

An Association of Our Own
A Look Back at 130 Years of Unity and Service

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Part Two

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In the last Echo, Part One of this article traced the history of our Association from its founding in 1874 through ninety years of growth and service to alumnae and the College. Part Two covers the last forty years of this history, a time of change and challenge.

The 1960's were as tumultuous a time for our College as they were for our nation. As the school adjusted to a new era in public higher education, so did our Association.

In 1960 all the public teachers colleges of Massachusetts became state colleges, opening their curricula to a broad range of academic disciplines and opening their doors to a larger and more diverse population of students. To keep up with this change the Alumnae Association changed its name to Alumnae Association of State College at Framingham. Of the nine Massachusetts state colleges, Framingham remained the only one that limited its admissions to women. But that would not last long.

After 125 years of tradition as a women's school, Framingham began admitting men for its fall, 1964, semester. This was a controversial change and meant that soon Framingham would be graduating men and the term "alumnae" as the plural form of the feminine "alumna" would have to change as well. The Association formalized that change in the fall of 1966, reported in the November *Echo* of that year with dubious enthusiasm in a brief notice entitled "From 'ae' to 'i'": "Much is done today under the title of 'progress'. We have been forced into this stream because of the growth and change at our College. Three years ago men were welcomed into the Freshman class. The Graduate Program has had men since its beginning [1961]. Therefore the inevitable happened – the Alumnae Board voted to change our name to be all inclusive. As of now, with all papers signed, we are the Alumni Association of the State College at Framingham."

Two years later, when the State College at Framingham became Framingham State College, the Association adjusted its name to Alumni Association, Framingham State College, a name used continuously for thirty-six years, until the College's 2002 lawsuit brought about a name change to Independent Association of Framingham State Alumni this year.

Other important changes were going on at the Association at that time. *The Echo* started publication in 1965 as a brief newsletter with high hopes of becoming a regular source for College news, class news, club news, and news of upcoming events and projects. But to achieve that dream the Association would need financial support beyond what was provided by its system of annual dues. According to the April, 1966, *Echo* the annual

dues of the Association was three dollars. A member could become a “life member” with a one-time payment of sixty dollars.

To support the expenses related to printing *The Echo* and mailing it to every graduate, and with the anticipation that the Association might soon have a house of its own, annual dues were replaced with an Annual Giving campaign. The first campaign was announced in the Midwinter, 1967, *Echo*, chaired by Executive Secretary Leona Smith Britton, class of 1951. One of the first contributors to the campaign was Rose Mary Hoye McCarthy, class of 1945 and wife of College President D. Justin McCarthy. Our current Annual Giving chair is First Vice President Kathleen Cotter, class of 1978.

As a full four-year college with an expanding range of academic programs, the campus of Framingham State College expanded accordingly. The 1970’s saw the addition of such structures as the Whittemore Library, additions to Hemenway Hall, dorms for men as well as women, and a massive College Center on the west side of State Street, later named in honor of President McCarthy. It was during this time of expansion and building at the College that the Association was able to realize its dream to have “a home of our own.”

Serious consideration of a building for the use of the alumnae goes back to the late 1930’s when Dwight Hall was under construction. A small student clubhouse dubbed “X.P.K” due to its origins as an experimental kitchen for Home Economics students was removed. The need for a new student gathering place was combined with a longstanding desire for an alumnae office in a vision promoted by College president Martin F. O’Connor, and presented at the Association’s spring council meeting for 1937. President O’Connor wanted to celebrate the 1939 centennial of the College by erecting a Student Alumnae Building on campus as a replica of the original 1839 normal school in Lexington. The \$20,000 cost of such a building would have to come from the students and alumnae themselves. A committee was formed and a building fund established, but raising the funds proved too demanding a task during those last years of the Great Depression.

The Student Alumnae Building committee was reactivated from time to time until O’Connor Hall was built in 1961, providing space for a “Student Union” and Alumnae Association offices. In 1967, the committee, chaired by President McCarthy, reorganized itself as a trust, with the intent that the money raised so far be designated for use by the Alumni Association for the purpose of building an Alumni House.

The opportunity to put the trust fund to use came in 1971. President McCarthy was approached by Dr. George G. Willis, a well-known local physician who with his wife Bertine was planning to move from their Adams Road home to a new home on Grove Street. Their house at 42 Adams Road, adjacent to the campus just behind O’Connor Hall, seemed the ideal location for an Alumni House. The Association agreed and the purchase was completed by the end of March. The Association appointed a decoration committee to prepare the house for its new life. The move from the rooms at O’Connor Hall was carried out during the last week of September, freeing up space there to be used

as a student lounge. A few months later the Winter, 1972 *Echo* reported, “Alumni classes or committees, Framingham clubs or faculty groups are urged to use the Alumni House for any of their meetings at any time during the day or evening. This was the chief reason for purchase of the house by the Alumni Association.”

The house at 42 Adams Road was built in 1916-1917 for Albert H. Wood, a grain dealer, from plans drawn up by Boston architect Oscar Thayer. It has been described as built in a “stuccoed bungalow” style with Colonial Revival details. Its many rooms provided ample space for Association offices, meeting rooms, and for social gatherings plus space for storing more than a century and a half of archival records. A small apartment, perhaps designed for a live-in maid, became home for Norah Gibbons, the house’s caretaker and former Head Housekeeper at the College for almost thirty years.

