

HISTORY OF WARING SCHOOL

Waring School, originally known as La Petite Ecole, was founded by Philip and Joséé Waring in their home in Rockport, Massachusetts in the summer of 1972. At the beginning, there were only four students, including the three oldest Waring children. During the first year of the Rockport school most of the Founders' time was devoted to the actual construction of the school building, a barn-like addition onto the Warings' own home. The School was completed by early summer of 1973. By that time the school had become known with the help of some publicity in the local newspapers, and the first applicants for the 1973-74 school year began to arrive. The first admissions cycle yielded nine new students out of 10 applicants.

With a completed school building providing the spaces for various kinds of learning activities, with a program of studies, and with a critical mass of 12 students, 1973-74 was really the first year of the Waring School. All of the children in the school that year were under 13 years of age. The program was very flexible and reflected the philosophy and personal preferences of its founders.

They believed then, as we do now, that children learn best when they are interested in what they are doing. They therefore sought to create a learning environment that would arouse students' interest and desire to learn. Though La Petite Ecole had limited space (one building on three-quarters of an acre), the Warings loaded it, inside and out, with interesting things and happenings. They created a rich diversity of gardens, animals, and "spaces" named after activities that were associated with them—the music corner, the pottery bench, the Art Studio, the Library, the Wood-Working Shop, the Poetry Room, and so on. La Petite Ecole was in many respects the "open classroom" much talked about in the late 60's and early 70's, though this was as much a result of physical necessity as any planned effort to put into effect a recognized pedagogical approach.

The Founders believed that the content of what students were asked to learn should be the very best our tradition and culture contains in the realms of music, art, literature, math, science, history, and language. They emphatically rejected the notion that there is a special subject matter, such as juvenile literature or simplified science and history texts, for younger students and that exposure to the great works of great minds should be deferred to the upper levels of high school or to college when students would be "ready" for them. Rather, the Founders held that the great ideas and images contained in our tradition can and should be presented to students "from the time they learn to read and count in order that they become familiar from the very beginning with the content of a liberal education." The environment of La Petite Ecole was, therefore, kept as rich in words, ideas, and images as it was in interesting things to do and share.

The typical day in the Rockport school began with Morning Talk, the historical forerunner of our present All-School Meeting. Everyone would sit around a long table in the Grande Salle of the school building and do such things as listen to stories, read poetry, solve logic problems, read out loud from journals, and discuss history and current events. After Morning Talk there would be academic (French, math, music, drawing, history, science, writing) and not so academic (pottery, wood-working, gardening, animal care, school maintenance) activities until the school day ended at 4:00 P.M.

The small number of students and staff made travel together an inviting possibility. In the spring of 1974 the whole school went camping in the Smokey Mountains for three weeks.

BEVERLY

Again the following year, everyone set out together, this time for California in a G.M.C. diesel bus, known as “Rocinante” which the Waring had purchased and outfitted for camping. The school’s departure on the last day of February 1975 marked the beginning of an epic voyage that lasted three months and involved a month-long mechanical breakdown in Texas and a two-week stay in the San Francisco area. The old “Rocinante” has been replaced with a newer G.M.C. coach, but the old Waring wanderlust is still very much in evidence. Travel to destinations near and far is frequently part of the Waring program. And this year during End Term, the junior class will take its 21st annual trip to France.

The year 1975-76 was the last for the school in Rockport. That year it had become clear to the Founders that if the school was going to keep its older students for the high school years, it would have to move to a property with more space, more buildings, and more possibility for growth. It would also need an area with a larger potential student population than Cape Ann. Moving closer to Boston seemed the obvious solution. In the spring of 1976 the school purchased the 26-acre Edith Miles Coolidge Estate in the Centerville section of Beverly, Massachusetts. The school moved from Rockport to Beverly in the spring and summer of 1976. As it turned out, only two of the Rockport students, besides the Waring children, accompanied the school to Beverly. When the school opened that September, the student body was almost entirely new.

