

2013 Lower School Closing Assembly Remarks

Headmaster Stephen M. Clement, III

The theme of the Lower School Closing has been “1888,” the year The Browning School was started. We are celebrating this special event 125 years later. We have hung a new flag, sung “Happy Birthday” together, worn special buttons, eaten black and white birthday cookies (with red and brown frosting), and looked at many wonderful old photographs.

We have told our special story in many ways. We know that when John D. Rockefeller moved to New York City from Cleveland, Ohio, he worked hard to find a great teacher to start a school for his son and three other teenage boys. That man was John A. Browning, and the year was 1888.

Mr. Browning chose the word “Grytte” as the motto for his school. For him it meant hard work, grit your teeth, stick with it until the end. In our birthday celebration, we have discovered many special old photographs through an archives preservation and restoration project funded by a gift to the school from the Parents of the Class of 2013.

Here is a wonderful photograph of Mr. Browning as an older man. I think it was taken in the summer, but he still has his tie on, and you can see a gold watch chain in his pocket. There is an elastic band on his left—and right—arm to keep his shirtsleeves up. Look closely at his shoes. They are not very shiny at all. In fact, they are dirty, covered with dust.

We know Mr. Browning loved to work tending flower and vegetable gardens. He and his two sisters lived in the Dakota, one of the first apartment buildings built along Central Park West at 72nd Street. We know there were many empty lots on the west side of Manhattan at the time, and immediately to the west of the Dakota was an open space, filled with gardens. This is where we think the picture was taken.

The photographer caught Mr. Browning hard at work, sticking with a task he loved, tending his garden.

And if you look very closely, you’ll see he even has “grytte” on his shoes. Mr. Browning, we salute you!