Northwood School: the Survival Story of an Educational Jewel in the Adirondacks

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Northwood School

The Survival Story of an Educational Jewel in the Adirondacks

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Section I: Education in the Adirondacks.

This Final Project for the Adirondack history graduate studies program tracks the establishment of a unique institution in the Adirondacks: Northwood School. It is not an attempt at a thorough historical account of the 100-year history of this private secondary school. It is, however, a study of the evolution of an enterprise in the Adirondacks that, like so many industries in the park, experienced growing pains.

Northwood School is an example of a secondary boarding institution whose history mirrors the many changes in private education over the last one hundred years. As was the case with many of these private institutions, Northwood had to contend with the issue of isolation. The school’s remote location caused it to evolve its own regional character. The school struggled financially as a not-for-profit institution that relied on tuition revenues and donations to maintain its stature in the competitive boarding school world. Northwood School also found itself challenged to sustain an educational philosophy when its market share dwindled and athletics became a more dominant identity for the school. Northwood School has had to reinvent itself a number of times over the one hundred year history, as other private schools have done. The school found itself in a paradoxical position regarding world affairs as it attempted to maintain its isolationist position while expanding its cultural programs. Yet despite these challenges, Northwood School survived because of its commitment to the core values written into the original charter of the Lake Placid Club Educational Foundation. Those core values are still maintained today.
Education is an industry and is subject to the same kind of analysis as other institutions. It is my intention to explore the vicissitudes experienced by Northwood School from 1905, when it was founded by members of the elite and internationally famous Lake Placid Club, to the present (2004) when the school is poised to celebrate its one hundredth anniversary.

The Adirondack region has always been viewed as a wilderness area. The first travel guidebooks, like that written by William H.H. Murray in the late 1800s, portrayed a place of wildness, remote but quiet, where one could escape the complexities of the civilized world. Artists, intellectuals, and the elite class all found reasons to travel to the Adirondacks. As people discovered the region they brought with them as much that was good about the urban world as they could. It was only a matter of time before these interests turned into retreats, clubs, camps, and more formal institutions. Northwood School, originally designed as an educational addition to the Lake Placid Club, evolved in this fashion.

Northwood School today is a co-educational, non-denominational secondary school serving grades nine to twelve. The academic motto “Power Through Health and Knowledge” steers the educational mission of the school. Students, both boarding and day, are asked to balance a rigorous academic schedule with a variety of athletic pursuits and extra-curricular obligations. The demands placed on those willing to join the Northwood School are many. College placement results and success beyond the school community are the benchmarks by which the school evaluates itself.

Northwood School survived its first century despite numerous challenges both inside and outside the Adirondack region. As with many of the industries that have come
and gone in the Adirondacks, there were both prosperous times and difficult periods. External forces, including but not limited to economic depression, world war and technological change, influenced many decisions that the institution's directors made. Yet Northwood School was able to stay the course through the establishment of a strong educational program supported by a series of committed educators who shared a belief in their vocation and a genuine love of the Adirondack region.

Northwood School has reached its first centennial. The bulk of the Northwood School story centers on the years from 1928, when the school was officially chartered, to 1973 when it changed its status from an all boy's to a co-educational institution. Like so many secondary schools that started as boy’s schools and added girls later in their history, the roots of the Northwood experience are deeply entrenched in those “all male” years.

The early years of the twentieth century are often considered a boom time for many areas in the Adirondacks, including Lake Placid. The hotel industry flourished as tourists flocked to the area to experience the beauty of the mountains and the cleanliness of the air, and to get away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Rail service opened the high peaks region around Lake Placid. By 1887 service existed to Saranac Lake and within a few years, the last spur to Lake Placid was complete. ¹ The development of better roads brought increasing numbers of middle class visitors into the region seeking recreational opportunities. Roads also opened the Adirondacks to a larger range of tourists, some expecting conditions nearly as luxurious as they had left at home.

Cultural pursuits as well as recreational ones began to flow into the region with increasing numbers of tourists. Clubs emerged throughout the Adirondacks as fishermen, ¹ Adirondack Yesteryears, “Adirondack History Timeline,” Advertiser’s Workshop, Lake Placid. 2001. p 5.
hunters, artists and intellectuals all came to the region in search of the wilderness. The first great preserve dates back to 1870s. The Adirondack Club was created by the owners of the prosperous McIntyre Iron Company. Its members took advantage of the vast holdings that included some of the best hunting and fishing spots in the area. Over time other preserves like the Adirondack Mountain Club, today known as the Ausable Club, and the Adirondack League Club purchased large tracts of land. Some of these purchases were for recreation; other for preservation and still others were business investments.

In many cases these clubs were quite exclusive. This was certainly the case with the Lake Placid Club, founded by Melvil Dewey. As a young man Melvil Dewey got involved in library work as a way of financing college. Dewey was a lifelong advocate of abstinence from alcohol who took courses at the Oneida, New York seminary and at the Seventh Day Adventist School in Alfred, New York. Dewey attended Amherst College where got involved in library work, and seemed to have an eye on the money making side of the business. Dewey wanted to establish a college for librarians, but found himself embroiled in politics and controversy in most of the collegiate settings he was employed. Finally Dewey founded the Lake Placid Club, far away from Boston and New York City and the critical eye of others. Dewey is best known as the inventor of the Dewey Decimal system, and he vacationed in the Adirondacks when he was otherwise not preoccupied with his library work. He saw the opportunity to create an institution in the Lake Placid Club that supported his ideas about exclusivity.

It was not Melvil Dewey's idea to simply find a quiet retreat ... he immediately set out to establish a cooperative organization of congenial people, mainly among
the library and academic professions whom he felt would appreciate the area’s beauty and tranquility, and, find self-rejuvenation from the rigors of daily life.²

The list of dos and don’ts for would-be club members supports Dewey’s conviction about selectivity and the formalities of organization.

Dewey’s obsession with rules and standards led to policies concerning everything from stray cats to membership. The following five criteria highlight Dewey’s obsession with searching out only those “pure” individuals willing to enlist in a club so focused on perfection.

“... The club does not want, and if by mistake it receives as member or associates will encourage to resign, the following classes, even though in other respects they meet club standards:

1. The ultra fashionable or fast set.
2. Those who outrage sensible mountain standards by overdressing, elaborate jewelry, etc.
3. Those who care more for the bar or grill room, late suppers, and city vices or wickedness than nature, simplicity and health.
4. Chronic faultfinders and born pessimists whose disagreeable comments on everything in sight annoy and offend people with healthier minds.
5. Bargain hunters unwilling to accept the club rule of invariable prices and striving to get more than they pay for, even if the extra cost is thrown on their associates.³

² David Ackerman, Lake Placid Club: A History (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1998), p. 17.
³ Ackerman, p. 37.
Despite these exclusionary views, the idea that one could come to the Adirondacks and set up an institution of one’s own was not new to the Adirondack region. From the early days of European exploration, the Adirondacks were viewed as a likely spot for creating a utopian environment. As with the founders of other controlled living experiments in the Adirondacks (Timbucto or Brown’s Tract or even Johnston) Dewey had a vision for his club that was well thought out and unwavering.

The Lake Placid Club came into being in 1896 through the efforts of Melvil Dewey, who made land acquisitions that led to its incorporation. The Lake Placid Club Resort became an international destination for vacationers. In fact, the Lake Placid Club Resort overshadowed other hotels and destinations for tourists in the area. The reason for its success lies in Melvil Dewey’s vision, attention to detail and his approach to membership. From the beginning Dewey was thorough and attentive to every detail. The consolidation of Dewey property and the acquisition of other parcels were well thought out, including the purchase of farmland to help make the entire resort self-sufficient. The Lake Placid Club Co. issued stocks and created an elaborate Board of Directors as well as an advisory board, none of who ever received dividends for their investment. But stockholders did see the value of the stock rise as the Lake Placid Club facility grew. Dewey was creative and somewhat reckless with his accounting practices as he was always spending more than the Lake Placid Club was receiving from membership. And by the end of Dewey’s life the Club found itself in grave financial difficulty. But Dewey always sought to expand his vision (figuratively and literally) and this constant growth kept Northwood vital.

4 Ackerman, p. 16.
Along the way Dewey had time to hone his educational vision. Starting in 1905 on the Lake Placid Club property, six students enrolled in a new school led by a man named John M. Hopkins who was hired by Dewey and other members of the Lake Placid Club Board of Directors to educate boys whose families were members of the Lake Placid Club. Hopkins shared Dewey’s ideas about education outlined earlier and was successful in moving the school forward toward the goal of a self sustaining program. By 1910 the school had sent its first graduates to Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

With the success of Mr. Hopkins’s school came loftier goals, and in 1912 the first buildings of what would become Northwood School were erected on property purchased by the Lake Placid Educational Foundation adjacent the Lake Placid Club grounds on the northern perimeter of the property. Hopkins’s facility was modest yet complete enough to satisfy the private school consumer. The school became known as an attractive choice for those who loved the outdoors and had hopes of preparing for the finest colleges and universities in the country.

The school of the Hopkins era was based on fundamentals. “The school is not committed to any method or scheme of education, but was founded and is administered on the fundamental principle that to fulfill its whole duty, it must meet as completely as it can, all the needs of boy’s life not cared for otherwise.” The course of study outlined offered core courses in: penmanship, public speaking, and debating. Latin was mandatory in addition to French. The pamphlet introducing the Boys’ School offered: “A boys’ workshop in a boys’ paradise.”

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5 “About a Boys’ School which will Open,” Lake Placid Club Education Foundation, Northwood School Archives, 1925.
6 “Boys’ School of the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation,” Lake Placid Club Education Foundation, Northwood School Archives, 1925.
Because Lake Placid was not yet a winter sports destination, the idea of staying in the North Country during the winter months was not entertained. Right after Christmas students traveled south to Florida where they set up shop in Coconut Grove for the winter months. The southern version of the Hopkins school again featured outdoor sports, during such seasons life was centered on the ocean, as the school owned its own sailboat. This north-south migratory tradition continued until the end of Hopkins’s career in 1921. Hopkins retired in that year and passed the reins to Herbert L. Malcolm.

