



All College Meeting, College of the Atlantic, 1980s

College of the Atlantic: The First Three Decades

by William Carpenter

Following the devastation of the 1947 fire, the Mount Desert Island community began to look for a financial base to replace the service economy that had been hit hard by the loss of many great summer mansions. A study was commissioned (with backing from Nelson Rockefeller, who was born in Bar Harbor) to determine how Bar Harbor and Mount Desert Island could secure future economic well-being, while at the same time strengthening cultural, social, and environmental characteristics of the island.

For two decades, various sub-committees of the Chamber of Commerce tried to promote the idea of a private school or college on the island. One effort involved persuading Phillips Andover Academy in Massachusetts to consider setting up an auxiliary campus. Around 1970-1971, four Maine Indian nations sought to start a school for Native Americans to preserve traditions and culture, and to educate tribal members. The location of the school was to be at the site of the Job Corps Center, now Acadia National Park headquarters. The school project received foundation and Federal money to start up, but the effort fell apart. The man in charge ran off with the funds.

In 1968, Father James M. Gower returned to his native Mount Desert Island and got in touch with his high school classmate Leslie C. Brewer, a Bar Harbor businessman. They talked about the idea of a college on the island and decided to proceed.

The first college committee consisted of Father Gower; Brewer; Robert Smith, regional director of the Office of Economic Opportunity and former elementary school principal; Bernard "Sonny" Cough, owner and operator of a motel in Bar Harbor; and Richard Lewis, a United States Customs Officer whose brother had been president of a small college in Massachusetts. As an informal group, they met several times over the following weeks in Brewer's home.

The committee realized that the new college would need a distinct identity to distinguish it from the New England mainstream. The country was still at war in Vietnam; so one proposed theme was Peace Studies, a direction that went so far as to produce a name, "Acadia Peace College." The sixties also witnessed the awakening of the modern environmental movement, sparked by pioneer works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1963) and René Dubos' *So Human an Animal* (1968). The theme that would prevail among the founders was ecology.

Sensing that a scientific curriculum would be too limiting, the committee broadened the theme to "Human Ecology." The college's first use of the term "Human Ecology" occurred in a letter written by the Reverend Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr., to the summer community of Mount Desert Island seeking support for the new college. "Human Ecology" had been an academic fad in the 1920s, as a branch of sociology, but in Bar Harbor it was reborn with an entirely different meaning, namely, the inquiry into the relationship between people and their natural, social, and technological environments.

The committee also considered regional studies focused on the North Atlantic. This theme did not prevail, but the concept provided a name. Edward Heyman, a songwriter (he wrote the lyrics to "Body and Soul" and other tunes) who summered on the island, came up with the name "College of the Atlantic."

Having a name and a theme, the founders now needed a place, people, and money. Brewer and his real estate partner, Charles Sawyer, knew of a 21-acre estate on the shore of Frenchman Bay one-half mile north of Bar Harbor on Eden Street. The property, the former Byrne estate, had two large summer houses that had been used as a seminary for the French Oblate order, which trained priests for work mainly in Canada (instruction was in French). The remains of the shrine to Our Lady of Fatima still stand at the north end of the campus.

Michael Garber, a businessman from New Haven, Connecticut, who owned the Bar Harbor Inn, had come into possession of this large estate. In 1969, Garber offered to lease it to the college for \$1 a year for five years.

The college had to pay property taxes of about \$5,000 per year. This property had not only a magnificent location and a historical significance through its gardens designed by Beatrix Farrand, but it had been converted to institutional use by the Oblate fathers. Library, auditorium, and rudimentary cooking facilities were already in place.

In 1971, the college started looking for a more permanent site, and in the fall of that year purchased 60 acres on Strawberry Hill near downtown Bar Harbor. Mr. and Mrs. R. Amory Thorndike gave an additional 20 acres through the Kebo Educational Foundation, which they had helped found in order to encourage a school to locate in Bar Harbor. The college retained Edward Larrabee Barnes, one of the country's most distinguished architects, to design a campus on the new site. His plan satisfied the design requirements and won a distinguished prize for architectural design, but the project was eventually abandoned and the Strawberry Hill property sold.

