

# Continuity and Change over 150 Years

David Jeffery, Principal



150 years. Here at the School it's easy for the significance of this anniversary to be lost. After all, we've spent some years in intense preparation for this year, and now it is sudden-

ly upon us. We need at the beginning of 2004 to step back and regain our perspective. 150 years. It is a great achievement simply to have survived all the vicissitudes and upheavals within India and the world for a century and a half. More striking, though, is the fact that, far from clinging to the hillside for mere survival, Woodstock is facing the next era of its life and work with excitement, confidence and a renewed sense of purpose. This sense of purpose is reflected in the new statement of mission adopted by the Board last October. It is fascinating, though unsurprising to those who know Woodstock, how the history of the school from its earliest days up to the present demonstrates the importance of vision in the life of the school and the elements of that vision which have remained consistent in all of the school's incarnations – British school, American missionary school, International Christian school. In reflecting on Woodstock – past, present and future – in this momentous year of our history, I want to explore some of these consistent themes by considering the implications of our new mission statement, drawing on what has been written in past years. The

longer extracts included alongside these thoughts present a clear picture of a school with a clear and widely-understood mission.

*Woodstock aims to develop responsible global citizens and leaders by providing a world-class international education, rooted in its Christian heritage and values, for a diverse group of students, especially from families in Christian or public service, in an Indian Himalayan environment.*  
– Woodstock's Mission Statement 2003

Many people have, down the years, written and spoken of Woodstock School. The number of books, memoirs, letters and websites about the school attests to the impact of the total Woodstock experience. But Woodstock is, first and foremost, a school. Our mission statement places right at the centre the aspiration that Woodstock should provide a **world-class... education**. This means that we desire to be measured against the best not just in India but around the world. It is interesting to note that almost 100 years ago, the quality of our education was no less a concern. "Our pupils...are sent up for public examinations held either by the university or the Department of Education. These examinations set the standard in all schools and test the quality of work done, a test which Woodstock has usually met triumphantly." (Mrs. Sara Andrews, wife of the Principal, writing in "Woman's Work", January 1908). Today, we measure ourselves against widely-recognised international standards – the Cambridge Checkpoint and International General Certificate of Secondary Edu-

cation examinations from the UK and the American College Board Advanced Placement examinations as we strive to educate and prepare our students for academic success.

Second, Woodstock's education is **international**. As indicated earlier, our academic curriculum and assessment draws from the best worldwide. Our teaching staff is international in its composition. Our students likewise come from all parts of the world. This, again, is typical of Woodstock's history. In the same article quoted above it is recorded that even in 1908 students came from the Persian Gulf, Burma and Siam, though largely from north and central India. Today Woodstock encompasses staff and students from more than twenty nations. There are still the children of expatriate workers, often in service in various countries in South Asia. The majority of our students today, however, are nationals of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Korea and other Asian countries – some, indeed, reversing the early pattern by coming as Indian passport holders from the west to study in India. In 2003-2004 we have around 220 students from India, 160 from the rest of Asia, and 95 from the rest of the world (Europe, North America, Australia, and South Africa). In terms of staff, again, half are Indian and half expatriate, mostly from the English-speaking countries of the world.

The third element emphasised in the mission statement is that of **diversity**. This commitment on the part of Woodstock's leaders is well illustrated from the time of



Mrs Andrews (C) with students, 1913



Staff and students, 2003

Rev. Allen Parker, in the early 1920s. As the extract below illustrates, there was a real question about whether Woodstock should move towards being a “pure” American/European school, excluding Indians and others, and the Board of Directors of the time made that decision. Rev. Parker’s response was typically forthright: “We thought it over carefully and prayerfully...we wrote back to India and I resigned as Principal” (the Board backed down!). Woodstock has, of