The move brought about many changes, but the first and most obvious was one of physical size. Consequently, the name “La Petite Ecole,” clearly no longer appropriate for an institution that occupied a large estate, was officially changed. The school was given two names, “Ecole Bilingue de Beverly, Inc.” and the “Waring School,” the latter because people were not usually able to pronounce the former and in any case had taken to referring to the school simply as “Waring.” “Ecole Bilingue” was chosen by the Founders because they wanted “to emphasize the position of French in our curriculum...” The school’s French name symbolized that the transmission of French language and culture is strongly associated with the Waring mission. Put simply, the Founders of the school “raised their own children in two languages and cultures and, to the extent possible, wanted to do the same for all the students of the Waring School.”

A second major area of change initiated by the move to Beverly was the significant growth of the student body and staff as a result of having facilities that could accommodate greater numbers. There were 18 students at Waring the first year in Beverly. By the next year that number had doubled. And seven years later, at the time of our first NEASC evaluation, there were 58 students in the school. The school continued to grow more or less steadily from that moment, leveling off at about 100 students in the early 1990’s. In the mid 1990’s a decision was made after much study and discussion to allow the student body to grow at a measured pace to its present size of about 145-50 students.

More students necessitated more teachers and staff. In Rockport and during the first two Beverly years, Philip and José Waring did most of the teaching with assistance from one additional staff member. The teaching staff was increased dramatically for the 1978-79 school year with the hiring of four new full-time teachers, who together with the Warings brought the number of full-time Faculty to six. Five part-time teachers were added over the next few years to bring the faculty to approximately eight full-time equivalents. Since that time the faculty has grown in measured response to program needs and the size of the student body. In 1993, the number of full-time equivalents was around 13.5, and the student-to-faculty ratio was 7.3 to 1. Today the number of faculty in full-time equivalents is slightly above 18 yielding a student-to-faculty ratio of approximately 8 to 1.

EXPANSION

In its new setting, the administrative needs of the school grew as well. In 1981 the school hired a full-time administrator to handle a wide range of administrative tasks that had previously fallen to the Founders and, to a lesser extent, the faculty. These tasks included keeping the books, paying bills, athletic scheduling, college counseling, school admissions, among others. Thus was set in motion the gradual development of the school's administration in response to its growing size and complexity.

The Coolidge property provided ample space, both in and out of doors, for the expansion of the young school. Originally there were five structures: a large main house, a stable and carriage house, a barn, a farmhouse, and a large greenhouse. In addition, there were fields, gardens, and woodlands as well as a stream and small pond. The school has been renovating and adapting the original buildings and landscape ever since it arrived on the property. The Stable and Carriage House, now known as the School, went through two stages of major renovation and now contains administrative offices, a large multi-function room called the Grande Salle, and a wing devoted to the music program. The Barn has also gone through repeated metamorphoses, beginning in the summer of 1978 and continuing into the summer of 1991. The Barn now contains the Library, the Pottery Studio, some faculty offices, and an array of large and small classrooms. The large main House has been renovated successively over the years and was significantly expanded with the addition of a three-story wing in 1986. The House now contains a large kitchen and dining area, a café, the Headmaster's office, an administrative wing, classrooms, a French library, a basement locker and activity area, a nursery, a darkroom, and three apartments for faculty. Even the former Greenhouse was rebuilt as a smaller theater. In 1991 this facility was expanded into a larger theater that would seat around 300. Included in the project was a new atelier for the Art Program, an exhibition foyer, a green room, and a significant amount of storage space. Only the farmhouse has remained substantially unchanged. It is currently the residence of the school's Caretaker and Plant Manager.

The only structures on the campus built entirely from scratch are the Gymnasium, completed in 1982, and an academic building known as the Forum, completed in 2001. The Gym includes a two-bay garage and adjoining workshop and storage area. The surrounding fields and pastures of the original estate have lent themselves well to use in the school's sports program. The school currently has two playing fields for soccer and lacrosse, a tennis court, and one practice field as well as a former large paddock adjacent to three of the buildings and known as the "Quad."