At this important juncture the school struggled to reestablish its identity and reputation in Lake Placid. The school was called by different names including The Malcolm School, The Lake Placid School for Boys, The Lake Placid- Florida School. The Lake Placid Club Board of Directors hoped the school could stand on its own merit, especially economically. The families of the young men attending during this time were affluent and interested in the selective nature of both the Lake Placid and the Florida campuses.

The Lake Placid Club’s elitist environment was by today’s standards discriminatory. There is no doubt that it was a selective institution that excluded many minorities. The Lake Placid Club established standards that today would be considered restrictive and in some cases prejudiced. Ackerman quotes an excerpt from the 1928 Yearbook, under the heading “Club standards,” that clearly indicates the attitudes of the founders regarding Jews and African Americans. The Lake Placid Club membership book uses exclusionary language such as the following: “From its founding the invariable rule is to admit no Hebrews . . . Except as servants, Negroes are not
admitted.” Evidence of these practices is also found in early editions of the student newspaper, and then known as the “Migrator.” On more than one occasion student editorials made mention of “Negroes” in a demeaning fashion, suggesting that African Americans played nothing more than a servant’s role in society. Although the elitist stance taken by the school was usually subtler, it is clear that there was no place for students of color. Members of certain religious groups were also excluded. Lake Placid Club School catalogue speaks to the school’s method: “... to inspire boys to achieve intellectual success and Christian manhood.” The elitism of “Club” affiliation was also highlighted in the school catalogue from 1926-1927. “... one must be from a present or former school patron, or a Club member.” The admission policies of the school and the practice of enrolling students that met Lake Placid Club standards stayed with the school well into the 1960s.

The Lake Placid Club School operated in the same fashion as most of the private school world. Private schools across the country, but especially in New England, worked hard to keep their charges separate from a growing immigrant class in America. Puritan influences controlled the thinking of school leaders during this time. Private schools were the perfect place to keep a child sheltered from the masses, and among their own.

There was upheaval in Florida as growth and development began to put pressure on the areas around the school. The hotel industry had begun to blossom during this period, ultimately forcing Malcolm to move the Florida campus north to Pompano Beach, an area farther removed from the tourist crowds in and around Miami. The hotel industry

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7 Ackerman, p 39.
9 Lake Placid School Catalogue, Northwood School Archives, 1922-1923.
10 Lake Placid Club School Catalogue, Northwood School Archives, 1926-1927.
in the Adirondacks had actually had the reverse effect on the school in the north. More visitors to the area had helped the Lake Placid Club grow thus increasing the client base for potential students in the Lake Placid Club School. Whether the pressure came from Malcolm’s desire to isolate his students from the perils of the civilized world or the real estate value was such that it made economic sense to move to less expensive property is unclear.

By 1925 the Malcolm era had come to a close and so too had the era of winter term in Florida. With the retirement of Malcolm the campus on the grounds of the Lake Placid Club fell into the hands of the membership. The management of the Lake Placid Club agreed to upgrade a few buildings to accommodate the school’s fifty students and seven faculty members. These first few years in the Lake Placid campus were not luxurious, as most of the buildings were not designed for year-round use. Winterizing the buildings and contending with the cold harsh winters was a work in progress for the first few classes and their faculty. It was here that the Lake Placid Club Educational Foundation stepped in and generated the needed revenues to strengthen the facility.

A great deal was going on around the nation during the first two decades of the twentieth century. World War I established the United States as an international power. The war to end all wars raged on for four years, finally bringing in the United States in 1917. Economically the roaring twenties fueled the industrial machine that the United States had created. Henry Ford brought the automobile to the assembly line before the start to World War I.

On the national front, private schools struggled to survive. Many good teachers enlisted in the war, and families who normally would have sent their sons to private

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school kept them home to help run the household, manage the family business or take care of younger brothers and sisters. The country was focused on rationing and conserving goods in support of the war effort. A private school education seemed frivolous when weighed against these more pressing needs.

On the Lake Placid Club School campus, located in the heart of the remote Adirondack Park, the effects of the war were documented in the monthly school newspaper, “The Migrator.” The February 1918 edition featured a full page advertisement taken by the Gallaudet Aircraft Corporation that announced the manufacture of seaplanes and airplanes, calling them; “The answer to the U-Boats.”

The opening editorial in that edition is titled “War and the Preparatory School.” The author talks about the pending legislation that would lower the age of eligibility to eighteen for enlistment in the armed service. The article also suggests that the best thing young men not old enough to fight could do was to work hard in school and be as prepared as possible for college or university. “As Mr. Wilson declared last year, it shows the best type of patriotism for those under age to remain in school and educate themselves for the time when their country may need them.”

The November 1918 edition remarks on the importance of good men in the United States, as the war was coming to a close. “Although our land has not suffered thro’ shell and marauder the period of reconstruction will, if possible, be here more trying than ever. Our country will need competent, able men-- men educated and strong in mind, body and will, -- men who should have what the boys in school are trying to acquire at present . . . and it was called Patriotism.” The alumni notes in the same edition

13 Ibid, p 5.
of the school paper list numerous men who died overseas. This patriotism and sense of mission that was part of the culture of the United States during this period served to justify the continuation of schools like the Lake Placid Club School. Parents felt vindicated in their decision to send their children to the school, and the students who attended had a reason to push themselves academically. This self-drive was important, especially given the school's distance from the centers of world affairs.

The Lake Placid Club Education Foundation had grand plans to run a Boys' school, a Junior Boys' school, and a summer school. The Foundation also continued to encourage its adult membership by proposing that the Club grounds be used for sabbaticals and periods of recuperation. All these ideas were part of a design that sought to maximize the efficiency and productivity of the nation's workforce. Dewey's mission was to have the Lake Placid Club Educational Foundation identified with the nation's best, and to prepare those "men" for service to their country.

While the war came and went, and the school suffered its share of losses, the overall impact seems to have been less than that of World War II. It may have been the older enlistment age of the times or the unsophisticated communication networks that minimized the impact in and around Lake Placid. It was likely some of both, but the school's desire to keep these young men out of harm's way and to prepare them for college is the most striking reason. While the Lake Placid School was attempting to keep its own isolated from the perils of the real world, the Lake Placid Club was growing and opening up to a larger audience beyond the "Blue Blood" affiliations of its founders. The club had developed a large physical plant that was expensive to maintain and required

14 Ibid, p. 5.
more revenue each year. Enrollment at the Lake Placid School was influenced positively by the continued growth of the club.

The Lake Placid Club was an established resort with a full service facility including farms, shops and services to meet most any needs. The novelty of winter sports was beginning to influence those wealthy enough to visit the Adirondacks in the winter. Speed Skating had become a major winter sport by the 1920s and the Lake Placid Ski Club was founded in 1921. The infrastructure of what is today Lake Placid village evolved during this period as grand hotels sprung up and attempted to emulate the success of the Lake Placid Club. Mary Mackenzie’s book on the history of the village of Lake Placid provides readers pictorial evidence of numerous grand hotels built to accommodate large numbers of visitors, yet most of them did not develop the infrastructure that the Lake Placid Club had. The strength of the Lake Placid Club was its self-sufficiency. As the Club grew it added a dairy farm, field for potatoes and livestock, along with all the support services one could imagine a small village to have.

By the halfway mark in the 1920s the resort known as the Lake Placid Club was prospering. Melvil Dewey’s educational institution was realized and had evolved into a well-respected school. The Adirondacks, more specifically the village of Lake Placid, became a desirable tourist spot, especially as modern travel became more convenient. Northwood School entered the second chapter of its history with a solid though incomplete foundation under it.

Section II: Northwood School Begins.

The Lake Placid Club School for boys welcomed the era’s third Headmaster Dr. Ira Flinner in 1925. Dr. Flinner was Harvard educated, and led an experienced teaching staff that had set up residence on the grounds of the Lake Placid Club. Flinner was also well connected to the wealthy and influential Lake Placid Club members.

This is the real beginning of Northwood School. Dr. Flinner oversaw the school’s operation over the next twenty-six years. This stretch of time witnessed a name change, the Great Depression, World War II, and the closing of the school, and a reopening and post war period. As with his two predecessors, Dr. Flinner possessed the strength of character that allowed him to guide the school through some of the most difficult years in the history of Northwood School and the nation.

The Lake Placid Educational Foundation was chartered in 1922 and its goals reaffirmed Dewey’s convictions. The literature speaks optimistically of a one million dollar endowment and the close relationship with the facilities of the Lake Placid Club. The spirit of health and outdoor adventure remain ingrained in the institution’s philosophy. In 1927 the school was officially named Northwood School, and that name remains today.\(^{16}\) The destination referenced the section of the Lake Placid Club property where the school was situated, which had always been identified on maps as “Northwoods”.

The Lake Placid Club had experienced considerable growth in the post WWI era, especially during the early 1920s. But it was the 1932 Olympic games that established Lake Placid’s stature as a world-class winter resort and had the greatest impact on

\(^{16}\) Lake Placid School for Boys, School Catalogue 1926-27, Lake Placid Education Foundation, Northwood School Archives, Lake Placid, NY, p. 5.
Northwood School. Northwood School, like many private educational programs embraced this new outside influence.

Once Lake Placid was formally named the site of the 1932 Olympic games, the village and the surrounding communities began preparations. This was no small undertaking, as everything from travel corridors to athlete housing had to be examined. With the excitement surrounding the Olympics came a greater focus on skiing, speed skating, and other winter sports that had been the special domain of European and Scandinavian countries. Northwood School found itself in the middle of the new “Winter sports capital” of the United States. Northwood School’s winter sports programs began to grow as more Americans became familiar with these new wintertime athletic adventures and the facilities for pursuing them became more abundant.

