

Looking back, moving forward

Betty Neal Crutcher and I moved onto campus in September after the completion of the Presidents' House renovation. The move has inspired me to reflect on Wheaton's history and how it has influenced the college we have become. As Shakespeare famously observed in *The Tempest*: "What is past is prologue."

The connections between Wheaton's historic past are many and substantial. Values that guide the college today have roots in the earliest days of the institution's history and reflect the outlook of the people who have built Wheaton. What values? A commitment to the enriching power of liberal arts study, a commitment to equal rights, to the importance of diversity, to the significance of being engaged in the concerns of the world—we can trace all of these ideas back through the years of Wheaton's past.

Wheaton began almost 175 years ago with Judge Laban Wheaton, a man of many accomplishments—chief justice for the Court of Sessions in Bristol County, a state legislator, a successful businessman and a four-term congressman. While serving in Congress, Judge Wheaton aligned himself with the Federalists and became well known as an outspoken abolitionist. And in founding the Wheaton Female Seminary, he showed not only great love for his daughter but also a belief that women deserved advanced education equal to that offered to men.

The house that Betty and I are now living in was originally built in 1829 by Laban Morey Wheaton (with money from his father, Judge Wheaton) for his new bride: Eliza Baylies Chapin. She lived there for more than 75 years! She watched over the college, through good times and bad, for nearly that entire time. Wheaton's first president, Samuel Valentine Cole, and the architect Ralph Adams Cram developed the plan for upper campus in a way that puts the house at the head of the Dimple, which they called the Court of Honor.

The Dimple, and the rest of the campus, is lined with buildings named for people who have helped make Wheaton what it is today. Consider Caroline Metcalf, an educational



First-Year Seminar students, staff and faculty enjoy dinner at the Presidents' House.

Keith Nordstrom

innovator with a deep concern for the quality of the educational program Wheaton offered. She brought professors from MIT to guide work in physics, chemistry, mineralogy, geology and zoology. She recruited talented teachers like the poet and writer Lucy Larcom, whose legacy is reflected not only in Larcom Hall but also with *The Rushlight*. Lucy Larcom founded that magazine, the longest running undergraduate literary magazine in the country so far as we know; students celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2005.

Mrs. Metcalf's dedication to Wheaton inspired the formation of the college's

alumnae/i association. The members of the Class of 1870 started the association and established Wheaton's first endowed scholarship. Since then, thousands of alumnae/i have stepped forward with the scholarship support necessary to help students obtain a Wheaton education. And they continue to do so.

I recently attended the inauguration of Harvard's new president, Drew Faust, a noted historian who made the point that colleges and universities embody a unique trust, "uniquely accountable to the past and to the future."

We may not know the future in all its details, but we are creating it now. From our vantage point, standing atop the foundation established by all those who have come before, we are building anew, pushing Wheaton higher, continuing to shape the college of the future. There is a role for each of us in this effort.

The Wheaton Hymn, with words by President J. Edgar Park and music by Professor of Music Emeritus Carlton Russell, expresses it well:

*A hundred years pass like a dream,
Yet early founders still are we,
Whose works are greater than they seem,
Because of what we yet shall be....* 