Once the issue of a home for the Association had been settled the Association decided to do something to get the male alumni more involved. By 1973 there had been six years of graduating classes that included men. The Association, Student Services Department, and Athletic Department worked together to start a Homecoming tradition based on an annual fall Rams football game. A pre-game coffee and post-game social hour and buffet supper at O’Connor Hall was planned, only male alumni (and their wives or dates) were invited. This event was co-chaired by Ray Flaherty, class of 1971, and George Duane, class of 1968. It marked the beginning of a concerted effort by the Association, “to generate interest and support for all the sports on campus.” Within a year there was an Alumni Sports Boosters Club. Its first annual Sports Booster award went to Athletic Director Steve Ryder, graduate class of 1969. The Athletic Booster Chair continues as an Association board position today, currently held by Joseph Collins, class of 1984.

Leona Smith Britton had been Executive Secretary through this time of expansion. In recognition of the wider scope of responsibility that this position now held, the title of Director of Alumni Affairs was added in 1971. A new era in the history of our Association began on September 1, 1974, when Marilyn Minahan Foley, class of 1958, succeeded Leona Smith Britton as our Executive Secretary / Director of Alumni Affairs. In his message to the alumni in the Fall, 1974, *Echo*, President McCarthy wrote, “Of particular importance to alumni is the appointment of Mrs. Leona Britton as Staff Associate for Public Affairs at the College. Mrs. Marilyn Foley has been named by the Alumni Association to serve in Leona’s former post as Director of Alumni Affairs. Both Leona and Marilyn are admirably prepared for their new assignments and we all look forward to a continuance of the splendid relationships which have so consistently existed between the College and the Alumni Association.” Marilyn Foley had already served for several years in various board positions, and had been editor of *The Echo*. As Executive Secretary / Director of Alumni Affairs, she would serve our Association for the next twenty-seven years with professionalism and dedication.

Marilyn Foley’s tenure began as a part-time paid position, which evolved into a full time job requiring the support of a part-time assistant. Among the growing responsibilities of that job was the administration of scholarships and awards as more and more were set up by classes, clubs, and as memorials to deceased alumni. By the year 2000, there were

more than twenty scholarships, loans, and awards handled by the Association, providing \$64,300 in aid for Framingham State College students that year alone.

Another addition to the College campus during its time of growth was the acquisition of an existing, historic property, the old St. John's Episcopal Church on Maynard Road. As the FSC Ecumenical Center, the handsome Gothic edifice served students and alumni alike for classes, weddings, and concerts, as well as ecumenical services, from 1969 until deteriorating conditions caused it to be closed in 1985.

The Ecumenical Center had been shuttered and neglected for six years when, on May 1, 1991, a group of concerned alumni, students, neighbors, and clergy were organized as the Friends of the Framingham State College Ecumenical Center, with support from the Framingham Historical Commission and Framingham Historical Society. This group, led by Executive Secretary Marilyn Foley and meeting often at the Alumni House, worked to raise public awareness of the plight of the Ecumenical Center and persuade the Massachusetts legislature to release \$800,000 in funds allocated for its restoration. It took nine years and eventually cost more than \$1,000,000, but the Ecumenical Center was restored to the college community in November of 2000.

Restoration of the Ecumenical Center, however, had not been a priority of the College, headed since 1985 by Dr. McCarthy's successor, President Paul Weller. The lobbying of the Friends group only added to a growing sense of friction between the College and the Association. The Association insisted on remaining independent of the College in spite of overtures for some form of merger. A year after the campaign to save the Ecumenical Center began the College opened a Development office, which created a "Recent Alumni Club" for those who were no more than twenty years past graduation. Several articles and letters in the Winter, 1992, *Echo* reacted to this. One of them stated, "Never before in the 118 years of the existence of our independent Alumni Association has any College administrator refused to pursue cooperative endeavors with our organized alumni. Our self-supporting Association continues to stand ready to meet the needs of our Alumni and to assist the College and its students at no cost to the taxpayers or students. We believe this says something positive about the caliber of the graduates of OUR COLLEGE."

Marilyn Foley retired as Executive Secretary / Director of Alumni Affairs in June of 2001, succeeded by Lisa Brouillette Holland, class of 1984, a long-time board member serving most recently as Second Vice President. At that time the Association was strenuously opposing the publication of an alumni directory by the College, in keeping with its policy to protect the privacy and security of our members. In September of 2001, the FSC Board of Trustees requested that the Association merge with the College or its Foundation, with the expressed intent to "proceed against the Association" if it did not comply.

Resolution committees were formed by the Association and the trustees to work together to find a solution to this crisis, but all ideas and alternatives were found insufficient by the trustees if they did not include the Association's surrender of its 127 year independence. After only four months of negotiations, and without any of the

Association's ideas presented to the full board of trustees for their consideration, the trustees, at their January, 2002 meeting, voted to create a "Framingham State College Alumni Association" and recognize it as the only authorized alumni group, demanding that our independent Association cease using the name Framingham State College in its name and communications. The Association refused to comply with that demand, leading to the College's filing a lawsuit against the Association in December, 2002, a lengthy and costly legal battle that lasted until September, 2004.

With the legal confrontation with the College demanding more and more time of our Executive Secretary, Administrative Assistant, and Executive Board, it is remarkable to note that the core mission of the Association has been carried on successfully over these past three difficult years. *The Echo* has been published, Alumni Weekend reunions have been held (albeit off campus), scholarships, loans and awards have gone to deserving students, and annual giving continued to support these activities.

With the summer of 2004 came our 130th anniversary, a time to look back and take inspiration from past generations of alumnae and alumni who kept the "spirit of Framingham" alive. We look to their examples as we strive to define a future that will be in the best interest of our College, its students, and its alumni.