

Cinema. Commonwealth developed interdisciplinary classes before many of its peers did, and the school must continue to draw from the experience and interests of its faculty and students. Changes in languages spoken, religions observed, global issues faced by society, and the role of technology will determine where we travel in our goal to understand and teach what is relevant. At Commonwealth, we are aware that understanding how to read Shakespeare or James Joyce is a meaningful tool in comprehending the voices of political and social commentary today, as well as a journey into the beauties of the written word. In addition, as the traditional family has evolved from the “nuclear” norm to one of many structures in which children are raised in America, and as varied pressures limit free time in our society, Commonwealth serves an even larger role in helping shape and reinforce values, collaborative skills, and a sense of community for our students.

The Next Fifty Years

WILLIAM D. WHARTON

LAST APRIL, members of Britain's Spiritual Workers Association (mediums, fortune tellers, et al.) lobbied Parliament to protest a new E.U. consumer protection law that would label them entertainers, leaving them otherwise vulnerable to prosecution for fraud. A headline in the U.K.'s *Independent* gleefully suggested that the psychics should have seen it coming. Recalling my attempt in high school to slog through Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, I propose that the E.U. regulation be extended to futurists. They wouldn't see it coming, either. For my part, I am loath to predict where Commonwealth School will find itself in fifty years, but I would like to discuss key questions for its future and to outline its promise.

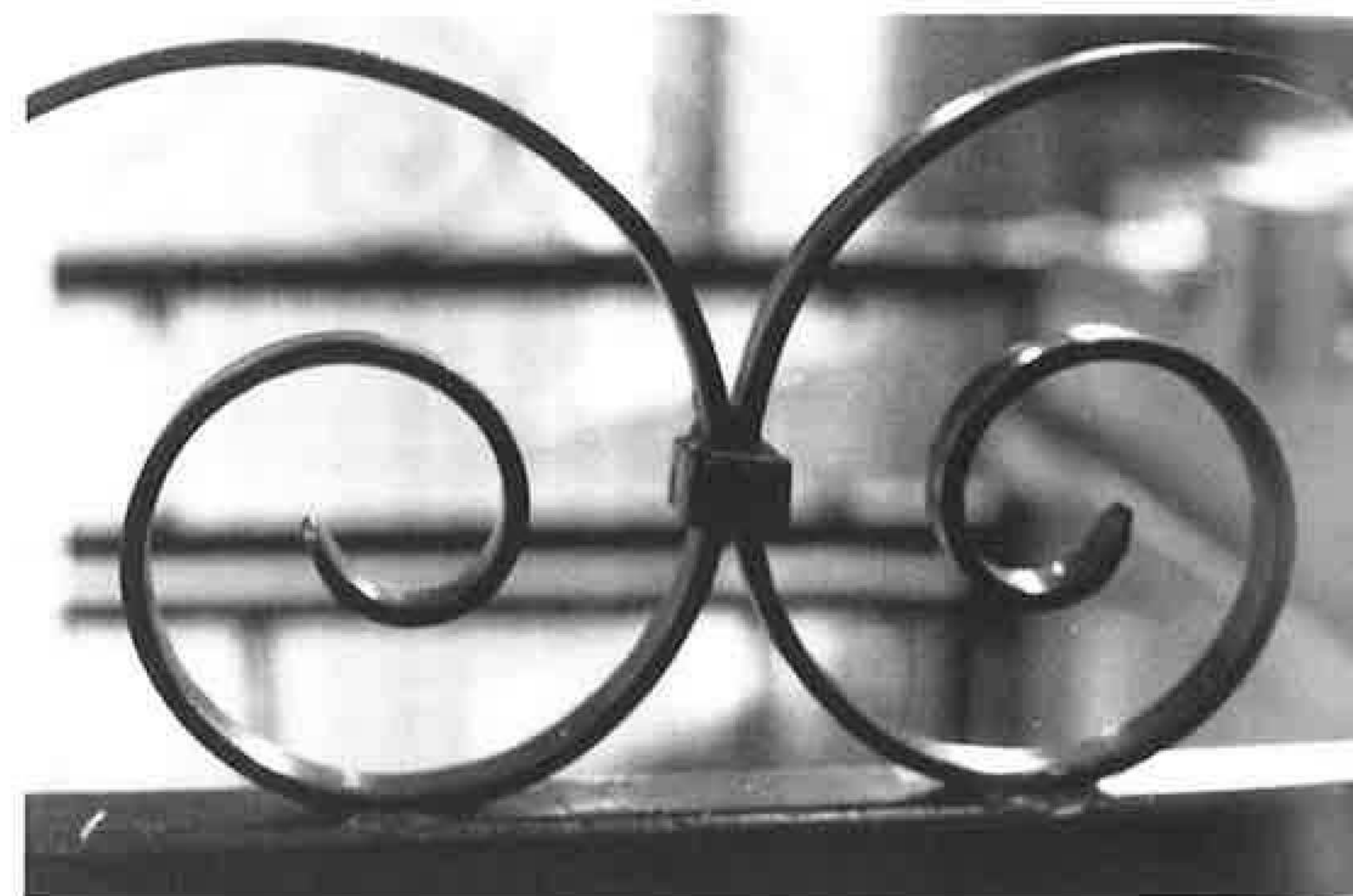
Remarkably often, alumni/ae from the early days of the School return and observe how familiar it feels to them. Even more striking, they are responding less to the physical surroundings than to the liveliness and humor of the students. If we have indeed managed to preserve the best of Charles Merrill's vision for the School, which particular elements of that vision must we continue to nurture if we want Commonwealth to be recognizable as Commonwealth in another half century?

