

LEARNING FROM HENRY MERRILL '25

By Principal Tyler C. Tingley '48, '64, '01 (Hon.); P'99

Henry R. Merrill '25 is stepping down from his position as class correspondent. Mr. Merrill will have turned 100 by the time you read this issue of the *Bulletin* which carries his concluding set of notes on the class of 1925. With few classmates left, Mr. Merrill had to innovate. He often wrote about the sons of his classmates, a number of whom attended Exeter in the 1950s. But with the news of each son was a fond remembrance of the man's father. In that way, Mr.

Merrill continued to fulfill his mission as a class correspondent.

The very first class note concerning a member of the class of 1925—in the *Bulletin* of August 1925—carried news of another father and son. It related a story published in a New York paper, in which Marcus L. Bell described a letter he had received from his son Marcus L. Bell Jr. '25. “My son writes from Exeter asking what I thought of Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain's attack on the Geneva protocol,” Bell Sr. writes. “I didn't read the speech, but how can I make such a confession? What would you do with a son like that?”

For the next 82 years, beginning with Mr. Bell's comment, the *Bulletin* has carried news of the class of 1925. As with all classes, some members married, had children, went to work and war, and they kept up with one another and with Exeter through the Class Notes section of the *Bulletin*. From the earliest notes, just after graduation to later chronicles of children's activities, Class Notes describe how a class and its members change and grow.

Growth and change are as essential to an institution as they are to a person or a class. Often, as shown by Mr. Merrill and the class of 1925, change inspires innovation. Exeter is no exception, and we know that our advancements must be evaluated to ensure that, as we transform and develop, we continue to be as true to our mission as Mr. Merrill was to his.

One tool for such an evaluation is provided to Exeter by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), which shepherds its member schools through a voluntary accreditation process.

In the fall of 2007, a committee of educators assembled by NEASC will come to campus. We are using the 2006–07 school year to prepare for that visit. At the heart of this process is a self-study which will lead to the creation of an action plan informed by reports from a series of committees. This self-study aspect of the work is especially well suited to Exeter.

During the fall term, the faculty met in 29 Preparation Committees representing academic departments and major program areas. These committees were composed of six or seven people from a variety of departments and with a range of perspectives. Each committee examined a department or major program area concentrating on program, experience of the students and resources to support the program.

Currently, we are in the second phase of the self-study process. New committees have been formed to evaluate how the school performs against a set of standards designated by NEASC. For example, one standard articulated by NEASC concerning student life is that “the admissions process assures that those students who enroll are appropriate, given the school's mission, and are likely to benefit from their experience at the school.”

Standards Committees are reviewing relevant information from the Preparation Committees' reports, from surveys, handbooks, policy manuals, plans and compilations of data. At the end of the winter term, each committee will write a section of the self-study, discussing its work, assessing how its standard is being met and providing recommendations for ways in which the school might strengthen itself in this area. This spring, a draft of the Standards Committees' reports will be presented to the full faculty for discussion and comment.

Finally, the committees will develop a Self-Study Action Plan, which is a set of short- and long-range recommendations we have made for ourselves. This piece will be given to the visiting committee and a follow-up program will be supervised by NEASC.

This preparation takes an enormous amount of time and effort on the part of an institution, but the opportunity to reflect on our institution and how we are serving our students is proving to be invaluable. Mr. Merrill has given us a fine example of how innovation can keep a class' news vital for many years, and I believe that as the Academy moves ahead, our innovations—informed by our reflection and planning—will be equally successful. ●

