




# The More We Change, The More We Remain the Same

 Lessons learned about Exeter while reading a century's worth of *Bulletins*.

By Beth Brosnan  
Editor

**J**ust how much has Exeter changed since the first issue of the *Bulletin of The Phillips Exeter Academy* was published 100 years ago?

For starters, the building in which I sit, Jeremiah Smith Hall, had not yet been built, nor had most of the buildings that define the Exeter campus today: the fourth Academy Building, Phillips Hall and Thompson Science Building; dormitories like Langdell and Wheelwright, Amen and Webster, Cilley and Wentworth; neither the Davis nor the Class of 1945 libraries, not the music building nor the theater, and next to nothing of the present athletic complex.

While the buildings of Exeter have changed, the people who study, play and live inside them have changed even more. In the fall of 1905, Exeter was a school of 443 boys taught by a faculty of 20 men, an all-male institution that was also almost entirely white and Protestant. Today's Exeter is diverse in almost every conceivable way: its 1,056 students (on campus and off), 49 percent of them female, come from all over the United States and from 25 foreign countries, and they are taught by a 194-member faculty (both full and part time), 46 percent of them female. At first glance, these two Exeters seem like completely different schools.

But only at first glance. If our work on this centennial issue of the *Bulletin* has shown us anything, it's how, amid a century's worth of growth and change, Exeter has remained true to itself, to its founding principles, its fundamental character. Ideals that John Phillips articulated in his Deed of Gift—a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and goodness, and the genuine effort, both mental and spiritual, such a pursuit entails—recur again and again in the *Bulletin's* pages.

Take this observation from the *Bulletin's* founding editor: "One characteristic it seems always to have had: like that greatest of teachers, experience, Exeter has always kept a hard school," wrote John C. Kirtland in a 1929 issue. "Obligation is the very quality of our being." His sentiment was echoed in the summer 2005 issue of the magazine in a commencement address by the senior class president. "From Day One, Exeter has pushed us to the limits of our being," said Kirk Bansak '05. "We have read much and we have discussed much around our Harkness tables, but more than anything, we have been challenged to think. Every day we have been challenged to think."

Exeter asks much of every Exonian. It pushes, it challenges, it sometimes overwhelms. "You will dream about this place," writer Gore Vidal '43 remarked in a 1981 assembly talk, a comment that drew rueful laughter from students, some of whom had

probably already had nightmares about showing up for class unprepared, wearing ratty pajamas. Judging by comments in the Class Notes section, some alumni/ae are still haunted by this dream.

Yet wending my way through a hundred years' worth of *Bulletins* has taught me that while it sometimes overwhelms, more often Exeter inspires. It encourages, it exhilarates, and, as Lois Beckett '05 observed in an essay in the spring 2005 *Bulletin*, it provides "a sense of purpose" that many Exonians carry throughout their lives, along with the profound friendships they formed in the process. "When John Phillips said that the Academy should teach 'the great end and the real business of living,' this, I think, is what he meant," Beckett wrote. "And if that were the only thing I had learned in the past three years, it would be more than enough."

**L**ike the school it chronicles, the *Bulletin*, too, has seen its share of outward change. The first issue was small in size and page count, devoid of photos and illustrations, but elegantly written and downright prescient in its understanding of the *Bulletin's* role:

*"The publication of the Bulletin of the Phillips Exeter Academy has been undertaken by the Trustees as a means of bringing the alumni in closer touch with the school and with one another. It is expected that three kinds of articles will find a place in its pages: first, reports of action by the Trustees and the Faculty and such other information concerning the progress, the problems, and the needs of the school as usually appears in official publication; secondly, more intimate accounts of school happenings; and thirdly, news of the 'old boys.' Success in the last particular will depend upon the measure in which the alumni contribute news of themselves and their brethren."*

The phrase "mission statement" is another thing that did not exist in 1905, and yet rereading this paragraph a century later, we were struck by how well these words (amended to include "old girls" as well as boys) describe what the magazine continues to do. Today's *Bulletin* covers much the same beat as the first issue, though we have the luxury of a larger and longer format, and many color photographs to help us tell the story.