Not everything associated with this new outside perspective proved helpful to the school’s advancement. The economic realities of the collapse of the stock market brought on by the Great Depression had a profound effect on the tourist industry around the country. Lake Placid, especially the Lake Placid Club, was not immune. David Ackerman cites the crash of 1929 and the death of Melvil Dewey in 1931 as two main reasons for the decline in the Lake Placid Club. Melvil Dewey had paid little attention to the Lake Placid facility during the last years of his life, choosing to focus his energies in Florida instead.17

At this point the school was still operating almost exclusively on revenues from tuition received. Efforts were made to secure additional financial support by Dewey and others from Lake Placid Club membership. Dewey had written requests to most of the members of the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation Board asking for assistance in

17 Ackerman, p. 347.
order to "balance the books," and such contributions allowed the school to continue, although barely.

Financial difficulties were exacerbated by the death of Melvil Dewey, who left the Lake Placid Club with over three million dollars of debt when he died in 1931. It took nearly ten years for the Lake Placid Club to reorganize its debt. Records from Northwood School show that tuition revenues came close to meeting the budget projections, but each year there was the need for the Headmaster to secure a few thousand dollars to balance the books.18

The following quote, taken from the 1940 report to the Northwood trustees, sums up the mood of the school leadership and the continuing problem of enrollment and tuition increase. "During the year 1936-37 we faced about the same problems that we are facing this year. Our enrollment for that year was 67, the lowest in a twelve year period beginning with 1928 . . . As we were proceeding through the year 1936-37 the future did not look very encouraging because at that time we were going to have a sizable operating deficit . . . We shall have an operating deficit for this year of only $2,050 and do not have a mortgage on the plant. Nevertheless the situation is such that it requires serious study because there are some factors present that have not as yet been stated." The 1940 report went on to say that the questions about whether the depression was really over and the war was about to begin, loomed heavy over the planners. While everyone agreed that enrolling more students was the answer, no was sure how to do so.19

18 "Northwood School Board of Trustees Report 1933-1940," Northwood School Archives, Lake Placid, NY.
19 "Northwood School Board of Trustees Report," Northwood School Archives, Lake Placid, NY Feb. 6, 1941.
Records show that there was an on-going effort to establish ‘endowed funds’ in anticipation of deferred maintenance needs and unexpected loss. An example of the kind of loss that was worrisome was fire. Many of the more grand hotels in the Lake Placid area were lost to fires. Mary MacKenzie’s book, *The History of North Elba and Lake Placid, 1800-2000*, shows records of hotel fires at Adirondack Lodge, the Cascade House, the Interlocken Inn and Whiteface Inn.20 All these establishments had unsophisticated fire protection systems, and the fact that most buildings were almost entirely wood built, made fire the number one concern. Administrators at Northwood School worried about this a great deal. As the school expanded, efforts to create safe living and learning environments were on everybody’s mind.

Fortunately the world of private boarding schools was immune from most of the economic declines felt by the average American. The fact that most of the students at Northwood School remained in school during the Depression years is evidence that the majority was from affluent families that survived the economic shifts during this period.

Two alums from the class of 1928 were recently interviewed in anticipation of the school’s 100th birthday. Their reflections about the years 1928-1929 support the fact that those students attending Northwood School during this time were wealthy enough to manage financial downturns, including the Great Depression. William Allyn was a member of the class of 1928. He recounted the crash of 1929 as a significant news item. He remembered Headmaster Flinner addressing the issue at a school assembly, yet could not remember any major interruption to his school life.21 Allyn graduated in 1928, a year before the Depression, but kept close ties with friends and family members still affiliated

with the school. Allyn’s cousin continued at Northwood until his own graduation in 1931.

Ames Wheeler, a classmate of Allyn’s, was not able to recollect any disruptions to his school life either. Wheeler did comment that his father, who was a professor at Tufts University, was quite concerned about sending Ames to Northwood School at the same time as he sent Ames’s brother away to college. Both men said that they were unaware of world events while at the school, including economic ones. As is still the case today, the isolation of this small boarding school located in a remote part of the country played a significant role in the school’s ability to filter out information about world affairs with both good and bad consequences.

With the establishment of Northwood name, the school entered its 23rd year as an educational institution. Records from yearbooks during these transitional years reveal some impressive statistics regarding academics and college placement. By 1943 Northwood School had issued 275 diplomas. Boys had gone off to over 50 different colleges and universities. The majority attended Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton, Amherst, Williams, Cornell and West Point. Northwood was an established elite preparatory school in the company of most of the nation’s finest institutions. The school was still small and regional in terms of admissions demographics. The elite nature of the program remained relatively easy to maintain given the fact that the school graduated only twelve to fifteen students each year.

Despite the economic climate, Lake Placid was awarded the bid for the 1932 Olympic Winter games. This event, like no other until the next Olympics came to town in

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1980, impacted the economic and cultural growth of the area. As the rest of the country was bracing for the depression, Lake Placid was gearing up for an international event.

Next door, the neighboring village of Saranac Lake had become an established Tuberculosis Center with over two thousand TB patients in residence in the 1920s. Sadly, but significantly, TB brought people to the Adirondacks. It also brought students to Northwood School. One example of this is the Wallace brothers, of Syracuse, New York who were “sent” to Northwood School because they had mild cases of TB. The brothers represented the classes of 1937 and 1941 respectively. Their visit to the school campus during the summer of 2002 is testament to their cure.24

Lake George and Saratoga Springs, just a few hours to the south were established resorts, as was Old Forge to the west and the St. Lawrence Seaway to the north. Lake Placid was within a few hundred miles of major metropolitan areas of New York, Montreal, Boston, as well as the secondary urban centers of Albany, Burlington, Vermont, Syracuse and Utica. Advances in transportation made it increasingly easy to get to the Adirondacks. The net effect was that the Adirondacks had arrived on the resort scene. For vacationers from all walks of life there was a reason to travel to northern New York. Visitors to all these resort areas came to appreciate the Adirondacks, eventually deciding to send their children to school there. Northwood School benefited directly from the increasing numbers of visitors to the region. Through word of mouth, news spread of a strong school in this beautiful part of the world that provided a safe and challenging educational environment for those fortunate enough to be able to afford private education. The 1932 Olympics had put Lake Placid and the Adirondacks on the international road map.

Led by Godfrey Dewey, the son of the Lake Placid Club founder Melvil Dewey, the Olympic Committee planned the facility improvements and changes needed to allow Lake Placid to host the Olympic games. A new bobsled run, indoor ice arena and outdoor speed-skating oval were constructed. The existing ski jumps and cross country ski trails were updated. These physical improvements had a lasting impact on the future growth of Northwood School and its establishment as a premier winter sports program.

Ira A. Flinner’s tenure as headmaster of Northwood School set the philosophical direction for the next 75 years. Flinner would prove to be one of the most influential leaders in the Northwood School family as he led the school for the next 31 years. The “Flinner Award” is still presented today at the Northwood School graduation. The recipient is determined by faculty vote to be one of the strongest students in the senior class and to have contributed most to the quality of school life.

In a promotional pamphlet titled: “About A Boys’ School which will open” Flinner outlined specifically the mission of the school and how the school planned to mix work and play. The goal of “well-rounded manhood” was to be developed with “Christian influences, physical work, and an emphasis on the individual differences found in each student.” This idea of individualizing an academic plan to meet the needs of the student was new to the educational world and reflected the school’s commitment to remain small enough in terms of the number of students while supporting a faculty large enough to offer all the core disciplines.

Much of Dewey’s vision had become a reality as Northwood students were realizing the fundamental intellectual values inherent in the charter of the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation. Northwood School was educating successful young men,
who went on to well-respected colleges and universities, including the class of 1940: Yale (3), Hamilton, Duke, Princeton, West Point, Williams, Michigan, Colgate (2), Amherst, M.I.T., Tufts, Swarthmore, and Bowdoin. Again the school found itself in a world where international affairs were unifying the nation. Parents sought a safe environment to educate their children and prepare them to be the leaders of tomorrow. Students enrolled at Northwood and other private institutions were hearing a lot about patriotism and commitment. They were expected to work hard and prepare to help their nation, whatever the sacrifice. As World War II unfolded, the isolated regionalism of the school shifted somewhat. Parents viewed the school as a safe, secure, and isolated environment a decade earlier. International events were influencing the role that the school played in the minds of this next generation of Northwood families.

Among other things, exclusive admissions policies were harder to maintain. "The class of 1940 commencement speaker was Dr. Alfred E. Stearns, former Headmaster of Phillips Academy, Andover. Dr. Stearns emphasized the fact that this country is in the greatest need of correct and excessive tolerance. Throughout this country there exists an underground current of racial prejudice and hatred that will in the end permanently harm democracy."

These comments were appropriate given world events, yet they are also an indicator of how private education presented a paradoxical view of the world for many of its students. At Northwood, as with most private schools, boys from mostly elite backgrounds were educated in an environment isolated from the "real world." These young men had little or no interaction with other elements of society. They lived a privileged, albeit rustic, life, isolated from the evils of urban living. Although prejudice,

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class struggles and health concerns found their way into the school’s small community, most of these boys went on to elite colleges and universities where they remained among the company of their peers. The simple educational product was what Dewey was after when he created the Lake Placid Education Foundation. Its application beyond the small remote setting in the Adirondacks was more difficult.

The 1932 Olympics arrived and, although quite small by today’s standards, was a success. The 14 events of the 1932 games did not include Alpine ski events, but Alpine skiing soon became the premier winter sports event in the Olympic games after World War II. The sport of alpine or downhill skiing grew as a popular winter pastime in the Lake Placid region, and Northwood School later became one of the top alpine ski programs in the independent school world. Skating, Ice Hockey, Ski Jumping and cross-country skiing were established sports in 1941 when the State of New York passed a bill permitting the construction of ski trails on Whiteface Mountain. These events brought alpine skiing to the area and added to the attractiveness of a Northwood School experience.

