

A The ARCHIVIST'S DILEMMA



Ruth Quattlebaum
at work in the
Archive

Preserving the Past, Capturing the Future

by Sally V. Holm

A serious young woman shows up at the Phillips Academy Archive office, tucked into a second-floor corner of the Oliver Wendell Holmes Library. Weighted down with canvas bags and a backpack crammed with papers, notebooks, photos, and a laptop, Marta Rivera Paczynsha is not an overworked student—not here anyway, not now. The 1994 Andover graduate is delivering pieces of her own and Andover's history into the eager care of longtime archivist Ruth Quattlebaum.

Paczynsha, who is finishing up a PhD degree at Tufts University, was an early organizer of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at Andover—one of the first high school organizations of its kind in the country. A featured speaker at the GSA's 20th anniversary conference in February, she had pulled together a PowerPoint presentation and a substantial number of documents and photos from that nascent period of gay awakening on campuses nationwide.

Now she was offering it all to Quattlebaum, because, she says, “after a lot of work getting it together, it seemed a shame to let it evaporate into the ether.” The archivist smiles with knowing pleasure. Indeed, here was raw history for the taking, a valuable gift. “This will bring this issue



Abbot Academy dinner plates. Most had outlined drawings of Native Americans on the underside. A few had red drawings. Girls delighted in flipping their plates over before the start of a meal hoping to see red, which presaged a "good week."

home for students now and in the future," says Quattlebaum, "because it's primary source material for their research, and it will be far more meaningful because it's the school's own history."

So Far Beyond Trinkets and Tchotchkes

Characteristically, Quattlebaum had gone right to the heart of the matter. "Archives ensure we never lose our history," she explains, "or our sense of who we are and how we have become who we are—what factors influenced our decisions, defined our journeys." She isn't so much referring to the "old curiosity shop" aspect of the archives—the fun, sentimental artifacts like most of those photographed for the *Bulletin's* cover—but more to the documents, letters, scrapbooks, student and administrative records, photographs, minutes, reports, and publications—and now the vast digital record being generated. "Our archival records at present constitute roughly 6,500 linear feet of material, or more than 18 football fields lined up end to end," she notes. They include such treasures as PA's original constitution, fading sermons, rare books, *Bulletins*, short-lived literary magazines, and Head of School Barbara Landis Chase's commencement addresses. These paper documents and a collection of artifacts fill more than 3,272 square feet of space in three library locations and a storage bay across campus.

The Archive reveals what long-time history instructor Vic Henningsen '69 describes as "the real stories, which are always found in the details. We're fortunate that Andover's very long history overlaps with that of the nation in important ways. Examining the school's past—both the people and the institution—can give us an interesting perspective on the national story." He suggests that the school's Archive could be plumbed for answers to any number of intriguing historical questions. For example: "Take the records of Headmaster John Mason Kemper, a West-Pointer in charge of the Academy during the tumultuous era of the Sixties. He was a major figure on the presidential commission that recom-



An oil-powered campus walking lantern, circa 1880, before electricity made lights possible on campus

Abbot Academy girls stand forlorn at a newly erected wire fence put up "to deter ominous sexual awakening" and "prevent an outbursting of sensibilities they had not learned to control," wrote Catherine Beecher in 1872. The provocation? That boys' school just up the hill.



Abbot Academy Commencement Fan, circa 1910.



mended creation of the all-volunteer army we have today. To what extent did his experience with Andover students in the late 1960s influence his work on that commission? There is undoubtedly a link between Phillips Academy and today's all-volunteer army, but no one's explored it yet."

The Archive's and the archivist's value to the Academy cannot be overestimated. Chase is currently using the Archive to study what guided past Andover trustees who made hard decisions in earlier times of economic crisis. "I've found that from the very beginning the notions to protect people and program were highest on trustee agendas," she says, "and there is assurance that we're making good decisions with this common sense of priority."

Some courses in history and English integrate use of campus archival materials as part of their curriculum to teach in-depth research skills.

Over the past several months, Thorndike intern Anabel Bacon '09, with Quattlebaum's help, has been digging into old, dusty records of Native American land claims that ignited the passion and sense of justice in the Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology's first curator more than a century ago. Bacon's findings (see page 22) feature original research and primary source work—raw and unburnished—straight from the Academy's Archive and the Peabody Museum.

The Academy's "Institutional Memory"

At this critical junction of history, its preservation, and current events, sits the archivist. But not for long. After 25 years of dividing her time between teaching art history and managing the Archive, Quattlebaum is retiring, along with her husband Ed Quattlebaum '60, a much-loved history teacher. While the Archive is, indeed, a treasure, so, too, is its principle caretaker and passionate overseer. Quattlebaum has been an avid acquirer and a highly knowledgeable keeper of the history.

"Thanks to her deep commitment to our Archive, Ruth has been tremendously successful in terms of providing access and knowledge to alumni, students, faculty, and scholars," says Chase.

"She is the institutional memory of Andover," adds Henningsen. "If there's something about the history of the school she doesn't know, then it's probably not that important." And no one, he laments, is prepared to take her place.

This is something that worries many across campus and in alumni quarters. "Archives are a tough sell in financially challenging times like these," says Henningsen. But he, Quattlebaum, and others are concerned that unless taken seriously, the Archive will become either a warehouse of uncataloged documents or a place people won't think of accessing to actually find answers to important questions about policy, curriculum development, and, of course, history.

Leather fire brigade bucket,
1817. The horse-drawn fire
wagon also is stored at
the Academy.