Our pupils come from all parts of India, from the Persian Gulf, Burmah, even Siam, but chiefly from North and Central India. Their fathers are missionaries, planters, merchants, doctors, engineers, railway men etc. They are of all ages, from six or seven to twenty and over and, beginning at the kindergarten, they are carried through all grades of the Government Education Department and the first two years of the university curriculum. There is also a training class for teachers. Our pupils in all these courses, together with similar pupils from other schools in the Province, are sent up for public examinations held either by the university or the Department of Education. These examinations set the standard in all schools and test the quality of work done, a test which Woodstock has usually met triumphantly. This year again, as several times in recent years, **one of our girls has led the whole Province in the High School examination.** Many music pupils from Woodstock also go up for public examinations, held under the auspices of Trinity College of Music, London, which sends a special examiner out each year. (*January 1908*)

The Woodstock Kindergarten Normal Training Department won **the only gold medal given** for this kind of work in the exhibition at Allahabad, last winter, in competition not only with all India but also with selected schools in England. An eminent missionary who spent a fortnight there and saw the students and teachers in everyday life, wrote: “I hope other schools of a like kind have as good an atmosphere surrounding their girls” (*April 1912*)

From the reports of Mrs. Sara Andrews Joint Principal 1899 – 1913 to the Presbyterian Church in the USA

course, become very much more of a diverse community since the days of Rev. Parker, particularly after Rev. Robert Alter moved the school more intentionally towards internationalism in the 1970s; the principle has never been seriously questioned since that day. Religious diversity is just one example of this. Today eight major religions are represented: nearly half of students are Christian, with large groups of Hindus and Buddhists. In cultural terms, we would dare to say that, rather than students aspiring to assimilate into one dominant group, we are creating our own, truly diverse culture which moves beyond tolerance into genuine respect for and empathy with other world-views. We believe that it is both right and possible to value diversity in this way, without losing our distinctiveness as a Christian school.



Enjoying the Woodstock environment

Has Woodstock changed? Yes, of course it has. Is it the same school? No, it isn't. And, yet, in a strange sort of way those answers are really also 'no' and "yes". What affected me and shaped my mind and spirit when I was a boy, I still see affecting the minds and attitudes and lives of students at Woodstock today: the love of mountains and forests, the enjoyment of spectacular scenery, the pleasure of exotic sights and smells, living in the midst of **cultural and religious diversity**, of never being quite sure whether one is Indian or American or Japanese or Russian – and all of this in a school that took, and still takes, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ seriously.



Mrs Ellen & Rev Robert Alter, 1970

In 1969, soon after I became Superintendent (now called Principal), we suddenly woke up to the fact that Woodstock would no longer be the kind of school for missionary children it had been for over fifty years. During the first four years of my tenure we watched the school's enrollment drop from over 450 to a low of 298. That was in 1972. Where were we headed? What could be done? We could continue as we were, a school for missionary children, with diminishing enrollments (projections indicated that there would be less than a hundred students by the end of the decade); or we could combine with Kodaikanal in South India, and continue meeting the educational needs of missionary families in a combined school that might last another ten to fifteen years; or we could let Woodstock become a good, English-medium, Indian-Christian school (there would be nothing wrong in doing that); or – which is what we chose to do – we could build on Woodstock's past, both as an international and as a Christian school, replacing missionary children as they left with children from other national, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

By 1980, after much hard work, we managed to get the school's enrollment back to over 400. The school was well on its way to becoming what it is today. Though the mix of students is quite different now from the one I knew as a boy, and knew later as a teacher, and even later as a school administrator, it's still basically the same school – the one that we remembered and the one we dreamed of its becoming – a school with a strong sense of Christian purpose, situated in a remarkable mountain setting in north India, offering a first class education to **a wide range of students who now come from all over the world** to live and learn and work and play together in a constantly changing milieu of national, social, religious and cultural diversities.

Rev. Robert Alter '43, “Living on the Edge” 2002

**W**oodstock, I have noticed, is a **blend of many cultures**. All of us are from different backgrounds, religions and nationalities. We all have different world-views, value systems, but we also have a unique quality, thanks to Woodstock. In this environment, all those barriers seem to fall and there is an amazing feeling of friendship and cooperation, something I will cherish forever.

