

THE HEADMASTER'S REMARKS AT THE GROUND-BREAKING
CEREMONY
May 15, 1965

It seems entirely fitting that I begin my remarks by expressing our gratitude to the man who had the dream which brings us together here today.

Paraphrasing the words of a man whom Albert G. Simms greatly admired, I would say: "Never before in the history of independent education have so few done so much for so many."

The few, of course, include the small but devoted group -- trustees, parents and my predecessor -- who have shared this dream for five years and who have worked unstintingly for this day. But among those few there was one man -- not a trustee, not a parent, not associated with the Academy in any normal way -- whose magnificent gift to the school was a result of his belief in the right kind of education for capable boys, his vision of the role a larger and stronger Academy could play in the Southwest, and his love for this community.

Without the material contributions of Albert G. Simms to the dream we have shared for many years, we would not be here today to break ground for the new Albuquerque Academy... But when I say that "never before have so few done so much for so many," I refer to much more than Mr. Simms' gifts, of money and of real estate. His material gifts will provide the handsome and well-equipped new buildings which will rise around this spot, but they cannot provide the goals, the philosophy, the spirit and the heart without which a school is merely brick and mortar.

But Mr. Simms has given us these things, too. He has left them as a legacy to those who were fortunate enough to know him. It is my earnest prayer that the vision he had for this school, and the conviction he had of its importance, will be given life by those of us -- trustees, faculty, parents and especially boys -- who in the years to come will share in the shaping of Albuquerque Academy.

In the days since Mr. Simms' legacy was announced, it has been interesting to watch the reactions of independent school people across the nation. At first the comments were all the same: a headmaster who wrote me from the annual conference of the National Association of Independent Schools said: "You are the envy of headmasters and trustees from coast to coast." But a month or two ago the comments began to change. A number of school heads and trustees have recently written to say that we have acquired, together with our legacy, a heavy responsibility to use our stewardship wisely. Some have said, in essence, "It is wonderful that you have received this endowment -- but isn't it too much? Doesn't such a gift present unusual dangers?"

I think that it does, and I think that Mr. Simms would be the first to see the danger that comes when something is given you without any matching effort on your part. He was an avid reader of history, and I would wager that [he] believed with Churchill that the ordeal of blood, of sweat and of tears is good for our souls and for our moral fiber as a nation.

I believe, quite simply, that there is a very real danger for all of us associated with the Academy: the danger that we will casually, complacently, carelessly and even smugly accept our fine new school without once reflecting on how little we have done, individually or collectively, to obtain it or even to deserve it. I think it is not mere sentiment which leads me to say that the strongest independent schools in the country are those whose trustees, parents, alumni and faculty have sacrificed mightily to build those schools and, in giving their money, their sweat and their tears, have established a tradition, a spirit and a sense of values that today make those schools great.

And so, when I say that it is in a way an unfortunate circumstance that Albuquerque Academy has been the recipient of such a large future endowment, I am entirely serious -- although this unfortunate circumstance is one that the trustees and I are now more than willing to struggle with! What we face is the danger and the difficulty of changing, almost overnight, from a small, struggling, unnoticed school to one that I believe can and should have considerable influence on American secondary education. What we face is the need to build lofty goals, high standards, significant traditions, and a spirit of excellence -- but without the years, the trials, the experience, the blood, the sweat and the tears that are normally the crucible in which great schools are forged.

This morning I want to suggest, then, that our magnificent legacy brings a significant opportunity, but also that it brings problems -- dangers that each of us must be aware of in the years ahead.

For the faculty, perhaps the greatest danger is losing sight of our aims. I propose to you that we think everlastingly of the goals of the Academy: of the seriousness of our responsibility; and of the unmeasurable reach of the example we set for every student every day.

The great danger facing trustees and parents is the temptation to feel that when we move to our new campus the job is done. To you I suggest that you consider that your responsibility begins anew when the move extends the Academy's opportunities and its influence in the community. I urge that you support your school; that you be aware of its aims and its problems; that you question or criticize when questions or criticisms are warranted; that you interpret the school to the community; and that you help us when help is needed. Above all, I urge you to pursue at home the same aims we pursue with your sons at school, and that, by precept, you teach them their roles and their responsibilities.

For you students, present and future, the responsibility to make this a great school despite its magnificent material legacy is the greatest of all. For you the great danger may be complacency, lack of commitment, carelessness about your duty to the Academy and to yourselves. I suggest that you consider admission to the Academy a privilege, and attendance an opportunity not to be wasted. You, more than the trustees, more than the parents or the alumni, more even than the faculty, will determine the ultimate worth of this school. Yours is the greatest responsibility of all if your school is to take its place, in less than 15 years after its founding, as one of the nation's outstanding secondary schools.

If all of us, then, are aware of both the opportunities and the dangers that await us, when the history of Albuquerque Academy is written it will not be said that "Never have so few done so much for so many," but rather: "By the timeliness, the far-reaching vision and the incredible generosity of his gift, Albert G. Simms gave this school a monument of brick, mortar, stone and lumber, and into that monument an entire community, touched with his ideals and his faith and his convictions, breathed love and life."

I should like to suggest that we are here this morning not so much to dedicate a piece of property, as to pledge our devotion to an idea and an ideal -- one man's dream of a great school.