For the 1932 games there was ice hockey, figure skating, and men’s speed skating. The only Nordic competition was ski jumping and cross-country. For the first and only time in Olympic history, the United States “won” the Winter Games by winning gold metals in six of the 14 events, plus four silver and one bronze. Three of the gold medals were won by Lake Placid residents.27 These local victories helped to establish Lake Placid as a winter sports mecca. From the end of the 1932 Olympics until the start of World War II, Northwood School established its new traditions in winter sports.

Beyond the winter sports offerings and the academic curriculum that were the foundation of the school, programs in drama thrived during these years, house parties were established, and the outdoor programs grew.

On the national front, academic institutions had begun to move away from the classical form of education. A renaissance was taking place and schools were examining the need for some of their tradition academic offerings. Courses in the arts and music grew during this time, as did electives in new subject matter like sociology and psychology. Private boarding schools were beginning to be viewed as more than just stepping-stones to Ivy League colleges and universities.

Yet the academic mission of the school remained strong. The May 1939 edition of “The Mirror” reported the college list was as impressive as those a decade earlier. In 1938 the list included M.I.T., Williams, Princeton, Harvard, Dartmouth, Cornell, Colgate, Bowdoin and Lehigh.28

Viewing the yearbooks and reading the school newspaper, and articles from the local newspapers, one is still left with the impression that Northwood School as a community, and Lake Placid the village, lived in a vacuum, regarding world affairs. The 1932 Olympics was a small affair. The seasonal nature of the Lake Placid Club and other resorts meant that there were serious gaps in the demand for information. Newsworthy items were hard to find during the slow periods of the year. An occasional editorial or announcement of a local boy entering the service was the only tangible evidence that the community was aware of grand scale of international events.

In a very real sense, however, international affairs threatened the stability of the institution. As Lake Placid grew, the Lake Placid Club found itself in debt and struggling

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to maintain a workforce as men went off to war. The club that Dewey had built was suffering from over expansion. Competition from other resort areas challenged the marketing efforts of the club. Improvements in transportation worked for and against Lake Placid. It was easier to get to the Adirondacks, but it was easier to get to most remote resorts, like those in Maine and New Hampshire. Because of this efficiency in transportation, people visited for less time and revenues fell. The new tourist class was less likely to pay the premiums the club was used to getting. Motels began to replace hotels, and camping became a popular activity. On top of all this was a huge complex in the Lake Placid Club with infrastructure costs that were difficult to fund, especially given the seasonality of the business.

In 1939 the Lake Placid Club went through a restructuring process in an attempt to manage over three million dollars in debt. The Federal Court got involved in 1943 and the United States Army took over the Club and Northwood School. The court mandated creation of a Redeployment Center at the Lake Placid Club and a Medical Unit on the campus of Northwood School allowed both facilities to operate and keep up with maintenance during the later years of the war. This influx of government money kept both facilities alive until the end of the war.

The school administration supported the war effort and acknowledged the efforts of all its graduates. The quote below comes from Headmaster Flinner’s opening remarks in the 1947 school newspaper.

I have enjoyed reading the reports that former boys have been sending to me concerning their military service. I wish there were some way to make these complete statements available to the 334 boys who served their country. The best we can do is to compile a brief summary concerning each boy so his friends may learn something about his war experiences. We are compiling such a history now to be published in book form and when completed each boy will receive a copy,
the gift of a member of the Board of Trustees. Whenever I mention to Northwood friends that 409 boys were eligible to serve their country, 334 selected and did serve and 16 failed to return, they are impressed with the large numbers for such a small school, but when I tell them that our eldest graduate when the war opened was only 38 and 18-year olds were called up, then they realize that the Northwood age group was the age group from which the government selected its largest numbers. The class of 1944 left a fund for a plaque to contain the names of Northwood men who served their country. The names of the 16 men who gave their lives are being placed on a bronze plaque and will be placed above the mantelpiece in the living room.29

The 1944 and 1947 Northwood School Yearbooks were dedicated to the men and women in-service to their country. The 1944 Northwood School yearbook, The Epitome, had an American flag, in color, inserted in the front inside cover and a full-page list of the Honor Roll, listing everyone from the Northwood family who served in the war. (Picture here) The 1947 Yearbook was dedicated specifically to the sixteen alumni who gave their lives.

Reading the individual biographies of each serviceman reveals much about their experiences at Northwood School and this era of the school’s history. Most of these men graduated from Northwood and moved on to a year of college before serving. Most attended Ivy League schools. In the case of Lawton Davis, a military career was the path he chose. Lawton was killed in action and received numerous citations for his gallantry. His Silver Star reads: “... for gallantry in action in connection with military operations against the enemy . . .” The military tradition was deep in the Davis family, and Lawton’s grandfather dedicated a room at Northwood, the Lawton Davis Memorial Room, in his grandson’s honor.30 This was just one act of philanthropy that helped Northwood school

30 “Northwood Boys of World War II,” p. 15.
finance projects and that also assisted in developing an endowment to protect against
economic downturns in the future.

World War II offered Northwood boys a more worldly view than they had
experienced in the First World War. The Second World War was the most significant
external event to influence the future direction of the school. World War II left a lasting
influence on over 80% of the Northwood School community. The sixteen men who died
in the war have been memorialized, but even deeper than their sacrifice was the change in
the mission of the school as a result of the war. Northwood School was no longer
immune to world events. Except for the 1932 Olympics, this was the first time in the
school’s history that international affairs significantly impacted the community.

The private school industry was also impacted by events on the international
scene. The sacrifices that the nation experienced during the war, and the revelation that
international affairs were now part of a well rounded education, caused educators at many
private schools to rethink their educational missions. Parents willing and financially able
to send their children away began demanding more diversity from the private sector.
Families were looking for diversity in the student body and in the academic programs.
Recent events had put the United States onto the front lines of the world arena. Preparing
young people for their place in this new world became a much greater task for educators.
For years private school leaders had found it easy enough to satisfy their customers with
a good college placement.
Section III: Post WWII, Renewal and Recovery

The social life of a student at Northwood School helped define the individual in the community. A brief examination of some school traditions highlights the important role that extra-curricular activities played in the school. The late 1940s saw the school settle back into many of the old patterns of earlier decades. Traditions returned and the school seemed to focus on providing a secure and safe environment for its students. Northwood School was again in the business of developing strong men who were academically, athletically and socially equipped for college and the world beyond school.

The October 1958 issue of the school newspaper, “The Mirror,” featured an article titled “Tribes elect Warpath Leader.” Northwood School’s mascot has always been “the Indians.” The logo on the ice hockey team jerseys was the same at that of the Chicago Blackhawks of the National Hockey League, complete with crossed tomahawks and the painted face of an “Indian Warrior.” The school even sponsored a yearlong competition involving the entire student body, which was divided into two teams, the Mohawks and the Senecas. The competition was varied and involved every possible competition available to the students, including skiing, chess, debate and crew. The yearbook and school newspaper are filled with highlights of the success of one tribe over the other during the course of the year. Senior pages in the yearbook listed the tribe affiliation near the top with the list of sports and activities.

The annual competitions between the Mohawks and the Senecas within the school continued until the 1960s. It is not clear whether they stopped because of a lack of interest or whether a change in the overall sports program brought more varied outside competition to the school, making the internal competitions obsolete. It is clear that these competitions filled a void in the lives of many of the Northwood boys.

When I recently interviewed two men from the class of 1928 and asked them if they remembered their tribe affiliations, in both cases I was told succinctly not only their affiliation but also the specifics of their victories and losses during their time at school. When I tried the same ploy with two men from the 1940s and 1950s, the responses were similar. It is fair to say that these affiliations were ingrained in the graduates of the school. From these affiliations alums were able to remember who the best chess player in the school was, who skied the fastest or who was the best tennis player. It seems that boys found their niche through their tribe affiliation and experienced success and failure in the context of that affiliation.

From year to year members of the winning tribe carried their bragging rights to school. Tribal leaders were praised for their efforts while the losing tribe was belittled. The school newspaper was usually the source of bragging rights or commentary about past accomplishments. The school’s yearbook always had a section devoted to specific scores from all the competitions. It is clear that these events were regarded as central to the school year by both students and faculty, as a typical selection indicates: “Never the less, the more powerful and mighty, the dominating and overwhelming Senecas remain in the lead as they are expected to throughout the year, the Senecas have an even more powerful aggregation this year than they did during the last twelve moons. With good
sports such as Ely and Tiernan, and our great Chief Alan Mackay, not to mention numerous others such as Vissering and Green who excel in the peculiar and particular fields-- we give fair warning to the unfair and useless Mohawks to pull up their women’s wigwams and move along; for they’ll find none but Seneca victories around here.” 32

This exchange highlights what I believe to be a significant piece of the school’s mission. These young men were sent away to boarding school at a young age, and asked by their parents to “grow up” and prepare for the world beyond. By finding themselves part of something rooted in tradition, these boys felt as though they were involved and valued. The security that developed out of these affiliations spilled over into other parts of school life and contributed to the individual boy’s healthy adjustment to a boarding lifestyle. Even though their antics may have been viewed as immature, and sometimes cruel, the students were clear on where they stood in the community. The Native American values of tribal life were an asset for the newcomer to the school and for the veteran who was looking to establish his place in the world. Leadership roles evolved through these affiliations and the school’s most respected student leaders were usually the tribal chiefs.

A typical excerpt from the “Mirror” confirmed these tendencies: “On September 28, 1940 Thomas Brown and Robert Isham were chosen the chiefs of their respective nations, the Senacas and the Mohawks. Once the chiefs had been chosen, Mr. Howard met with the delegation of three from each tribe to select the future members of the nations from the new boys. Since the ranks of the Senecas had been more heavily depleted than those of the Mohawks, the Senecas were accorded first choice with a two-

to-one pick over the Mohawks thereafter. As a result of this secret meeting the Seneca’s added thirteen new members, while the Mohawks increased their list by six."