**Woodstock is a mini-world**, a friendly one which all of us will miss. It is no hidden fact, though, that the world we are about to enter is not a friendly one. War, unrest, unhappiness, and racial discrimination bear testimony to that. As Woodstock graduates, I feel we are well-prepared. In my previous school, though the education system was excellent, it was not able to instill a very essential quality in its students (and it cannot be really blamed), namely independence. This quality that Woodstock has helped us to imbibe will show its real value later.

Whether we realize it or not, **Woodstock has also made us respectful and tolerant of other cultures**. It has taught us, through the class-discussions with many nationalities present, the virtue of looking at both sides of an argument before making decisions. The fact may not have sunk in yet, but we are leaving an ideal world, an Utopia, and going into the 'real world'. I feel the experience of mixing together so harmoniously as the Class of '91 at Woodstock will help us spread that feeling of cooperation. As well-rounded, experienced people in the field of multi-national relationships, that will be our greatest contribution to the world. Cooperation and harmony, needless to say, are the need of the hour. If it is in our power to create a better world, it is in our power to change mankind for the better, let us take the initiative.

**Aryan Ranjbaran, 1993 Commencement – Valediction (Quadrangle Summer 1994)**



Fourth, the mission statement speaks of **families in service**. Woodstock has a special mission to the children of families in service in India and elsewhere, and this is a major aspect of our continuing scholarship programme, which currently redistributes 20% of the school's total income to enable appropriate students to benefit from a Woodstock education. Current parents are engaged in work in rural hospitals, among children from Delhi slums, among people living with HIV/AIDS, in literacy work, in village development, in all kinds of Christian and NGO service. Alongside this is the element of our scholarship programme we refer to as "nation builders", Woodstock's

investment in the development of responsible governance and public administration in the South Asian countries. Our vision of what "service" entails has broadened down the years, and we are privileged to be playing a part in social change on the widest front.

Fifth, mention is naturally made of the **Himalayan environment** within which all of these activities take place. For alumni and former staff, this may be the most long-lasting impression of Woodstock. Whether it is the sense of "living on the edge" in terms of the sparseness of home comforts (not

**W**e call ourselves the **Central Himalayan Rural Action Group** and work in thirty villages in Ramgarh, Dhari and Bhimtol blocks in Naintal District of the Kumaon region. Our headquarters is at a village called Sitla, near Mukteshwar and our aim is holistic and sustainable development of hill communities, starting with arresting the degradation of the physical and social environment of this area. Establishing, hopefully in the process, a framework for future efforts in other Himalayan areas.



Our work hinges on dialogue with villagers to identify their problems and needs, and all our programs have been born out of this ongoing dialogue.

So far, we are involved with forestry for local needs, fodder development, community health care, low cost water storage, sanitation, energy saving devices – e.g. bio-gas, optimal land use research, cooperative marketing of fruit and vegetables, pre-primary education through anganwadis, establishing cooperative ration/provision stores, and last but far from least forming and building up decentralized groups within villages to take responsibility and accountability for the success of all these programs, which of course is a long-term objective.

The work is challenging, stimulating, allows much scope for interaction with people, and development of one's own personality, ideas and attitudes towards life, which to me is most important.

**Ever since my Woodstock days, I have wanted to live and work in the hills, and associate myself with development efforts from the environmental viewpoint, and it has proved to be a unique and rewarding experience so far. I wouldn't want to give it up for anything!**

**Darab Nagarwalla '80: Working with Hill Communities (Quadrangle Summer 1991)**

**I** take with me the faithfulness I owe to the different cultures I have encountered. It is these memories and the problems we have faced and solved together that will keep us from drifting apart. To be one. To be united. They say in unity is strength, but also in unity lies understanding. I urge us all to understand one another, to compromise with each other, to understand yourself, your desires, and only then rush out and achieve your goals.



