

# A Massachusetts family affair

## *Wheaton College, 1834–1957: A Massachusetts Family Affair*

**Paul Helmreich**, college historian and professor of history emeritus  
Cornwall Books, Associated University Presses, ISBN: 0-8453-4881-7.

Tell us about the subtitle.

There are two methods to my madness. One was to get “Massachusetts” into the title and make it very clear that I was not writing about the *other* Wheaton College. The other was because the unifying theme of the book is that these were very clearly the years in which the college lived under the direct influence of the Wheaton family. Until 1905, of course, there was the personal influence of Eliza Baylies Wheaton; she supervised both the voice and purse of the seminary, though always indirectly—as befitted a woman of that time. Until Mrs. Wheaton’s death, the family was not anxious to have others contribute; it was their institution and they were going to take care of it. From 1905 to 1957, the college consciously lived in accordance with Mrs. Wheaton’s views concerning the college and within the confines of the fiscal legacy provided by her estate. Wheaton didn’t have a development office until 1956, when the expansion process to 800 students began. Gil Hood, a trustee at the time, later made a comment that helped give me my theme: “The Wheaton family era is coming to an end.”

The increase in students, incidentally, created the half-time position that got me to Wheaton: a one-year, half-time appointment teaching two sections of “History 101,” a required course for all students.

So 1957 holds even greater historical significance for you.

I just got my master’s at Harvard and hadn’t passed my qualifying exams for the Ph.D. yet; Wheaton would never hire anyone with those credentials today. As I mention in a footnote, I met the other

basic qualifications: I was married and I had a car. The college at that time didn’t hire single young males and Jack Knapton didn’t want to be bothered by someone who’d have to use trains and taxis to get to Norton.

What intrigued you about Wheaton’s history? Were there any surprises for you?

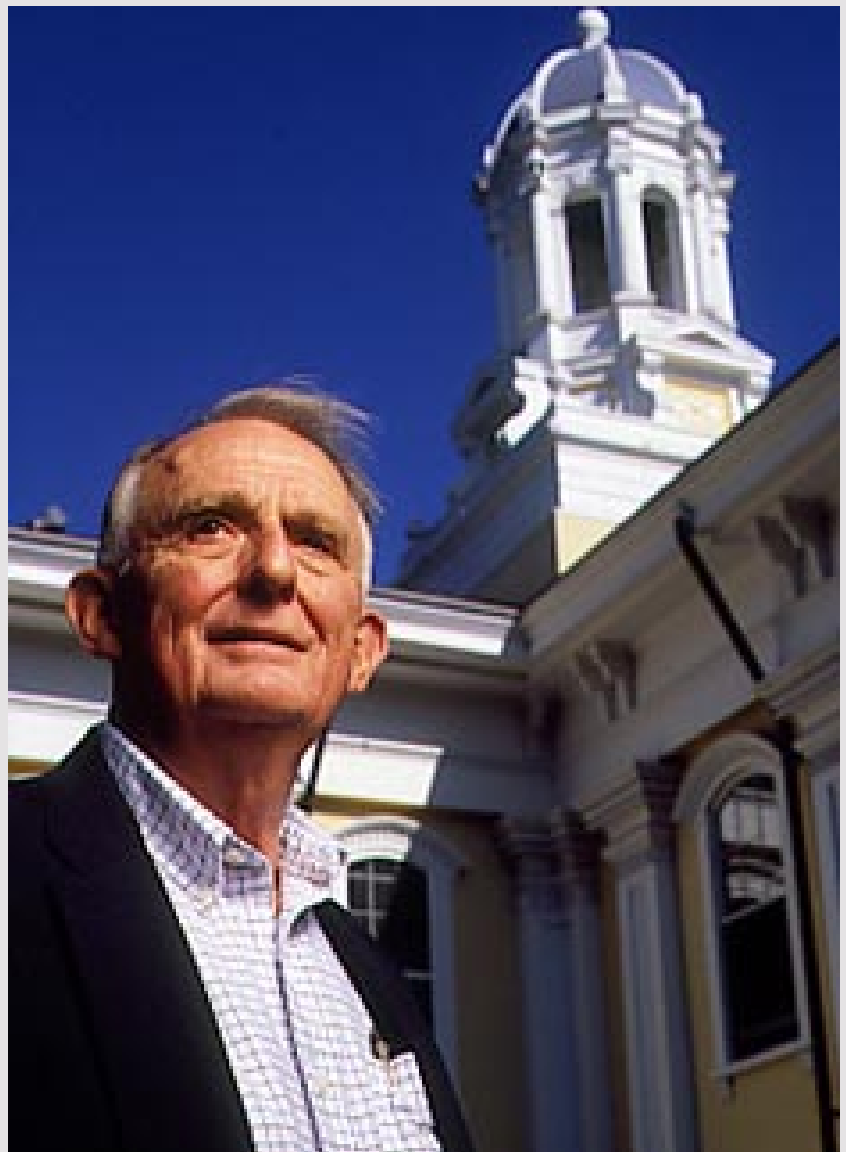
Unlike other history projects I’ve undertaken, which involve original archival work but with a great deal of secondary support material, there was little support literature



about Wheaton. There was Grace Shepard’s *The Reference History of Wheaton College*—a collection of records compiled in the 1920s—and some references from English Professor Louise Boas’ *Woman’s Education Begins*. Most of this book was created from scratch.