The lack of climate control is an additional worry. “Documents can’t cry out ‘I’m hot, I’m cold, I’m disintegrating, I’m fading away,’” says Quattlebaum with a wry smile. “I don’t want to sound hokey, but that’s what’s happening.”

And then there’s the whole issue of digitization. Quattlebaum has not jumped into the electronic age for more reasons than its cost. Although she knows photos and documents need to be scanned, labeled, and organized so they can be both preserved and accessible to future users, she worries that technology is changing so fast, locking into any one system is a gamble—something she calls “the floppy disk syndrome.” (In fact, current thinking among archivists is that all captured data needs to “migrate” to an updated format at least every 10 years in order to assure its continued accessibility.)

For the short term, Dean of Studies John Rogers has appointed Tim Sprattler, the library’s assistant director and supervisor of its rare book collection, to serve as interim archivist. But Rogers acknowledges that a longer discussion clearly needs to begin. “In considering how to continue Ruth’s remarkable legacy of stewardship, we need to take a step back, invite outside expertise, and evaluate how best to reach our ultimate goal of making sure we preserve, continue to acquire, and carefully manage relevant materials, as well as provide appropriate access to our various constituencies and to the public.”

Meanwhile, the Alumni Council has quietly been studying the issue of the Archive’s future on its own. Outgoing trustee and council president Peter Hetzler, MD ’72, who calls Andover’s collection “priceless,” has made the Archive—and the new world of “content and distribution”—a key topic on the May agenda. “The Archive is of critical importance to alumni,” he says, “and hopefully it will become an important priority for the Academy when economic times are better.” Hetzler also wants the council to explore what can be done in the meantime without a large financial investment. “The Alumni Council is replete with knowledgeable people who can and will take this issue on,” he adds.

A Whole New (Digital) World

One of these members is council vice president Steve Matloff ’91, who was tapped by Hetzler to help create the council’s recent strategic plan. The Archive issue became a key component, not just the preservation and accessibility of what it currently holds, but the enormous question of how the Academy should go about capturing, distributing, and preserving new content—audio, video, Web sites, blogs, e-mails, YouTube postings, and text messages, as well as photos, graphics, and documents. “The Archive is the legacy of anyone who has ever been on our campus over time,” says Matloff, who believes alumni are hungry for content and connections. “You never know what will trigger someone’s emotion or school memory and inspire reengagement. That reengagement is the strength of the community.”

Like Hetzler, Matloff believes a number of actions can be taken without big budgets and that the primary objective for now is to raise the issue’s awareness



One of the very few “time capsule”
boxes ever unearthed on the Hill, this
one is from the Class of 1950. For
decades, members of each class
enclosed their treasures in lead and
buried them somewhere on campus.

...such as ga...
 on-sistent with cleanliness
 of their parents; and the fruit of their
 be applied at the discretion of the Trustees for
 procuring the library, or in some other way in
 increasing the usefulness of this Seminary.
 But above all, it is expected that the
 Master's attention to the disposition of the Minds
 and Morals of the youth under his charge, will
 be of the greatest importance. It is considered that tho'
 goodness without knowledge (it others)
 is a dangerous, and that both united form the no-
 blest character, and lay the surest foundation
 of usefulness to mankind.
 It is therefore required, that he frequently de-
 attentively & vigorously guard against
 earliest irregularities.
 That he frequently de-
 colours the deformity
 the beauty & aim

Original Phillips Academy
 constitution, penned in 1778.
 Note the famous words
 "goodness without knowledge."

Lyrics to the song "America,"
 better known by its first line,
 "My country, 'tis of thee," in the
 hand of its author, Andover
 Theological Seminary student
 Samuel Francis Smith, 1832.

America.
 My country, 'tis of thee,
 Sweet land of liberty,
 Of the Prince;
 Land where my fathers died,
 Land of the pilgrims' pride,
 From every mountain side
 Let freedom ring.

level and get members of the community to begin thinking creatively about future directions. Bristling with ideas and eager to get started, Matloff has suggested, for example, a "producer-in-residence" program that would mimic the artist-in-residence concept, bringing alums with solid expertise to campus for months of consultation and work on the Archive.

If Rogers wants outside advice to help study the whole issue, he might start at Harvard. Megan Sniffin-Marinoff, the university's head archivist, says, "All archives are in a real transitional moment. We've gone from centuries of all paper, to a weird period in the last decades of the 20th century when there was a mix of paper and electronic data, to the present, where there is a substantial transition to electronic formats. We're still cleaning up the 20th century as massive change occurs in the technology, in the world, and in the way we work."

Sniffin-Marinoff, who oversees 23 full-time staff in Harvard's central Archive (which does not include the medical school, the business school, or the art museum),

has just completed a major project to determine how they will "harvest" Web sites, which, like most of the new digital world, are so ephemeral. She predicts the days when archives are gifted with file cabinets full of documents are coming to an end. "Archivists today must think like IT people," she explains, "which is a major role change. We're involved up-front, creating systems and making decisions to deal with a new world of records—how to capture them, screen them, store them, and make them accessible." She says the Harvard Archive's next big project—how to tackle e-mail—is enormous, and the big unknown in any serious archival effort, she acknowledges, is cost.

Andover's head of school knows that many of these larger questions will have to wait until the economy improves, but Chase firmly believes that the Academy has a moral commitment to preserve its history into the new age. "As an institution we are committed to maintaining a lively and up-to-date Archive so that those in the future will be able to look back and gain as much insight as we can right now."