**Ajay Bhalla  
1995 Commencement –  
Valediction (Quadrangle Winter  
1996)**

quite as spartan now as many remember), or the sheer grandeur of our surroundings, Woodstock undoubtedly impresses itself on the heart, mind and spirit of those who have lived here. Apart from the obvious life-long love of the open air and of trekking evidenced by many of our alumni, a significant number have gone on to devote their lives to environmental concerns. At the recent opening of the Hanifl Center for Outdoor Education and Environmental Study, our significant new investment in this arena, one of the guests was Dr. Gabriel Campbell, Director of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICI-MOD) in Nepal – just one of a host of alumni working for sustainable development and environmental concerns throughout the world.

Sixth, our education is *rooted in our Christian heritage and values*. Chapels are a formal expression of the school's commitment, but there is much more to the school's Christian life and influence than that. At our recent staff retreat, Bruce Hekman, an experienced international educator, encouraged us to think of Woodstock as a "community of grace". We recognise (in common with all religions) that there is a spiritual dimension to life. We are commit-

ted to the idea that life should be lived with a strong sense of right and wrong, within a moral and ethical framework. We regard all men and women as being "made in the image of God", and therefore worthy of the utmost respect and care – whether rich or poor. We consider that because of this it behoves us to make the best use of our God-given talents and opportunities in altruistic service – and how much have our students down the years benefited from that attitude in the staff at Woodstock! Finally, as a "community of grace" we should have love at the centre: the quality of relationships at Woodstock and the compassion towards those within and without our community should be evident to all.

What is the end result of all this? *Woodstock aims to develop responsible global citizens and leaders*. I can find no better way to illustrate this than to quote at



Dean Samuel Burgoyne, Principal 1953 to 1968

length from one of my predecessors, Dean Samuel Burgoyne, who wrote as follows in a Quadrangle editorial. "The President of a College in the U.S.A. once said in my hearing: 'Wherever I have met former Woodstock students during my world travels I have usually found them in places of high responsibility. They know nothing more satisfying than service.' Generally speaking, that statement is true, for, even when their employment has no direct service impact, our representatives are found active as good neighbours in their local situations.

"It would be strange if this were not so. There is a wide range of abilities invested in this school, and there is a very obvious return of dividends in our alumni. Nurse, doctor, teacher, research chemist, diplomat, business executive, truck driver – they all play their parts, with degrees of success which vary according to the quality of their aims. The letters W.S. stand for Woodstock School, but they also may be regarded as an honourable degree denoting 'World Servant' " (November 1959). That designation is even more appropriate today than it was 45 years ago, with the exciting difference that we now see increasing numbers of alumni from South Asian countries in positions of leadership and service across the region and beyond. Throughout all the changes of the last 150 years, the vision and the mission continue.

**W**oodstock was with me from the time I was born in 1933, in the person of my English Governess, Josephine Georgine Newman (Russel) (1900-1996) who was an alumna of Woodstock College. In our home, she was known as 'Tiny'. Physically she was, but mentally Tiny was a towering Christian presence in the Sikh Princely State of Patiala. Full of unselfish compassion, tolerance, honesty and forgiveness. Never standing in judgement of anybody for any reason whatsoever. Quietly pursuing her Christian values in an alien State.



I was only five years old when Tiny taught me the 'Lord's Prayer' and the hymn, 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'. Although my family are Sikhs and we had our religious tutors, her Christian influence was to be everlastingly meaningful and caused no conflict or pressure within me over the fact that I was born a Sikh and continue to be one.

Persons, Places, Possessions are precious to all of us. Truthfully, I have to say that through Tiny, Woodstock also came to be an exclusively precious intellectual Person, Place and Possession. Yes, this wonderful Christian institution, founded, nurtured, and lovingly served by some of the most dedicated Christians I will ever know, will always have a place of honor in my matrix and be a part of what is best in me intellectually and otherwise. **I came to grips with a whole new spiritual and cultural experience** that has lasted up to now.

Princess Bhuvnesh Kumari Patiala '50,  
"Living on the Edge" 2002



Students in science class