Again these affiliations kept the Northwood boys focused internally. They looked ahead to each new season with anticipation of upcoming competitions with new recruits and greater success. There was an effort by the administration to weave in some academic competition as well. The Debate team was one academic competition. The Bradley Prize speakers and the Isham Prize speakers were two highly touted clubs that competed for their respective tribes. Although most of the summaries written in the school yearbooks highlight the athletic and outdoor adventure competitions, sometimes the annual race came down to an academic event. “The race between the two nations was now becoming a close one and, when the Mohawks picked up another 30 points by winning the annual debate, the margin between the two tribes was only twenty points.”

One can argue that this format helped break the monotony of school life and gave every member of the community something to focus on.

The school mascot, the “Redskin,” supported these competitions and accentuated the school’s focus on developing strong young men. It wasn’t until 1996 that Northwood School finally made the decision to change the school’s mascot from the Indian to the Husky. Despite opposition from many alumni of the school, the Indian name was dropped. This was the same time when professional teams like the Atlanta Braves and the Cleveland Indians baseball team experienced lawsuits and chose not to change their names. One other local public school in the area changed from the “Redskins” to the “Red Storm.” The current Headmaster of Northwood School, Ed Good, had spoken

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about such changes with Northwood School alum named Doug Smoke, who was then the chief of the northern New York State Native America group known as the Akewsasne. Smoke’s reply was that as long as the name and logo used were not depictions that made fun of or taunted people’s perceptions of their race, he did not have a problem with the school keeping the mascot. The Board of Trustees voted to make the change anyway.35

Beyond the Native American affiliation the school attempted to support other maturity building programs, most notably, hunting and the gun club. Northwood School annually sent a group of boys into the woods for a fall deer hunt in hopes of “bagging” a deer. Again, by today’s standards, these adventures into the woods with guns would not be acceptable at most institutions. At this time, however, it was thought to build character.

The fall deer hunt was an event in which only a few boys participated. The idea of teachers and students tracking deer through the woods and actually shooting them again seems farfetched by today’s standards. Yet again the bonding between teacher and student and student and student was important and valuable. The school paper reported the results of such expeditions with pride. “The deer hunt, which is taken every year, was a success. Sixteen Northwood hunters returned with two bucks. Mr. Wells and Mr. Cervone collaborated on an eight-point buck. Ed Norton another deer slayer, shot “Bambi,” another smaller buck.”36

The school also supported a gun club. The 1944 yearbook lists the school “Gun Club” with 15 students and a faculty advisor. In 1950 the name was changed to the “Rifle Club.” The 1947-48-student newspaper mentions The DeWitt Marksmanship Cup

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awarded to Peters Holmes, a member of the riflery Club, and acknowledges James Stillman as the winner of the “Fowl Shooting Contest.”37 Before and after WWII guns were still a part of a young man’s education and were an acceptable addition to the activities offered at the school. As the Second World War approached and Northwood boys joined the effort, hunting rifles were replaced with weapons of war.

At this juncture in the school’s history, the curriculum still represented the traditional academic model with requirements in Latin and Public Speaking and a focus on handwriting skills and the classics. Yet there was a subtle shift away from academic rigor that seems to have been a product of happenstance. The post-World War Two Northwood student arrived on the school campus in need of more than just academics. Dewey’s original intention to develop a “well-rounded individual” was reinforced during this time. The fact that academics may have been less important reflects a combination of institutional shifting and the personalities of the faculty in residence. This institutional shifting was also occurring on other private school campuses across the country. Private schools were again dealing with a consumer who was looking for something more.

Northwood School was an all boys’ school. Ingrained in the heart of the school’s mission was the development of boys into men. Part of that experience, beyond the academic preparation, was the development of a strong confident “man.” The following quote comes from the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation mission statement.

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“Lake Placid Club Educational Foundation will open a boy’s school . . . To prepare boys for college and technical schools and to develop them in body, mind, and morals in preparation for useful living.”

This idea of developing strong confident men was closely tied to the regional challenges of the Adirondacks. From the days of William H.H. Murray and his documentation of the Adirondack forest, residents from downstate have come to the mountains to refind their manhood. The modern urban world was increasingly compromising men by not giving them enough physical outlets to prove themselves. Melvil Dewey spoke of the importance of developing mind and body. That philosophy was written into the goals of the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation. It was supported by the Northwood School Riffery Club, the Hunt Club, and the Seneca verses Mohawk competitions. All these events were designed to give the young men at Northwood strength of character in preparation for life beyond school. Manhood was part of the formula for success, combined with strong intellectual pursuits.

At the close of World War II the Northwood School attempted to resume activities as usual. The last few years of the 1940s and the early years of the 1950s challenged the leadership of the school. Enrollment increased slowly and the facility began to require more and more money to maintain itself. In 1944, $20,000 was borrowed from the Lake Placid Education Foundation to pay past deficits for the years 1941, 1942 and 1943. Additional monies were spent to pay off a land purchase, with the small remainder put away for future considerations. Board reports throughout this time

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dating back to the mid 1930s and as far ahead as 1955 reference the need for loans, gifts from donors and more capital for improvements. These are not unusual needs for any business, and it seems Northwood School was never fiscally comfortable.

Meanwhile the Lake Placid Club was struggling to maintain its expansive facility. There was less support from club membership. This was due in part to the less exclusive nature of the clientele. There was a growing concern for the long-term future of both the Lake Placid Club and Northwood School. Competition from other private schools and the growing strength of suburban public and parochial schools were challenging Northwood School’s enrollment. The vacation industry was expanding and destination resorts like the Lake Placid Club were growing less popular as people sought out less expensive options for shorter periods of time.

The retirement of Dr. Ira A. Flinner in 1951 contributed to the financial turmoil of the next decade for the school. Flinner had steered the school through the Depression, World War II, and recovery. Flinner faced increasing economic challenges as the Lake Placid Club membership changed, however, and the program’s support for Northwood School lessened.

At this time in the school’s history, one finds a growing student population, expanding facility, and many new program initiatives. But “stockholders” still had reason to be wary. There was at least one occasion when the Headmaster was forced to ask some of the more affluent alumni for “emergency funds” to balance the budget. In a letter from Ronald Boardman to Godfrey Dewey on July 20, 1954, Boardman wrote: “Long before this I intended to write you a note to congratulate you on your able and
successful drive to raise enough funds for Northwood School to insure its continuing operation. 40

In 1954 Godfrey Dewey secured enough pledges to raise a total of $100,000 over a two-year period, "... To re-establish the Northwood School on a secure basis." Nine donors contributed between $5,000 and $25,000 each to reach the $100,000 goal and thus secure the continuation of the school. 41

In Godfrey’s letter a few weeks later to one of the benefactors, he was able to confidently say that the school would continue on. “Thank you for your friendly wire received yesterday in reply to my April 30 letter regarding Northwood School. When the deadline date arrived, we had the necessary $100,000 fund 90% subscribed and made a venture of faith in deciding to continue.” 42 Northwood School remained a tuition driven program throughout the rest of the 1950s and into the 1960s. If tuitions were not collected, bills did not get paid, and the school was forced to identify benefactors as Godfrey Dewey had done before.

Academically Northwood School no longer enjoyed an elite status in the private boarding school world. Many Northwood students during this time were weaker academically and socially than their predecessors in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Like many private schools, Northwood attempted to grow the enrollment during this time. The primary reason was increased revenue. The secondary reason was competition with other schools. Northwood was finding it more difficult to complete for its market share as other private institutions with much larger populations were building new buildings and creating impressive facilities. Northwood School was unable to maintain admissions

standards equal to those of past decades. As the pressure to enroll more students increased, there was a downturn in the quality of the student body. College placements were correspondingly weaker. It was simply more difficult to get students into the top colleges and universities. The curriculum had not been altered dramatically. The need for Latin and some of the more traditional course offerings was less. As more students arrived on the Northwood campus who were not projected to attend Ivy League schools or their equivalent, the school developed programs in remediation and introduced tutorial services. These efforts to help academically less capable students started a trend that diminished the school’s academic reputation over subsequent years. Ultimately the importance of tuition revenues became the focal point of many admission decisions. When tuition projections were not achieved the net result was deferred maintenance on the physical plant.

Despite these economic worries Northwood did continue to move forward, especially in the area of athletics. Northwood attended its first interscholastic crew event in 1952. That same year Northwood began the tradition of hosting its own Ice Hockey tournament. That event still continues today and is regarded as one of the best in the eastern United States. The student body also grew. The first exchange students came to Northwood in the 1950s. Increases in financial aid opened the door for students from middle class families. Northwood School was working harder to “fill the school” with strong students who were also accomplished athletes, and whose families had the ability to pay the tuition. Athletic program successes, especially in the winter sports, bolstered the school’s image and contributed to stronger admissions. Although not an explicit school policy, athletic prowess was become a key attribute for admission to the school.
Many of the faculty who came to Northwood School stayed for long periods. That fact contributed to the consistency of mission and success of many of the school’s programs. In the private school world today, faculty retention remains an important ingredient in the success of any school. Boarding schools, especially small ones in rural areas like Northwood, struggle to find ways to entice good faculty to stay in their communities. Those men and women willing to live in residence halls with the students, teach them in class, coach them on the playing field, and mentor them as surrogate parents, are rare. Schools have been forced to develop creative and sophisticated ways to retain faculty, including better salaries, nicer housing, and more non-salary benefits. Still, it takes a certain kind of individual to make the commitment of being a “school person” for the long haul.

Northwood School has been more fortunate than many schools because of its location next to the village of Lake Placid, a well-endowed resort community in a beautiful part of the country. Faculty came to Northwood, fell in love with the area, and often stayed on to raise their families and to enjoy the amenities. Northwood School today has six faculty with over twenty years of service to the school and two others with over thirty years.

Section IV: 1960’s, a time for change.

