

In the Beginning

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Dean John Williams, in his first annual report on what was then the Graduate School of Public Administration

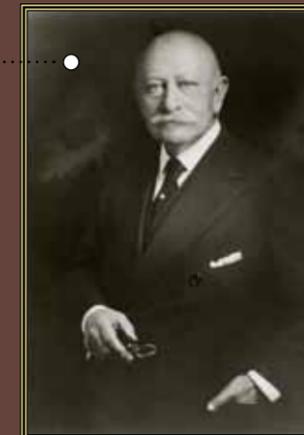
THE BEST HOPE Lucius Littauer, Harvard graduate, New York congressman, glove manufacturer, and philanthropist, was the school's great benefactor. In early correspondence with Harvard University President James Conant, Littauer expressed his ambition that the school “would be the best hope of avoiding disasters arising from untried experiments in government and administration, and would tend to raise the level of American life.”



LAYING A FOUNDATION “This splendid gift... will strengthen Harvard University and enhance its ability to contribute to the country's welfare,” Harvard University President James B. Conant told Littauer in accepting his \$2 million gift. “I am sure that every year which passes will multiply the proofs of the far reaching effects of your benefaction.” Harvard men present at the dedication of the Littauer Building (from left): Dean John Williams; Abbott Lowell, Harvard University president 1909–1933; Leverett Saltonstall, future governor and U.S. senator; Littauer; Conant; Charles Francis Adams III, former U.S. secretary of the Navy.

ON THE WEB
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HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL turns 75 in 2011. The school looks a lot younger than its years—both its architecture and its name hint at a more recent birth. But looks deceive. It was conceived in the middle of the Great Depression, born of the vision of its first great benefactor, Lucius Littauer, a Harvard graduate and former congressman, and Harvard President James Conant, of a training ground for men (equal opportunity was a long way away) dedicated to solving the economic and administrative problems of their day.



What was then the Graduate School of Public Administration began life in 1936 as something other than the world famous graduate school and research center it has grown into. It was a sort of stepsister to Harvard's government and economics departments, offered no degrees, and borrowed faculty from elsewhere. Its official beginning, on December 7, 1936, came with

12 faculty appointments (of faculty members who also held appointments elsewhere at Harvard). Its first students were a handful of public officials (known as Littauer Fellows). But even as it took its first, somewhat uncertain steps, all those decades ago, its direction would be strikingly familiar to us in 2011.

“We are not seeking to find in public administration a new content,” wrote John Williams, the school's first dean, in his report on the school to President Conant in 1938. “What we hope may justify the creation of the School is our attempt to find a new method of work. We are seeking a means not only to bring the different branches of the social sciences more closely together but also to bring the University and the public service nearer to each other.”

Public service had, for 300 years, been part of the fabric of Harvard. Its graduates had been colonial administrators, signers of the Declaration of Independence, members of Congress, and presidents. But what the school began, modestly and quietly, 75 years ago was a new vision of public service as not just an avocation, but also a career and of public administration as not just an art, but also as a science.

A NEW CENTER The original Littauer Building, built to house the nascent school, along with the economics and government departments. “The creation of such a center should,” Dean Williams hoped, “enable us to focus our combined efforts more effectively than in the past upon the problems of public policy and administration.”