At last February's Board meeting, Bowdoin College's Dean of Admissions, Bill Shain, spoke to trustees about the pressures and trends in college admissions and about the way he and many of his

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As a student, I felt protected and comforted by the coziness of 151 Commonwealth Avenue. Today I realize acutely the challenges of operating a multifaceted high school in such a small space. In my dreams, 135 Commonwealth Avenue is for sale and we buy it; or better, the building is for sale and someone buys it for us. Over the next several years, we will carefully examine the spatial needs of the school and strive to satisfy them creatively and thoughtfully. We will consider all options, with the overriding goal of providing an environment that both preserves the greatness and optimizes the potential of Commonwealth.

I am so proud of Commonwealth School and all that it has accomplished in its first 50 years. I am grateful to have been chosen as the first alumna to serve at the head of our Board, and I can only hope that years from now, Commonwealth will also be proud of my tenure as its Chairman.



Benjamin Caine '11

colleagues view Commonwealth applicants. He said, “There are very few schools in the country where the life of the mind is as treasured as it is at Commonwealth.” He noted that our students and teachers turn out some of the best essays and recommendations their office reads. Later, at dinner, I asked him what other schools he thought resembled us. He named a few, and then added, “There used to be more, but they chose to become like other schools.”

His comments highlight Commonwealth's strengths and its distinctiveness. This is a place that prizes and cultivates intellectual curiosity, teaching its students to tackle the kind of high-level work that rewards daring inquiry. Students care deeply about close reading, clear writing, and sharp thought. This is a community whose scale and closeness empower students to push for new courses (psychology), teams (baseball and chess), and clubs (Amnesty International and, most recently, Students for a Democratic Society). Even freshmen are encouraged to question the

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Headmaster about the reasoning behind a decision or policy. At the same time, Commonwealth teachers and students appreciate personal accomplishment: the student body that lustily applauds a shy classmate's elegant twelve-tone orchestral composition also cheers the ninth grader who has mustered the guts to perform solo at the Hancock talent night. Students offer frank assessments of prospective teachers to the adults in the community: they want teachers who know their stuff and who won't go easy on them.

We are, in many ways, a school in, of, and for the city. More than one-third of our students receive financial aid, and the consequent mix of backgrounds in our community makes possible (as we saw during our Diversity Day workshops in May) increasingly frank and constructive discussions of race, class, and privilege. One of the most electric assemblies of the year brought urban economist Edward Glaeser to speak about the way successful cities—from Renaissance Florence to contemporary New York and Boston—bring talented people into close quarters where, like riffing jazz musicians, they borrow and build on each other's ideas. The students' enthusiastic response stemmed in part from their recognition of the ways their own creativity feeds on the density of energy in their School.

Commonwealth's direction will, in the long run, depend on the teachers it hires, the leadership it can draw on—both Heads and trustees—and, most important, the students it enrolls. With a new generation of exceptional teachers, a devoted Board, and a steady stream of new students attracted by what they see and hear in classrooms and hallways during their visits, we are thriving. Alumni/ae and parents provide additional, vital support—through the Alumni/ae Association and Parents Committee. And the suc-



Camille Simoneau '10

cess of our capital campaign, *Engaging Minds, Changing Lives*, has greatly strengthened our financial foundation. Commonwealth will be on the scene in 2058.

And it will still be making a difference in the world. In preparing for October's celebration of our 50th anniversary, our communications with alumni/ae have regularly confirmed that the School not only prepares its students for what our mission statement calls “rewarding and productive lives” but also turns out an unusual number of people with the intelligence, will, and conviction to work for constructive change—anyone in need of convincing should look through the last decade of spring *Newsletters*. Our Admissions Office now produces each year a set of profiles of seniors and young alumni/ae whose accomplishments in science, the arts, service, and the humanities hold out the promise that as the need for smart, good people grows ever more acute, the School will continue to exercise an influence that far outweighs its modest size.

Leadership that can protect the core commitments to intellectual adventure, artistic passion, intimacy, and connection with the city and the larger world will ensure that 50 years hence, alumni/ae will still recognize Commonwealth as Commonwealth.



Catriona Blunt '08