College of the Atlantic was passing from concept to reality. At this time, the founding committee grew to 16 members. The board consisted of Brewer, Chairman; Carlo Ninfi, Treasurer; Father Gower, Secretary; David Benson, a motel owner and former State Senator; Dr. Seldon Bernstein, senior staff scientist and assistant director of The Jackson Laboratory; Frederick Burrill, an attorney in Bar Harbor; Bernard Cough; Albert Cunningham, president of the Bar Harbor Banking and Trust Company; John Good, Superintendent of Acadia National Park; Heyman; Lewis; James McLeod, motel owner and operator, and representative to the Maine State Legislature from Bar Harbor; McGiffert, president emeritus of the Chicago Theological Seminary and an MDI summer resident; Smith; Erwin Soule, president of the First National Bank of Bar Harbor; and Dr. Winston Stewart, a physician from Bar Harbor. It was a board with a preponderance of year-round residents. There was, as yet, no strong tie to the summer community.

Addressing the need for money to launch the college, the trustees sent a letter to the residents of Mount Desert Island, stating the goals and year-round and summer focus of the college. "We invite you to be a Founding Contributor," read the solicitation. About 345 gifts resulted, most for \$10 or less. Regardless of the amount, local support was there.

Hiring procedures were less formal than at present, and the first presidential search, which culminated with the hiring of Edward Kaelber, was unadvertised. Following a career in the lumber business in upstate New York, Kaelber had been working at Harvard University as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Education since 1958. By 1969, he was ready for a change. A friend and colleague at Harvard, Dana Cotton, had been traveling in Maine and met John Good, Acadia National Park Superintendent and a new member of the college's board of trustees. Good mentioned to Cotton that they were looking for a founding president, and Cotton promptly spoke of it to Kaelber.

In November 1969, Kaelber called Good and drove to Bar Harbor to be interviewed by the trustees. In December 1969 he was offered the job. He accepted and moved to Bar Harbor to start his presidency January 1, 1970. Kaelber lived with Father Gower at the Catholic rectory in Northeast Harbor for six months until his wife, Patricia, joined him and they took up residence in one of the Byrne cottages. Kaelber had recently returned from setting up a comprehensive high school in Nigeria. With experience starting from scratch in remote locations, he seemed a natural choice.

President Kaelber was committed to the practical application of classroom learning. In a time when the very purpose of liberal education had come into question, his vision emphasized education as a problem-solving activity to be judged by its practical results. The justification of an academic activity was not its traditional place in the curricula of the past but its capacity to answer the urgent demands of the present.

Liane Peach, a Maine native whose husband worked at The Jackson Laboratory, heard about plans for a new college and volunteered her services on a part-time basis, agreeing to help until Kaelber found a full-time secretary. She began as the College's secretary and went on to become the College's business manager.

As an assistant, Kaelber chose Melville Coté, who had accompanied him in Africa. Coté was working on a doctoral dissertation at Harvard on the development of two new colleges, COA and Hampshire, an experimental college in Amherst, Massachusetts. He and his wife, artist Polly Coté, moved to the island in June 1970. Coté's principal responsibility would be

admissions, but he did many other tasks. At his retirement in 1999, he was Dean of Administration.

Albert Stork was hired as groundskeeper, and Millard Dority, then a 17-year-old high school student, acted as his assistant. Dority eventually became Director of Campus Building and Planning, a position he continues to hold today. Other early staff included Dolores Jordan, Coté's secretary in admissions, then the first registrar. Samuel Eliot, a Harvard graduate in literature whose ancestors were among the earliest summer residents of Northeast Harbor, joined in early 1971 as assistant to the president—or, as he put it, "utility infielder."¹

The founders sought and received state authorization in 1969. In the fall of 1970, the founding of the college was publicly announced, including a notice in another fledgling enterprise, the *Maine Times*, published in Bangor, Maine. Official incorporation of the college in 1969 changed the founding committee to the first Board of Trustees.

Not everything was unequivocally positive in those days. Harvard President Nathaniel Pusey, a summer resident of Seal Harbor, was reported to have said to Kaelber, "The last thing the world needs is another college." Despite that pronouncement, connections with other Harvard faculty and graduates have continued. Harvard Education Dean Theodore Sizer, an early trustee, who remained a durable friend over the years, joined the college's Council of Advisors as a charter member in 1997.

A successful application for a \$50,000 National Endowment for the Humanities planning grant allowed both faculty and students to be compensated for their participation in the experiment, and the board started to recruit faculty from applications that came in response to the initial announcements. By spring 1972, the college had received 1,700 inquiries. Guidelines for faculty included a willingness to enter into interdisciplinary arrangements: "people strong in their academic fields who both intellectually and viscerally see a need to combine their strengths and perspectives with those of colleagues from other fields." And prospective faculty had to want to teach.