Well, your bibliography is impressive. How long did you work on this project?

I started it in 1979–80. Originally, I was going to do a history of the college that would be ready for the sesquicentennial in 1984. I completed the seminary history by that point, and that book now serves as the first part of the new volume. Part two, which is about twice the length of part one, is what I’ve worked on since. Of course,



I've taken time out to do other projects involving European history, which is the field I was originally trained in.

Are there any particular Wheaton characters that stand out for you?

Well, there are key players, of course: Eliza Baylies Wheaton; Caroline Metcalf, a real shaper and mover; and Samuel Valentine Cole, whose vision guided the transition from seminary to college. J. Edgar Park was a character like no other; he must have been an amazing person to work with and against. He was a perfect example of the patriarchal president of a small liberal arts college; as chief academic officer, he wielded a great deal of power with his ruthlessness, his openness and his incredible wit. He coupled his use of power with a great degree of understanding and care for people, but he tolerated no challenges to his authority. There were many other players who nonetheless exerted their influence and personality in any number of areas. There were faculty characters—there always are!

Is there more coming?

I'd like to write a history from 1957 through the coeducation decision, but that raises problems for me. I came to Wheaton in 1957 and I wonder if I can write an objective history; it's more difficult when you're a player yourself. Also, there are some papers and recorded interviews in the archives that have access restrictions placed on them, and without permission to use them, I'd find it difficult to write another history.

An interesting outgrowth of this project is a planned reunion of 10–12 faculty children who have reconnected after reading the book. We all have been corresponding via e-mail, and they've shared a number of their perceptions and recollections of growing up at Wheaton. It's been a lot of fun.

## Publications, Honors and Creative Works

### Faculty

**Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus**, associate professor of religion, published "The Role of Service-Learning in the Transformation of Islam: Faith and Practice," in *From Cloister to Commons: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Religious Studies* (2002). He also published a review of Alan Dershowitz's *The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice That Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Law*; titled "Review Essay: Chutzpah Even Before the Heavenly Court," the piece ran in *Contemporary Justice Review* (2002).

**Samuel Coale**, professor of English, published "Mysteries of Mesmerism: Hawthorne's Haunted Houses" in *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (2001) and "American Fictions: The '80s, the '90s and Beyond" in *American Literature in the 1980-90s* (2001).

The Boston Public Library has purchased five lithographs and etchings by **Claudia Fieo**, associate professor of art, for inclusion in its permanent print collection. Her artwork also was selected for the cover of *Modernism, Ireland and The Erotics of Memory*, a scholarly text by Nicholas A. Miller (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

**Tommasina Gabriele**, associate professor of Italian studies published "Una poetessa di origine ciociara: Maria Luisa Spaziani" in *La Ciociaria tra letteratura e cinema* (2002).

**John Kricher**, professor of biology, published *Galápagos*, a detailed natural history of the archipelago (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

**Charlotte Meehan**, assistant professor of playwriting, wrote *These Four Walls*, a month-long production of Dixon Place in New York City. Her *Beesus & Ballustrada*, an erotic comedy, was produced as part of the Women Center Stage Festival at the Culture Project, New York, in July. An upcoming workshop production of *Sweet Disaster*, a multimedia performance event with films by David Hopkins and text by Meehan, will be produced through a residency at HERE (SoHo, New York) in January 2003.

**Soprano Joanne Mouradjian**, assistant professor of music, performed Armenian songs for the Chaminate Music Club of Providence in March 2002. The following May she performed the Bach cantata *Jauchzet Gott* with Earle Raney (trumpet) and Joe Bono conducting the Wheaton Chamber Orchestra. In August she performed the lead soprano role of Elsie Maynard in ten performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Yeomen of the Guard* with the Courthouse Center Light Opera Company in Kingston, R.I., David Price directing.

At the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, **Bianca Cody Murphy**, professor of psychology, was given the Distinguished Professional Contribution Award by Division 44 for her leadership and scholarship on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues.

**Barbara Stephens**, visiting instructor of English, published the creative nonfiction story "Queen of the Ball" in *A Sense of Place*, an anthology of Cape Cod women's writing (Shank Painter Publishing, 2002).

**Patty Stone**, assistant professor of art, mounted a one-person exhibition of her paintings in September at the Sullivan County Museum in Hurleyville, N.Y. The exhibition, titled *Aerial Views and Flight Patterns*, included new work inspired by flight maps Stone inherited from her father, a WWII pilot. In conjunction with the show, Stone was interviewed on Aug. 23 for WJFF New York about her work and life as an artist. Stone's work is included in a current exhibition at the Fitchburg Art Museum. *A Nation Mourns and Artists Respond* runs through Dec. 29. Last March a Stone painting was included in the juried exhibition *Action/Reaction* at the Paul Creative Arts Center Gallery at the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

**Gerald Zuriff**, professor of psychology, published "Philosophy of Behaviorism" in *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior* (2002).

### Alumni

**Deborah M. Figart '81**, Ellen Mutari and Marilyn Power recently published *Living Wages, Equal Wages: Gender and Labor Market Policies in the United States* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). Wage setting has historically been a deeply political and cultural as well as economic process. This informative and accessible book explores how U.S. wage regulations in the twentieth century took gender, race-ethnicity and class into account. Focusing on social reform movements for living wages and equal wages, it offers an interdisciplinary account of how women's work and the remuneration for that work has changed along with the massive transformations in the economy and family structures.