The 1960s marks an important juncture in the history of Northwood School. Coats and ties were still required but the students were beginning to examine issues surrounding residential life. Headmaster Howard reprinted an article in 1958 titled,
"Hard Education or Soft?" This article was written by Seymour St. John, then Headmaster of Choate School, in Wallingford, Connecticut for his own school’s alumni magazine. Excerpts from the article raise many questions about the role of education, especially private education, in a more global world. In addition the article addresses issues surrounding what to expect from our young people and how to approach their collective preparation for the world beyond school. “Our weakness can be boiled down to three main lacks that ought to be basic in our education: discipline, responsibility, and sure values . . .” Mr. St. John was a man of principle and sought to “harden” the educational mission of schools. “Hard as opposed to soft education; discipline as opposed to license; responsibility as opposed to self-centeredness; principle as opposed to expediency. These words are demanding, unequivocal- and inspiring.” St John’s had an expressed political component to them as well. These comments are reflective of the post war era at Northwood as well, fueled by growing threats in Korea and the rise of Communism. Mr. St. John feared a softening of the American ideals that helped win the Second World War. His words were also inspired by his own experiences as a leader in education and a former Lieutenant Commander in World War II. He noted: “Younger and older generation, public and independent school community and country we shall all stand or fall together. And that survival or that death will depend on what we insist upon in education of our American youth. It is my profound conviction that only by choosing the steeper way to the farther goal can we gain strength from the past, character in the present and faith in a strong and idealistic-happy-America in the future.”43 Much of this speaks to the mission of Dewey and the early educators of the Lake Placid Club School  

as well. St. John saw the changes in the students attending private school education, and he was concerned that their choices might represent the path of least resistance.

The issue surrounding the education of young people was tested from time and time over the next decade or two. As the school entered into the decade of the 1960's the dualism of hard and soft education polarized students and faculty even more. Issues that students had often grumbled about among themselves became more visible. Youth found ways to express themselves, often more radically than the previous generation liked.

Northwood School was not immune to these expressions of independence and change. The pendulum was swinging toward "Soft" education, away from the 1950s era of conformity and conservatism. Headmaster Howard finished at Northwood School in 1965, and the helm was handed over to Edward G. Wells who was only able to lead the school for two years; he was simply not equipped to run the school and was easily convinced to hand the leadership over to the acting Assistant Headmaster W. John Friedlander.

W. John Friedlander took over as interim in 1967 and was appointed Headmaster by the Board of Trustees at their January meeting in the winter of 1968. The era of John Friedlander lasted for 31 years. Friedlander carried the school through some of the more demanding transitions in the school's history: the 60s, Nixon, the Grateful Dead, Disco, and the 1980 Olympics to name a few. In all this, Northwood School mirrored national trends that reflected changing attitudes toward private schools.

The 1969 school Yearbook, mostly created by student Todd Lockwood, is full of symbolism regarding the changes going on in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Current faculty member Don Mellor points specifically to this year as the most radical shift in the
design and message of the yearbook. Prior to 1969 the yearbooks looked exactly the same, Northwood School blue with the school seal embossed in the lower right corner. The “feel” of the yearbook was in keeping with an all boys, coat and tie program. There was an air of formality that dominated the text and the photographs. In one school year there was a significant departure from the standard design. The 1969 design was clearly a student one and featured a sunburst on the cover and a non-Northwood School blue jacket. Student artwork, creative photography and poetry are in evidence throughout. This yearbook was the first of many more to come that demonstrated the student perspective on school life and brought a more carefree voice to the publication. In future years yearbooks would become much less formal and in some cases politically incorrect.

I asked Don Mellor about protests and conversations regarding the Vietnam War during this time of change at the school. Mellor felt most students were sheltered from the news and were insulated in their boarding school world. Don referenced one “protest” in which leaders rallied students to boycott the tradition of waiting at the dinner table until the Headmaster rang the bell to excuse everyone. On a predetermined evening the students planned to leave the dining hall five minutes before the bell, but that meal the school happened to be serving strawberry shortcake, a student favorite. When the protest leader stood to leave, his followers numbered less than a dozen and his attempted protest failed. It seemed the lure of the strawberry shortcake was more enticing than the desire to support a revolutionary cause. 44 Mellor’s point here was that students at Northwood were emulating the protests of the times that they observed on television or read about in the newspapers. Yet the isolationism characteristic of Northwood kept many of these national issues out of the minds of Northwood students, and as in earlier decades little

attention was focused on national events, even those feeble attempts to raise awareness on the Northwood campus.

Mellor also talked about Dan Mead, a teacher in 1969 who taught Political Science and protested the war from the pulpit in his classroom. Dan Mead’s picture in the 1971 school yearbook, and the paragraph written by the student editor below, exemplify the change in faculty perspective, in keeping with times. Mead is standing in front of a VW minivan. His beard and glass disguise his youth, while he appears to be listening intently to a student. His hair is longer, but not unkempt. The caption below reads: “It is important that students are drawn to faculty. Mr. Mead has the capacity to draw student discussion and direct this interest. His ability to understand and yet guide is what every man in the teaching business seeks. This, Mr. Mead has found.”

Vietnam War protest found its way into the student life. The November 1969 issue of the “Mirror” featured a two page article about the famous “March Against Death” that took place in Washington DC. That same issue lampooned the draft with the cartoon reprinted below. Editorials appeared in the “Mirror” often during the early 1970s, the most prominent example being an editorial written about the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Unlike the previous two wars, Vietnam was a regularly televised event. The idea of being drafted and “sent” to Vietnam was on the minds of students and faculty alike. Unlike the wars before, few wanted to fight for their country on this particular cause. The ideals previously mentioned about preparing young men to be leaders were tarnished by the more modern wave of protest and anti-establishment sentiment. Like all

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of America, Northwood students watched the Vietnam War on television, complete with anti-war protests and peace rallies.

Although there is some evidence that more Northwood School boys were involved in Vietnam, little was written in the school newspaper or yearly publications. There is the story of Tom Smith, who graduated in 1969 and wrote an autobiography about his time in Vietnam. Smith’s book, *Easy Target: The Long Strange Trip of a Scout Pilot in Vietnam*, is a personal journey that takes the reader through his experiences in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot, beginning with his career at Northwood School, which played a small role in his ending up in Vietnam. Smith recounts story after story of the futility of the Vietnam experience. He presents near death incidents, including crashing his helicopter three times, with a casualness that helps the reader understand the attitude of men serving in Vietnam. Smith also reflects on the many correspondences with relatives and friends in the United States who wrote about everything from patriotism to war protest demonstrations.

Smith makes reference in his book to Northwood and to the Adirondacks. He often mentions his love of the area. His occasional story about his Northwood days always involved a broken rule or a run-in with a member of the faculty, yet Smith remembered these moments fondly, and was quick to blame himself for the problems he experienced. Smith tells of an evening when he left the dormitory after lights out and went into the village of Lake Placid to “have a few beers.” Upon entering the bar he and his buddies bumped into a faculty member and were promptly escorted home. Neither Smith nor the faculty member ever mentioned the incident the next day, and no one got
into trouble for the violation. 47 Such treatment was not compatible with the “hard education” that St. John advocated, perhaps, but it served its purpose.

Smith was an example of the kind of student who came to Northwood during the era of the 1960s and early 1970s. He needed structure and discipline and strong role modeling. His limited success as a student at Northwood was due in part to his personality, but it is revealing that so many years later he included that chapter in his first book, and often mentioned the school fondly. Smith, like many others during this time, was sent away to school because his parents felt he “needed structure.” He was not a high achieving academic, and actually chose Northwood because of its outdoor program and the proximity of Whiteface Mountain Ski Area. Like many students Smith was attracted to the amenities, and his parents sought the structure and discipline missing at home. Tom Smith visited Northwood School in the fall of 2002. He is now a successful writer, living in the Adirondacks. His memories of his time at Northwood School are still about supportive teachers and the closeness of the fellow students. It is clear that Smith got some educational value from his Northwood experience despite himself.

During these years Northwood School increased its financial aid program, and, this, in combination with the expansion of the size of the school, meant that net revenues grew very little. Back in 1951 as part of the transition from retiring Headmaster Flinner to new Head of School Moreau Hunt, a small publication was produced called "Northwood School: The Era Ahead." The balance of this publication was a commentary on the needs of the school in the coming years. Securing competent and energetic faculty was a primary objective along with the goal of remaining a private independent school, free

from any state or federal control. The publication specifically discusses the need for funds to enable the above programs.

But Northwood's program of service, its plans for progress, and its adherence to inflexibly high standards are all threatened by rising economic adjustments that originate with the tension and strife so much a part of the world today. Means must be found to guarantee the solid and essential functions that the school can continue to perform in equipping boys to be useful citizens of a country which, in a generation from now, cannot afford to have mediocrity in either citizenship or leadership. Consideration of the present and sensible judgment of the future indicate that approximately $250,000 must be raised in order to keep Northwood on its course in face of rapidly changing world conditions.48

But by the 1960s, the idea of "inflexibly high standards" was in the past. The product that Northwood School was offering changed with the demands of the consumer. Northwood School continued to maintain a reputation for its athletic programs, especially in ice hockey and alpine skiing, but the academic program was considered mediocre. Even the marketing arm of the school used phrases like "second chance school" and "remedial support." 49 Northwood School was not sending many of its graduates to the Ivy League schools unless they could skate or ski for one of those particular programs.

The ideals of the 1960s altered the public view about private boarding schools. Northwood's elite standard established in the Dewey years had been replaced with programs designed to help students with academic deficiencies. Many boarding schools went out of business during this time. Others like Northwood struggled to cater to a new consumer less interested in the elite nature of private school and more interested in issues like diversity and creative thinking. The most exclusive schools like Deerfield, Choate and St. Paul's maintained their stature in the private school world, but the majority of private schools struggled to redefine themselves in a changing marketplace.

