



The gymnasium room, on the second floor of Gymnasium Hall (Ole Jim), decorated for "The Presentation Hop", 1895. Courtesy of the Gallaudet University Archives.

Presentation Day, May 1894

As a celebration of this year's Commencement, we are excited to present to you information about Gallaudet's past graduation ceremonies. Although today they are held in the Field House, graduation has varied greatly throughout our history. One of the best ways to learn about Commencement ceremonies of the past is through *The Buff and Blue*, examining some of the earliest issues. The most interesting issue we found was Vol. 2, No. 6, published on June 1, 1894, focused on graduation, or as it was called then, "Presentation Day".

This Presentation Day, on May 2, 1894, the 30th anniversary of the College, was particularly special. *The Buff and Blue* described the day as "an ideal May day, and the Green was clothed in her loveliest Spring garb." The Museum staff is proud to note that Chapel Hall, presently the home of our permanent exhibit *Gallaudet at 150 and Beyond*, hosted graduation in 1894. On this beautiful day, "The Chapel which was plainly but tastefully decorated for the occasion with flowers and plants, was almost filled to overflowing with a large and select audience." With only 10 students graduating – four Master's and six Bachelor's students – and one student receiving a certificate, it was clear why the Chapel was able to host the graduation ceremonies, while today we must use the Field House.



An outdoor commencement ceremony, c. 1914. Courtesy of the Gallaudet University Archives.

The program started off with Rev. Edward B. Bagby, Chaplain of the House of Representatives, providing an invocation. Then five students presented their dissertations:

- "The Power of Public Opinion" – Thomas Sheridan
- "Goethe" – Hannah Schankweiler
- "The Future of Jupiter" – David Ryan, Jr.
- "Agriculture in the United States" – John Kershner
- "Education in the Middle Ages" – Louis Divine
- "Fairy Mythology" – Lily Bickaler

Following these, President Gallaudet presented the degrees, and the Honorable Hoke Smith, Secretary of the Interior, addressed the graduates. The best was saved for last. James C. Welling, President of Columbian University (now part of George Washington University)

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