’s article was a key reason for the triumph of formal economics over institutional economics:

Stolper-Samuelson showed that it was not enough to be a reasonable, well-spoken, thoughtful person to be a competent economist; unless you understood how to make and use formal general equilibrium models, you were going to be in danger of being purely and simply wrong about very basic issues.

One wonders what the Swarthmore Economics Department of the 1940s and 1950s would have thought of Krugman’s comment. Clair Wilcox probably appreciated the importance of Stolper-Samuelson, and he certainly appreciated the role of formal economics. He himself, though, would continue to write only institutional economics.

Stolper resigned from Swarthmore in June 1949 for a post at the University of Michigan, where he remained until his retirement in the 1980s. The exact circumstances of Stolper’s departure are unclear, but Stolper was no doubt attracted by the prestige of the Michigan Department. The job that Stolper was offered at Michigan may also have been more secure than his Swarthmore position. At Swarthmore, Stolper may not have had tenure, and perhaps he feared that as had happened with Urdahl, a new college president could mean the end of his job.⁴⁰ Any such fears would not have been completely groundless – Stolper was not viewed as a great teacher.

⁴⁰ The first reference to tenure in archived economics department correspondence occurred in 1956. At this time, tenure in the Economics Department was still conferred informally, mostly by Wilcox and the college president (Courtney Smith). Evidence of this comes from a letter from Frank Pierson, an economics professor, to Courtney Smith (2/25/1956): “I had not realized that you and [Wilcox] had already agreed that Willis [Weatherford] should get tenure; I thought this was something we had kind of eased into under the Nason regime.” In the mid-1950s, when Pierson made this comment, tenure was becoming established at colleges and universities throughout the U.S. A 1940 joint statement by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Association of Colleges (AAC) outlined the contours of the modern tenure system: professors would serve for a probationary period before being reviewed for tenure, and once tenured, professors could be fired only through a judicial process (Commission on Academic Tenure in Higher Education, 1973, pp. 152-153). For many university

A year before Stolper came to Swarthmore, in 1940, Swarthmore hired Frank Pierson (1911-1996), a labor economist. Pierson was associated with the Swarthmore Economics Department for almost sixty years, far longer than anyone before or after him. He graduated with highest honors in social science from Swarthmore in 1934,⁴¹ served for one year as an instructor in economics in 1937-38, was a full-time member of the Department from 1940 until 1979, and advised economics students on career options from 1979 until the late 1980s. During Wilcox's years as chair (1943-67), Pierson was second-in-command. When Wilcox went on leave, as he did during nine of these twenty-four years, it was Pierson who became acting chair. And after Wilcox relinquished his chairmanship in 1967, Pierson chaired the Department for nine years.

Those nine years were not easy ones for Swarthmore or the Economics Department. Over the 1967-68 winter break, the Swarthmore Afro-American Student Society (SASS) presented Swarthmore's president, Courtney Smith, with several non-negotiable demands (Stapleton and Stapleton, 2004, pp. 180-181). SASS insisted that Swarthmore admit more African-American students and was hostile to the dean of admissions, Frederick Hargadon. Hargadon had angered SASS when he released a report in which he criticized African-American students at Swarthmore for their "separatism," arguing that this separatism made it more difficult for Swarthmore to recruit African-American students (Stapleton and Stapleton, pp. 177-178). When President Smith neither fired Hargadon, nor immediately agreed to SASS's other demands, SASS occupied the

professors, however, it was not until the mid 1950s that these words became a reality. An AAC and AAUP Commission on Academic Tenure in Higher Education reported what happened then (1973, p. 156):

[T]here arose two unprecedented phenomena: American colleges and universities faced with plenty, and an American professoriate almost able to afford the middle-class style to which it had so long aspired. Inevitably, the fortunes of judicial tenure rode high upon this arc. The instant creation of new universities increased the number of parvenu institutions that would offer tenure along with other perquisites just to prove to the world that they had arrived. The shortage of top-flight applicants in relation to top-flight jobs changed the buyer-seller balance all down the line and made the promise of firm if not easy tenure an essential part of the bargains that were struck.

⁴¹ In 1934, students could not be pure economics honors majors. Instead, students who wished to study economics had to take seminars in economics and two other social sciences (Swarthmore College Faculty, 1941, p. 74). Out of 23 honors social science students, Pierson was one of only three to receive highest honors.

Swarthmore admissions office. A week later, Smith died of a heart attack in his office. His death ended the admissions office sit-in but did not end unrest at Swarthmore. Smith's successor, Robert Cross, was president only briefly: he left his post in 1973 after the Board of Managers forced him to resign (Schall, 2003, p. 91). Cross's tenure was marked by continued tensions between the Swarthmore student body, faculty, and administration over protests against the Vietnam War, women's rights, Black Studies, and co-ed housing.

Instability in the college was preceded and accompanied by instability in the Department of Economics. Between 1953 and 1966, the Department had a core of five permanent professors: Clair Wilcox, Frank Pierson, Joseph Conard, William Brown, and Willis Weatherford.⁴² They were helped by two part-time members of the Department: Helen Hunter and Edward K. Cratsley, the later of whom was also a Swarthmore vice-president. By 1969, all the full-time members of the Department except Pierson were gone. Willis Weatherford left Swarthmore in 1965 to be Dean of the College at Carleton College. Joseph Conard and William Brown suffered untimely deaths in 1965 and 1966, respectively. And in 1968, Clair Wilcox retired.

