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John Jay Iselin Named President of Marconi Foundation; Reception Honors Fellows

By Suzanne Trimel

John Jay Iselin, a leader in public broadcasting and education and well-known New York figure, has been named president of the Marconi International Fellowship Foundation at Columbia's Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science.

Iselin comes to the Marconi Foundation, named for the inventor of wireless transmission, after a distinguished career in higher education, public broadcasting, magazine journalism, publishing and public affairs. Most recently, he was the 10th president of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, one of the country's premier art, architecture and engineering schools.

"We went through a period, after the advent of the radio, when we focused on wired technology," said Iselin. "But now we're looking once again to the wireless world, and we have the invention of the radio, modest as it may seem now, to thank for that. I'm pleased to be here, in a place that honors the past while recognizing the wave of the future."

Iselin, who holds degrees in history, literature, law and government, stepped down after 12 years as president of The Cooper Union in June. For 16 years before that he had been president of Channel 13, the nation's largest public television station, where he oversaw the production of many distinguished series and programs, including "Great Performances," "Live from Lincoln Center," "The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," "Bill Moyers Journal," "Nature," and "Currents," the unprecedented six-year series of Shakespeare plays.

Prior to joining Channel 13, he was a vice president of Harper & Row Publishers from 1969 to 1971 and a correspondent in Newsweek's Washington bureau from 1962 to 1965.

Born in Greenville, S.C., Iselin is a graduate of Harvard College and earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Cambridge and a doctorate in government from Harvard.

The Marconi Foundation was established in memory of Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of wireless transmission that led to the development of radio, by his daughter Gioia Marconi Braga in 1974, 100 years after Marconi's birth. Since then, the foundation has been honoring innovators in telecommunications whose work has advanced the public good.

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Queen to Honor Columbia's John Jay Iselin

The United Kingdom's Queen Elizabeth II has awarded John Jay Iselin, president of Columbia's Marconi Fellowship Foundation, an honorary CBE. The CBE stands for Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, an order founded in 1917 that honors foreign-born citizens for public service. Iselin's investiture ceremony will occur June 9 in Washington, D.C.

The honor is in recognition of his outstanding contribution to British television interests in the United States and his services to Cambridge University. Iselin has served as president of WNET, the New York PBS station, and was the driving force behind a distinctive schedule of programming, which elevated WNET to one of the two leading public television stations in America. In so doing, he nurtured key relationships with the BBC and various British companies that opened the door for the incredible penetration of British television into the American market.

He helped WNET to program *Upstairs/Downstairs*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *I Claudius*. He also launched the program *Nature* and oversaw WNET's unprecedented six-year series, *The Shakespeare Plays*.

Robert MacNeil, former executive editor of the *MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour*, said: "Jay Iselin is a visionary figure from the heady, founding days of public television. His dedication to the need for a non-commercial alternative was passionate and he drew much from the British experience. Under Jay's leadership, many of the core programs which shaped the PBS identity were created."

Speaking in New York, British Consul-General Sir Thomas Harris said of Iselin: "His work in promoting closer cultural exchanges between the two countries is exemplary. Whether it is in advancing greater academic links, or encouraging some of the brightest students in the U.S. to attend British universities, he brings to the task a commitment and an energy which the rest of us can only admire."

Iselin served for 20 years on the board of the American Friends of Cambridge University, where he was a Marshall Scholar, and has chaired the New York Marshall Selection Committee since October 2001.

Before becoming president of the Guglielmo Marconi International Fellowship Foundation at Columbia University, Iselin served as president of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Iselin also is currently an adjunct professor in the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

The Guglielmo Marconi International Fellowship Foundation at Columbia University is dedicated to nurturing, recognizing and celebrating individuals whose ingenious application of communications technology has had a positive and lasting impact on human progress around the globe. Established in 1974 by Gioia Marconi Braga, the Foundation is known for the Marconi International Fellowship, awarded annually to an outstanding individual whose scope of work and influence emulate the principle of "creativity in service to humanity" that inspired Guglielmo Marconi, the father of modern communications.

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