Beyond the Northwood school campus the economy was influencing life in the village of Lake Placid also. The February 22, 1966 edition of the “Mirror” featured an article that discussed the fact that Lake Placid had lost in its attempt to bring back the Olympic games in 1972. There had only been a remote chance that Lake Placid would win out over Salt Lake City, yet the loss further served as a reminder that the economy and general growth of the area was weak. The Lake Placid Club was struggling to stay in business, as the costs of maintaining facilities far outweighed revenues. Local alum Mike Raymayley, was a student during this time, and he spoke of many closed and run down buildings in the Lake Placid Club. Raymayley also referred to Main Street Lake Placid as a lot of “Bars and T-shirt shops.”

Things were in decline, and Northwood School was also working hard to make ends meet. Mike Nugent, Northwood School business manager, started working at Northwood in 1965. Nugent, in his 38th year at Northwood School, works in the same office that houses all the business records of the school, going back to 1905. Nugent showed me records of the school’s deficit at the time of his arrival. He explained that the Headmaster and Board Chairman found benefactors to “bail out” the school at the end of each fiscal year. Many of these benefactors had ties to the Lake Placid Club. Some were business owners or “summer people” who either had children attending Northwood or had been asked to be part of a new group called “Advisory Trustees.”

The school’s headmaster was quoted in the school newspaper about an initiative designed to strengthen the school’s financial picture. “A new innovation on the scene at Northwood this year is the Board of Advisory Trustees. The general purpose of the

Advisory Board shall be to promote the educational ideals, objectives, welfare, growth and interest of Northwood School." Along with this distinction came a $200 donation from each member. All added to the general fund. A summer school was introduced and a music camp was proposed as way to further add to the school’s receipts.

In 1967 W. John Friedlander, a faculty member, had been appointed interim Headmaster in light of the resignation of William C. Wells. Friedlander was an "old school guy" who had been educated at Hotchkiss School. He had also played professional football and was an accomplished athlete. Friedlander’s style, like that of most of his predecessors, drove the school for the next three decades. Friedlander ran a tight fiscal operation that required the academic programs to consolidate. Fewer courses were offered, and some classes were eliminated. Extra-curricular programs were minimal. Even more than those before him, Friedlander needed to pay close attention to the budget. Both supporters and critics agree this time was marked by the theme "survival." That is to say students attending the school "survived," and faculty who worked for Headmaster Friedlander "survived," and the school, meaning the physical plant, and the business aspect, survived. Those who remember the "Friedlander years" most fondly would say that he saved the school from closure during some demanding times when many other boarding schools closed or operated in deficits.

It is important to note that the boarding school industry was experiencing difficult times throughout the country. Low demographics and rising costs, coupled with less interest from the public at large, resulted in an industry in turmoil. The schools that survived these times were the ones able to define clearly their niche and commit

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marketing dollars to their cause. Northwood School took some time to articulate its niche, but ultimately the school did find its identity and its fiscal solvency.

Again there was a silver lining during most of this period, as the exemplary ice hockey program and a small number of outstanding alpine skiers enabled the admissions recruiters to have something to brag about. As the school contended with deferred maintenance issues, it graduated boys who went on to the National Hockey League and the Olympics. (See Appendix) In fact interviews with three members of the current Northwood School faculty and retired Headmaster Friedlander, brought to light an interesting piece of information. Approximately seven of the list were labeled as “less than model citizens” by their former teachers, coaches and mentors. In one case a former coach said he hoped never to lay eyes on the player again. 53 This fact was underscored further when a recent Olympic and National Hockey League plaque was proposed for permanent display in the athletic wing of the main school building. The plan was to invite back each of the athletes who was to be honored. There was heated debate over whether to invite back one or two individuals who did not leave the school on a positive note nor distinguish themselves in their collegiate and professional careers beyond Northwood.

This problem with the character of some of the students who were attending Northwood suggests how much things changed since Dewey envisioned a school where the elite would perfect their behavior. The school standards were high and the level of tolerance low in the first half century. That can’t be said for the second fifty years. Dismissal rates increased as admissions standards were lowered. The tolerance of a wider

spectrum of student was greater and pressure to secure top-level athletes challenged the academic integrity of the school and the financial aid program.

Northwood School was a victim of its own success in the specific venues of ice hockey and alpine skiing. The athletic reputation attracted a different kind of student. Academics were only important as a means to an end. The ideal of the well-rounded student was not as clearly articulated in the new mission of the school. The school found itself in a specific niche that made it difficult to meet enrollment projections, expand programs or maintain its physical plant. Programs in the arts, electives and lesser activities all suffered in the shadow of the school's two premier winter sports programs. This niche was the only one the school was able to establish given its location and size. The school strove for a more diverse program but did not have the financial stability or the infrastructure to achieve that goal.

By the time President Nixon had announced his resignation, and the Vietnam War was nearing the end, Northwood School had transitioned from a single sex, coat-and-tie program for young men of affluence and promise, to a more casual, relaxed environment, strongly influenced by the 1960s and the cultural shifts of the times. Pictures from yearbooks and school newspaper illuminate this change. The tone of editorials and imagery used by graduating seniors also echoes the themes of "protest," non-conformity, and in some cases overt dismissal of institutional themes. The editorials in the school newspaper had become bolder. The visible change in hair length, both on the students and the faculty, was another obvious change. These alterations were happening throughout the country, and small isolated places like Lake Placid were not immune to them. As with other things, survival at a small private school in the
Adirondacks meant accommodating national trends and demonstrating general flexibility in social and cultural matters as well as political and academic ones.

Section V: Coeducation

The decade of the 1970s had a more lasting influence on the Northwood School than either of the world wars or the Vietnam War. Coeducation came in two waves. First, in 1970, day student girls arrived on campus, and then, a year later, in September of 1971, the school opened its doors to thirteen boarding girls.  

Boarding schools across New England were becoming coed institutions under pressure from alumni and in an effort to keep their market share in an increasingly competitive industry. The pool of male applicants had shrunk by 1970 to an industry low and more progressive parents were keeping their children in public schools. The combination of these two trends and the continued competition between boarding schools made admissions a challenge. Boys and girls schools merged with each other, as was the case with Northfield Mt. Herman School, Williston North Hampton and Kent. Other single sex schools like Holderness, Berkshire and Gunnery embraced coeducation as Northwood did, in order to enhance their enrollments and thus their net revenues.

By 1972 Northwood School found itself with a small but influential contingent of girls who shaped the school scene for years to come. Girls quickly found their way into leadership positions and on committees that influenced school policy from dances to lights out.

The 1971 September edition of the school newspaper featured an article titled: "Girls Initiate Coed Era." A review of the careers at Northwood of these girls reveals a great deal about the school as a whole at this time. All these girls were classified as "day students," however five lived together off campus in the home of Ellsworth Jackstadt, a Northwood faculty member who happened to live within walking distance of the school. Three other girls were figure skaters who were housed in a home of a local figure skating coach. The others were local students from Lake Placid. The addition of girls to Northwood School was welcomed by most, although male students were the last to fully embrace the introduction of girls. By 1973 the "Mirror" featured another article that was titled: "Girls Disclose Views on Coeducational Status." In this article the girls interviewed unanimously agreed that life at school was good, and that they were not receiving any more or less than the boys. In fact most of their concerns were similar to those of the boys, boredom, too early a bedtime, and the dress code. In 1973 the girls numbered 27, up from 11 only two years earlier. There were 100 boys in 1973. 35

These early pioneers of coeducation made the transition to Northwood because they were athletic and had reason to come to Lake Placid, either skiing or figure skating. If they were not involved in one of these two sports, they were likely day students. That trend continues today with two exceptions: 1) girls come to play ice hockey as well as ski or skate; and 2) international students attend Northwood School because of its small English as a second language program and its location in a safe and secure part of the world.

Gender issues plagued the school throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Northwood School was often referred to as: “A boys school that has girls in it.” It was difficult to

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strengthen the enrollment of girls with limited facilities. And there was not enough 
money available to support programs for girls. It was a classic dilemma: more money 
and better programs were needed to attract more girls, but more girls were needed to 
justify those programs and expenditures. The result was slow moving program changes.

One example of this slow pace was staff hiring. Most agreed that the school 
needed to establish better gender equity in its staff. There was little teacher turnover 
during these years, and the criteria for employment at Northwood required a faculty 
member who could teach, coach and live in the dormitories. The “triple threat” nature of 
a boarding school job, especially in an environment dominated by boys, made hiring 
qualified female faculty a challenge. Coeducation at Northwood School continues to be a 
topic of discussion at faculty meetings and among administrators and school leaders.

Two long time faculty members at Northwood School have commented on these 
matters. Steve Reed, senior master at the school and a thirty-year veteran, is a supporter 
of co-education but is an out-spoken critic of the school’s modest coeducational 
development plan. Reed points to the school’s inability to implement programs in the 
arts and hire “appropriate” female faculty as the two main reasons why coeducation has 
floundered for two decades at the school. Reed supports the current administration’s 
initiatives and points to the creation of the girls ice hockey program as one of the most 
important additions in the school’s coeducational history. Reed added the increasing 
number of girls in the school strongly influenced the quality of college placement results. 
Because of girls, according to Reed, more honors level classes were added and the 
general atmosphere regarding academic prowess improved.56

Phil Clough, retired faculty member and longtime classics teacher, is considered by his colleagues a staunch conservative. Clough was a faculty member at Northwood School as early as the 1950s and retired in the mid 1990s. Clough’s time at Northwood afforded him the opportunity to witness most of the modern upheavals in the school’s history, including coeducation. Clough’s reflections concerning the school’s change from a single sex institution to coeducation are two-fold. On the one hand, Clough remembered the 1950s and early 1960s as a time of structure, discipline and order. From a faculty perspective, Clough found comfort in those years. On the other hand, Clough experienced the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the school, like so many other educational institutions, struggled with issues like conformity and discipline. Clough saw the introduction of girls to Northwood School as a welcome addition in part as a check on the excesses of such change. According to Clough girls brought some focus to the classroom and in many cases “raised the bar” for the boys at Northwood School. Clough also spoke of staffing as a large hurdle in the coeducational effort. He stayed at Northwood long enough to see girls well integrated into the school.57

These two men represent the “old school” vision of coeducation. Their comments support the earlier statement that identified coeducation as a positive transition for Northwood School, especially given the tumultuous period just prior to the introduction of girls.