The recently completed Forum, the most prominent structure in the build-out of the first phase of our Campus Master Plan (developed in 1996), is a multipurpose facility located on the hill between the Gym and the House and overlooking the campus from the east. The building contains three state-of-the-art laboratories, a green house, computer center, faculty offices, project area, and amphitheater known as the Polygon. The award-winning design of the Forum was developed by JSA of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The Forum with its pedestrian zone that extends to the House and School has largely redefined the center of the Waring campus.

After the move to Beverly in 1976, the scope of the program expanded rapidly to accommodate the needs of students in a wider range of ages. By 1979-80, there were students from late elementary age through the senior year in high school. In the spring of that year, Waring's first graduates were awarded their diplomas. One of them was the oldest daughter of Philip and José Waring; the other was the oldest daughter of one of the faculty. The school has graduated students every subsequent year. The 2003 graduating class brought the total number of alumni to 298.

TRANSITION

In 1981 the original Board of Trustees, which was comprised of Philip and José Waring plus two members of the Waring family, was expanded to include parents and prominent North Shore residents who had an interest in the school. The Waring family, however, maintained their decision-making authority by means of the Corporation, of which they were still the only members. The mid-1980's saw a further addition of new Board members as well as an expansion of the Board's role as a formal governing body of the school. The membership of the Corporation was increased, which had the effect of gradually transferring authority to determine policy from the Waring family to the Board of Trustees. In 1985 the Board of Trustees elected college professor, Dr. Malcolm Reid, as its first chair who was not of the Waring family. He served two years before stepping down in 1987 in favor of Thomas M. Burger, a financial consultant who served as Board Chair until October of 1993. At that time Richard Prouty, Executive Director of Project Adventure Incorporated, assumed Board leadership and has served in that capacity up to the present.

In the spring of 1990, Philip and José Waring announced their retirement. This decision was made in consultation with a Transition Committee that had been formed by the Board of Trustees in anticipation of the Waring family's regretted but inevitable withdrawal from active, day-to-day participation in the life of the school. Assistant Headmaster, Peter L. Smick, was appointed Acting Headmaster in July 1990. The Waring family departed in September. In early March of 1991, Peter Smick was appointed Headmaster by a unanimous vote of the Board of Trustees. By the summer of 1991 the Board considered the transition from the founding era of the school to the second generation of leadership to be complete and voted to dissolve the Transition Committee.

The Waring School has prospered in the last ten years since it was last evaluated by the NEASC. That period has seen growth in the school's program both in terms of scope and depth. There have also been a wide range of initiatives that have helped to advance the school as a viable institution in the long-term. These include two strategic planning cycles (1994 and 2002), the development of a Campus Master Plan, a significant increase in the school's endowment fund, a three-year capital fund campaign, and two major revisions of the school's governance structure, which have helped to

clarify the Board's role and to insure dynamic and responsive leadership for the school in the future. Finally, the Waring community has developed a more positive and consistent self-awareness that has helped it to identify its strengths and build on them more effectively as well as to understand and address its inherent weaknesses. As a result, the school is achieving better harmony between its outward and inward concerns as well as between how it perceives itself and how it is perceived by the wider community.

The history of the Waring School has largely been one of transition: a transition from simplicity to greater complexity, from the personal vision of its founders to a shared vision of those who have been drawn to the school, from a large family to a small community, and, inevitably, from a little school that did everything *de nouveau* to an institution that has a rich, though relatively brief, historical tradition. The original mission of the Founders was to create a vibrant and compelling learning environment that resembled a large family. In the words of Philip Waring, "that large family has become a small community." But, its underlying mission has remained remarkably the same: to be a place where learners can flourish and encourage one another in the pursuit of learning.