

This is your Wheaton: Celebrating our history

Did you know Wheaton was the first college in the nation to build a freestanding gymnasium? That one of our faculty members was among the first to win a Guggenheim fellowship in 1925? That Wheaton was among the first college campuses planned by noted architect Ralph Adams Cram?

You can learn many interesting things from Paul Helmreich's new book, *Wheaton College 1834-1957: A Wheaton Family Affair*. This history traces the college's evolution up to 1957, the year Professor Helmreich arrived on campus. It will give you a new sense of pride in Wheaton and the many talented people who founded and shepherded the college over the years.

Reading the book has deepened my sense of pleasure and pride in having been part of the Wheaton story during the past 11 years. It is fascinating to see Wheaton's history in the context of larger changes in higher education and in American society, which Professor Helmreich includes effectively in the Wheaton story. It also is affirming and inspiring to see how deeply the college's character is rooted in its past. One of the book's central themes can best be described as the Wheaton spirit: a willingness to experiment, combined with a



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commitment to core values of quality and critical thought.

I was particularly struck by the fact that the cornerstone of the college's pathbreaking new curriculum—the idea of making connections among courses in all disciplines—is grounded in our history. In 1927 President Park told the faculty that it is necessary to "conduct here an experiment in education which will make Wheaton stand for something other than a second-rate minor edition of the larger college." He encouraged interdisciplinary approaches, urging faculty to try to interconnect their courses with one another "rather than teaching in a manner that resulted in students being dosed with mere unconnected fragments of knowledge."

Other themes are present as well, including recurring fiscal challenges. For example, the college's reliance on financial support from the legacy of the founding family kept it from developing successful fundraising efforts until 1955. At the same time, Wheaton's student body has always been smaller

than its peers. Each generation has reaffirmed Wheaton's tradition as a small, caring community, but notes Professor Helmreich, "as the years passed and the college continued to grow, the issue of defining a maximum size to which the college could expand and still preserve the unique virtues associated with smallness became ever more pressing."

Today, Wheaton's enrollment stands at 1,500 students, the largest in the college's history. Academic programs are growing in ways that will improve every student's educational experience. The institution's fiscal health is much improved thanks to philanthropic support (more than \$120 million that has been contributed to Wheaton's betterment over the past ten years). In Professor Helmreich's opinion the college has never been stronger than it is now.

While Don and I will miss all our Wheaton friends after I retire at the end of June 2004 and move back to our house in the San Francisco Bay Area, exciting new opportunities and

challenges await Wheaton. In the months ahead, the college community will have the chance to shape its future through the search for the next president. A committee made up of trustees, faculty, staff and students will conduct the search and seek input from all members of the college community about the qualifications that would be most important for Wheaton's new president (see story on page 4).

As we make plans for tomorrow, it is important that we honor the past and reaffirm the core values that have served Wheaton throughout its history. I hope every graduate will participate in the presidential search process and engage with your college in enhancing Wheaton's excellence as a liberal arts institution that is committed to social justice and equality. I also urge alumnae/i to invest in Wheaton's future through the Annual Fund. In fact, when people ask how to thank me for my years as president, I respond by saying that I would like to leave a legacy of a strong Annual Fund at the \$3 million level with 1,000 leadership donors in the Mary Lyon Society.

The Wheaton of today *is* your Wheaton. It is grounded in a proud history that celebrates the ideals of critical thinking and equality while looking forward to new horizons that will preserve the college for generations to come. You can help shape our future history through your support and interest. □



To purchase Professor Paul Helmreich's *Wheaton College 1834-1957: A Wheaton Family Affair*, contact the Old Town Hall Bookstore in Norton at (508) 286-3430.