Because one of the qualities that Exeter inspires is loyalty, much of that story—an average of 40 to 50 pages per issue—unfolds in the Class Notes section, the work of our 100-plus

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THE BULLETIN.

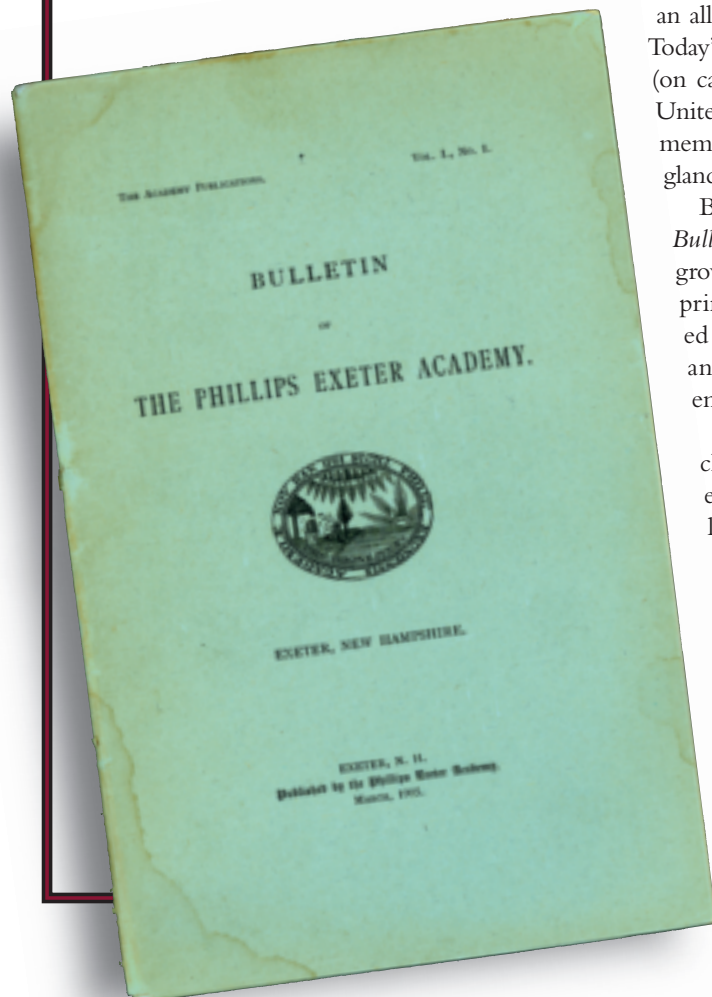
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Success in the last particular will depend upon the measure in which the alumni contribute news of themselves and their brethren. Class secretaries can help by entering into correspondence with the members of their respective classes and publishing in the BULLETIN the results of this correspondence in the form of class reports. It is hoped that all classes of which any members are living will see to it that they have permanent secretaries to perform this duty.

The BULLETIN will be sent to all alumni whose addresses are known, and any who do not receive it regularly should report the fact. Information as to change in address, contributions for the September issue, and suggestions looking to the betterment of the work may be sent to  
*John C. Kirtland, Jr., Exeter, N. H.*

class correspondents (and of their veteran editor, Janice Reiter, who has overseen the Class Notes section for 28 years). Four times a year, the correspondents "bring the alumni into closer touch with the school and with one another," and provide a panoramic group portrait of Exeter's 21,065 alumni/ae that is wondrous to behold.

Along with tales of degrees earned, jobs held, families begun, honors bestowed and tragedies endured, what the Class Notes reveal is just how fully most Exonians live their lives, wherever their pursuit of knowledge and goodness has led them. Exeter helps shape these lives, but as Adrian Hopkins '02 wrote in the summer 2002 *Bulletin*, Exonians also "make Exeter what it is." Amid a century's worth of growth and change, this, too, remains unchanging: The Academy is continuously renewed by their intelligence and idealism, their energy and aspirations, and fortunately, so is the *Bulletin*. ●



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