Amidst turnover in the Department and turmoil in the College, Pierson was a valuable source of continuity and compromise. Pierson was a soft-spoken man who treated people in a way that conveyed fundamental respect. Chuck Gilbert (2004), a former Swarthmore College provost, recalls that this "inner-light approach" made Pierson both well-liked, and an effective negotiator. Gilbert imagines that Pierson was a wonderful resource for students in need of adult advice; he had the ability to see "not just both sides, but all sides of every issue" (Gilbert). Pierson's open-mindedness was not only useful to him at Swarthmore, it was essential to his success as a labor arbitrator, a job he performed frequently in the 1940s and 1950s.

⁴² Joseph Conard (1911-1965) and William Brown (1924-1966) deserve more mention. Both taught in the Economics Department from the early 1950s until their deaths, and both were much loved for their activities inside and outside the classroom.

Despite an admirable willingness to negotiate, Pierson was fiercely committed to the Swarthmore Economics Department and his academic work. Charles Gilbert describes Pierson as a “dead serious scholar,” a statement borne out by the quality and quantity of Pierson’s scholarly output. Pierson wrote or co-edited nine books and published more than forty articles in academic journals. His primary research interests were unions, wage determination, and structural unemployment. Although Pierson’s work demonstrated a firm grasp of economic theory, his work was not technical: there are few graphs or equations in his books. Thus Pierson’s work could be easily read by non-economists. Pierson’s last book, *The Minimum Level of Unemployment and Public Policy*, is an example of the accessibility and relevance of Pierson’s publications. In this book, Pierson (1980) considers the problem of unemployment that persists during economic expansions, so-called structural unemployment. He begins the book (p. 1):

In the [1970s], unemployment has again become one of the country’s most serious unresolved problems. . . . The broad consensus among economists today is that if reliance is placed on Keynesian macro-expansion policies alone, the jobless rate cannot be pushed below 5 percent, perhaps not even below 6 percent, of the nation’s labor force without unleashing severe inflationary pressures.

In a mark of his constant concern for social justice, Pierson goes on to note (pp. 1-2):

[T]he kind of unemployment that persists into periods of general prosperity falls much more heavily on certain groups than on others: those with low incomes, few skills, and little education. . . . [P]ersons who cannot even find stable jobs in boom periods can hardly be blamed for becoming discouraged and defeatist about their personal worth as well as their role in the life of their communities.

In the rest of the book, Pierson considers how public policies such as affirmative action, a lower minimum wage, and improved secondary education might reduce structural unemployment.

Pierson believed, for example, that education improvements were necessary (p. 192):

[M]ajor changes in the nation’s public school are needed if the structural unemployment problem is to be effectively attacked. Of the various conditions that call for redress, two bear most directly on the issue of structural unemployment. The first is the gross difference that exists in terms of per student dollar outlay and comparative quality of programs between upper and lower income communities or districts. The second is the failure of the schools, notably

in the latter areas, to provide meaningful work experience opportunities to students who desire them and put them to good use.

As these passages suggest, and as was often characteristic of members of the Swarthmore Economics Department, Pierson was deeply involved with real-world problems. And Pierson managed to combine public service with his teaching and prolific scholarly work. In 1941-42, for example, Pierson worked as a special arbitrator for the National War Labor Board. The same year he published his thesis, entitled *Collective Bargaining Systems: A Study of Union-Employer Responsibilities and Problems*, and taught two courses and an honors seminar. That year's activities were typical for Pierson. In 1952, while teaching Introduction to Economics, Labor Problems, and two seminars, Pierson served as a consultant and public panel member of the National Wage Stabilization Board. And the next year, Pierson published *Community Wage Patterns*, a detailed statistical study of wages in Los Angeles County.⁴³

Epilogue

Pierson retired in 1979, and with his departure the Economics Department lost its last direct link to the pre-1966 era. In the twenty-five years since Pierson's retirement, the Department has continued to expand, and at least as measured by the number of teachers with Ph.Ds, the Department has become more professional.⁴⁴ If the ghosts of William Hull, Thomas Urdahl, and Clair Wilcox were to see the Department today, it is this expansion and professionalization that would surprise them most. In other aspects of the Department, they would see continuities. Hull would be displeased at the triumph of neo-classical economics, but he would take solace in noting that today, as in 1900, the Economics Department avoids mathematical economics. Out of twenty-five economics courses and seminars offered in the

⁴³ Pierson (1953) concluded *Community Wage Patterns* by reporting, "it is the economic environment, not the institution of collective bargaining, which largely controls wage relationships at the community level" (p. 164).

⁴⁴ In the spring of 1979, when Pierson retired, there were two professors in the econ. Dept. without Ph.Ds. And in the fall of 1979, there were five. Today, there are none.

2004-05 academic year, only two had a calculus prerequisite. Thomas Urdahl, fired by Aydelotte in 1925, would envy the protection given by tenure to current professors, but he would find honors seminars familiar. Clair Wilcox would be surprised that neither economic history nor public control of business are taught, but he would find familiar the combination of academic and policy concerns that characterize Economics Department members today. At the same time as current department members write papers for academic journals, they participate in economic development efforts in West Africa and Kenya, evaluate the effectiveness of U.S. social programs, and work with community development agencies in Chester, Pennsylvania.

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