



Winter 2-16-1994

## Founders' Day Convocation (1994 Program)

Illinois Wesleyan University

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# Founders' Day Convocation

February 16, 1994 11:00 a.m.  
Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall



## Helen Thomas

She takes “the vacuum cleaner” approach to covering her news beat: The White House.

That’s how one colleague and competitor described Helen Thomas, UPI’s White House bureau chief, who has had a “ring-side seat to history” for a half-century since she joined the wire service’s Washington bureau in 1943.

ABC News Correspondent Sam Donaldson, who covered the White House from 1977-89, said: “Those of us who had access to the wires were always impressed that Helen, on a day-in and day-out basis, would be, say, 20 minutes ahead of what we knew in the press room.”

Thomas, who has covered the White House since John F. Kennedy’s administration, is a familiar personality to millions of television viewers who tune in to presidential news conferences. She typically asks the first question and closes each encounter with her trademark, “Thank you, Mr. President.”

Over the years, Thomas has reported many big stories—the Vietnam War, the invasions of Grenada and Panama, and the Persian Gulf War—from the White House vantage point. One of her biggest stories came in 1972, when she was the only print journalist to travel to the People’s Republic of China with President Richard Nixon on his historic diplomatic mission.

During Watergate, the political scandal that forced Nixon to resign the presidency, Thomas was the recipient of a string of late-night phone calls from a talkative Martha Mitchell, wife of Attorney General John Mitchell, who was deeply embroiled in the controversy. Mitchell called Thomas with angry stories about how the White House was undermining her husband. A 1990 *Washington Post Magazine* profile of Thomas observed: “Mitchell’s stories were big news—shocking and sensational—and Thomas’s already solid career emerged into the limelight. She became not just a reporter but a ‘personality.’”

Thomas is renowned for her straightforward questions frequently targeted to presidents, politicians, and other pundits. One colleague said her questions are “almost like what a housewife in Des Moines would ask.” Others characterize them as tough and populist.

Born in Winchester, Ky., in 1920, Thomas is the daughter of Lebanese immigrant parents. She was raised in Detroit and after graduating from Wayne State University landed a job as a copy girl on the now defunct *Washington Daily News*. Thomas joined UPI in 1943 and for a dozen years wrote radio copy, beginning her work days at 5 a.m. Later she won assignments covering some of Washington’s biggest agencies: the Justice Department; FBI; Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and Congress. She joined UPI’s White House bureau in 1961 and was named bureau chief in 1974.

Thomas, a pioneer among women journalists, has won many awards and honors. She was president of the Women’s National Press Club and the first woman officer of the National Press Club after it opened its doors to women. Thomas was the first woman officer and president of the White House Correspondents Association. She has received 17 honorary doctorates and is a popular commencement speaker.

NBC News Correspondent Andrea Mitchell, who reported from the White House for seven years, described Thomas this way in the 1990 *Washington Post Magazine* profile: “The average burnout for a White House correspondent is after one term or at most two terms. No one can do it on a sustained basis, except Helen Thomas.”

# Founders' Day Program

President Minor Myers, jr., *Presiding*  
Professor John Ficca, *Mace Bearer*

ORGAN PRELUDE .....Professor David Gehrenbeck, *Organist*  
Variations on AMERICA .....*Charles Ives*  
(1874-1954)

PROCESSIONAL  
Trumpet Tune in D .....*David N. Johnson*  
(1922-1987)

INVOCATION .....Chaplain William White

WELCOME .....President Minor Myers, jr

SPECIAL MUSIC  
Sonata in G Major, Opus 78 .....*Johannes Brahms*  
(1833-1897)

I. Vivace ma non troppo

Susan Marie Feldman '94, *violin*  
Daniel K. Hobbs '96, *piano*

AWARDING OF HONORARY DEGREES .....President Minor Myers, jr.  
Provost Janet McNew  
Dean Roger Schnaitter

Helen Thomas  
*White House Bureau Chief*  
*United Press International*

REMARKS .....Helen Thomas

"Alma Wesleyana" (NATIONAL HYMN) .....*George W. Warren*  
(1828-1902)  
From hearts aflame, our love we pledge to thee,  
Where'er we wander, over land or sea;  
Through time unending, loyal we will be—  
True to our Alma Mater, Wesleyan.

When college days are fully past and gone,  
While life endures, from twilight gleam til dawn,  
Grandly thy soul shall with us linger on—  
Star-crowned, our Alma Mater, Wesleyan.

—*William Eben Schultz*

BENEDICTION .....Chaplain William White

RECESSIONAL .....Professor David Gehrenbeck, *Organist*  
Fantasie and Fugue on ST ANNE .....*Paul Manz*  
(b. 1919)