Northwood School in 2002 enrolled fifty-eight female students out of a total student population of 155. The boarding girls made up thirty-five of the school’s 110 residential students. Sports programs, the arts, theater, music, student leadership, and most importantly, academics have all prospered due in part to the strength of the female

population of the school. This fact is repeatedly recognized by the senior faculty who remember the mid-1970s and early 1980s when coeducation was adopted but not fully engaged in the school community. Most of this senior faculty group cites the Headmaster change in 1996, when W. John Friedlander retired, and Ed Good became Head of School, as the benchmark for a positive coeducational program.

The school began to examine subjects taught and the role of its faculty in shaping the lives of these young people. “Senior projects” were born during this time. These were attempts at giving seniors a practical “hands on” task in the spring of their senior year. Projects ranged from construction to law. Seniors were given the freedom to design and create. The idea again was to liberate, not restrict. This educational philosophy again was not unique to Northwood School and suggests another change in how private schools nationally viewed their new generation of students. Experiential learning and more hands on programs were developed at Northwood and other private schools during this time.

Alumni from the 1970s at Northwood School share the memories of the outdoors as their common thread. NOC or Northwood Outing Club was a strong entity at this time. Interviews with alumni graduates Chip Bissell and Don Mellor reveal the strength of the membership in NOC. Many of their recollections touch on the outdoors as a stage for experimentation with alcohol or drugs. But their perspectives, likely honed with age, downplay the use of drugs and alcohol and highlight the comradery and friendships that developed “in the woods” or “on the mountain.” Sports teams suffered some during this time. A senior quote from the school’s yearbook in 1970 acknowledged the condition:
“Some of us didn’t want to win, we wanted to enjoy ourselves, others did, we were not a hockey team because of it.”

The 1970s and 1980s represent an interesting time in the history of Northwood as the school was caught up in a cultural shift experienced by most educational institutions around New England. Co-education can be easily marked as the reason behind these changes, yet many institutional shifts were already in flux before girls arrived at Northwood School. The male student at Northwood looked very different in 1970 than his predecessor only a few years earlier. The yearbook design, the faculty who were hired, the issues that made the headlines of the “Mirror” were all different in the decade of the 1970s.

But the true indicator of change is the students themselves. These men who today are grown, many with families, careers and goals, are the best barometers of change. Their recollections define these shifts in the institutional direction better than anything found in print. A vivid example can be found in two separate conversations that occurred during a recent reunion weekend at Northwood School. Table one had two men, classes of 1966 and 1965, who told vivid stories of drinking, late night antics and what many parents would call a complete lack of supervision and discipline. Their stories often came to the conclusion that dress code, a fundamental academic program, and a strong athletic program produce exceptional college placement results, some successful businessmen and an even a few Olympic Athletes.

Table two was represented by two graduates from 1971. The stories from this table replaced alcohol with marijuana, but were otherwise quite similar in their mention

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of student covert activities and naive adults. The difference was the emphasis on friendship that the 1971 alumnus highlighted so often. Their “success” was gauged by the still strong relations between graduates. They had less to say about the faculty and the school as their vehicle to a successful college and university. They focused more on how the school “allowed” them to discover themselves and their place in the world.60

If one contrasts these two perspectives with evidence previously mentioned like yearbook design changes, relaxed dress code and greater faculty tolerance, it is clear the 1970s marked a significant change in the school’s character and mission. Northwood School remained a small, successful enterprise, run by a Headmaster who managed all aspects of the program and whose personality influenced the direction of those programs in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s.

As W. John Friedlander entered the second decade as the Headmaster, the school survived fiscally, while enrollment fluctuated and the physical plant began to show signs of wear. The academic program remained stark by industry standards, yet adequate in meeting the needs of Northwood students. There were few electives and almost no offerings in the arts.

There were some renovations and additions to the school, most notably an indoor tennis facility, which helped the school attract students. Ice Hockey remained a marquee sport and alpine skiing retained a respectable status in the school. Faculty and students shared a common bond built around their overlapping lifestyles in this unique part of the world. More than any other time in the school’s history, Northwood was removed from other private school influences. Sports teams rarely participated against other prep schools. Teams competed against local public schools and community colleges.

60 Chip Bissell, “Personal Interview with Perry Babcock,” June 2003
Administrators rarely traveled to national conferences and faculty, many of who had taught for years at the school, seldom ventured beyond the school campus.

This trend is quite similar to that of many Adirondack enterprises that became insulated from the “real world” due mostly to the geography of the Adirondacks and the climate. Northwood School shaped its curriculum around the seasons of the year and the student interests in winter activities. Examples of this philosophy are early spring graduation; two week February winter break, limited spring or fall sports, and few art offerings. In short the school was small, heavy in athletes, anxious for graduation, and completely removed from the private school world of old New England.

Friedlander was the last of a generation of headmasters around New England who had long careers as heads of school. Today the average headmaster tenure is 5-7 years. The position that was often likened to a monarchy has now come to be defined as a CEO. Corporate strategies are used to run schools like a business. That fact challenges small schools to stay the course written into their long-range plans. Yet it is a positive change as it allows schools to be run with more input from faculty and students, thus reducing the emphasis on one personality defining the school.

Northwood School has a long history of being defined by one personality. The Headmasters who had the greatest impact on the school were those who stayed on the longest, for good and for bad. Like Flinner and Howard before him, Friedlander had a lasting impact on three decades of Northwood Students and faculty. The Friedlander years saw great changes at the school. Creativity describes those years, and there is no discounting the fact that the school survived on an austerity plan. But the groundwork was laid for many of the institutional programs that are flourishing today.
W. John Friedlander retired in 1996. In a wise decision, the Board of Trustees voted to hire an interim headmaster for one year who would be charged with guiding the school through the transition period. David Burnham arrived on the scene, having completed an interim year as Head of St. Andrews School in Rhode Island. Burnham was a true “Boarding School” man, having worked at several schools during his career. Burnham’s charge was to steer Northwood through the turmoil of change brought about by Friedlander’s retirement after so many years as Head of School. The interim period allowed the Board of Trustees to select a new Headmaster, Edward M. Good.

This would prove to be Good’s second tour at Northwood. Good was a teacher, coach and Athletic Director for three years in the early 1970’s. Ed Good’s return to Northwood marked the beginning of a true renaissance for the school. The physical plant experienced a 6 million dollar makeover, while most every program was scrutinized.

Enrollment trends were becoming positive during this time. The school made a commitment to an aggressive marketing program, especially in the day student market. Enrollment increased and the quality of the student body improved from an academic standpoint. The school moved away from its remedial programs, adding advanced placement courses and more honors level sections. Art, music and drama were reintroduced and a number of senior electives were reinstated.

By the time the 20th century came to a close, Northwood School was well on its way to respectability in the Boarding School world. College placement results improved and the sports programs re-found their prowess. The school still thrived on to its traditions in winter sports but was able to add additional layers in the area of the arts, music, drama, senior electives and girl’s athletic offerings. The community service
program was revamped, and students began to take a vested interest in the operation of the school.

With all this success came another set of challenges as the school began to compete with other strong boarding schools across New England. The school’s success and diversity put it in the company of larger schools in the East. Educational consultants and placement agencies began to recognize the successful balance of academics and athletics at Northwood. Academically Northwood School remained in the second tier, meaning students who needed structure or were not achieving at larger public and private schools, were the best matches for the programs offered. But there was now a place for the stronger student who wanted a small school and an aggressive athletic program. Northwood was increasingly comfortable with its niche and its marketing strategy. The institution also benefited from a renewed interest in the Adirondack region and the community of Lake Placid.

The village of Lake Placid was growing as a response to the strong economy and the community’s efforts to market a four-season resort. As more people moved or invested in the area, the infrastructure began to look and feel more exclusive. These phenomena contributed to increased exposure for Northwood School, thus helping to validate the program.

As the school prepares for the centennial in the year 2005, the institutional integrity remains strong. The fiscal health of the school and the positive trends that have characterized the last five years, have provided the school’s leaders with the confidence to look ahead to the next ten years and beyond. In 2005 Northwood School is having a
celebration that recognizes its first one hundred years. Plans are well underway for the
direction the school will travel in the future.

Northwood School, the industry, is a success. As an enterprise the school has
followed the direction envisioned by its founders. As a financial institution the business
has survived many vicissitudes, some internal, some external. As a program designed,
then fine-tuned over nearly one hundred years, the school survived where so many other
industries in the Adirondacks did not. Leadership changes, technology shifts, external
competition and internal challenges came and went over the school’s first century. It is a
credit to the vision and resolve of Dewey and the founders of the Lake Placid Club
Education Foundation that the program we know today thrives in the Adirondacks and
has established a reputation for academic and athletic excellence. But it was the school’s
adaptability, especially in the second fifty years that allowed it to embrace change and
survive the cultural and institutional fluctuations that challenged the private school
industry.

The private school industry was forced to redefine itself after World War Two as
the elitist nature of schools in the private sector experienced a change in consumer
demand. The industry diversified and embraced coeducation. While tackling issues like
diversity and liberalism, private schools had to redefine their individual niches while
preserving the traditions established by prior generations of leadership. Schools that
succeeded were either well entrenched in tradition and therefore confident in their niche,
or dynamic and willing to reshape their mission to meet the demands of a new generation
of private school applicants.
Northwood School has always been a small school, remote and isolated physically from most of the private school world. Northwood benefited from having a strong mission statement, established by Melvil Dewey, and then carried forward by a succession of strong leaders. Northwood's niche was well defined and even when it was altered during the 1960s and 1970s, the underpinnings remained, thus allowing the next succession of leadership to return it.

Northwood School is a strong educational institution today. Education in the Adirondacks is a strong industry because it relies on the area's best resource, people. Those people, committed to the ideals of education and willing to live in this part of the world, represent the heart of this successful educational institution.
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