The board and president, acting as an informal search committee, selected three faculty for the summer session, with a spread of disciplines reflecting the founders' vision of academic diversity. Human Ecology was thought to be the fusion of science, politics, and written communication; therefore, a political scientist, Francis Singleton; a biologist, Glen Paulsen; and a humanist, William Carpenter, were picked to teach the initial cadre of thirteen students. Eliot helped out with the English program. The ecology and human history of Bar Island were chosen as the focal point for the first summer session, and, with a low-tide hike across the bar, College of the Atlantic's academic work began.

In the fall of 1971, Dr. Sizer hosted a meeting of summer faculty, trustees, and administrators in his Harvard office to determine the next step. Hampshire College had recently been founded with a \$5-million donation, and College of the Atlantic founders undoubtedly hoped for similar large-scale assistance. But no such early endowment was forthcoming, and the summer program had consumed the NEH grant. The question before the meeting was whether to wait for more money to come in. Opinions on both sides were expressed, with the adventurous prevailing. The first full academic session was set for fall 1972.

Over the winter of 1971-1972, Kaelber, Coté, faculty, and staff, along with the founding trustees, set the stage for the following fall. From the summer faculty only Carpenter and Eliot stayed on. Two students from the summer course, Becky Kolouris and Jill Talbot, also remained to assist in recruiting. Another student, Gray Cox, a graduate of Mount Desert Island High School, became Coté's Assistant Director of Admission. Many years later, after receiving his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, he joined the COA faculty in political economics. The new biologist was Steven Katona, who had pioneering interdisciplinary experience at California Institute of the Arts. The political wing of Human Ecology was represented by Daniel Kane, a patent lawyer and environmental activist who had been teaching in the new Environmental Studies department at San Jose State University in California.

The first female teacher was Linda Swartz (now Lindsey), an anthropologist from the University of Texas. Swartz was joined by a part-

time anthropologist, Elmer Beal, an island native who had gone to Bowdoin and then to the University of Texas for graduate work. Beal became director of the new Maine Coast Heritage Trust, founded by Mrs. David Rockefeller, which was first housed at the college. Beal, who was directing the internship program² began to teach anthropology after Swartz's departure in 1976. Beal and Eliot, along with Peach, Jordan, Stork, and Dority, provided vital connections with both summer and native populations of the island in the early years.

The first faculty broadened the curriculum by hiring part-time and adjunct faculty to give the initial problem-solving approach wider range and more interdisciplinary focus. Students called not only for hands-on learning but a knowledge of history, aesthetics, and philosophy that would define the human values surrounding environmental decisions. In this way the new field of women's studies was introduced by Susan Lerner, art history by JoAnne Carpenter, and ceramics by Ernie and Marilyn McMullen. The visual arts, though not formally represented in the initial concept of human ecology, proved so popular among students that substantial appointments have been made over the years. This evolution illustrates how the college's curriculum has been shaped in an ongoing dialogue between faculty concept and student interest.

As soon as the original Board of Trustees passed control to the president, and on to the college itself, a major goal was to create a governing structure that would be appropriate to the ideals of Human Ecology. From the outset, the "town meeting" style was adopted in the All-College Meeting (ACM). Not only were students encouraged to participate in all decisions, but so were the secretarial and maintenance personnel—often unheard voices in academia.

The small size of the community at the beginning allowed for an experiment in direct democracy. In that period of American higher education, just after the Kent State incident and student strikes at Columbia, Berkeley, and Chicago, it seemed imperative to govern the college in a democratic manner, allowing a voice to students who are not only the consumers of education but the numerical majority.

The college deliberately set out to dispense with the old idea of an authoritative faculty laying down the law to obedient pupils. From the beginning, students had a substantial voice in curriculum, policy, and hiring decisions. The Vietnam-era sense that the American university had failed in its mission provided fertile soil for the experiment.

The first 32 students, recruited and selected by Coté from an applicant pool of 85, were a mix of transfers with substantial college experience and recent high school graduates. One student, Eric Henry, now a building contractor in Southwest Harbor, had a bachelor's degree already; he was an engineer with a desire to start over.

The high schoolers were necessary to test the college's capacity to offer a full four-year education. The transfers, carrying a sense of alienation from traditional institutions, were invaluable in keeping the new college from reinventing old ways. They knew what they wanted and didn't want in a college, and they made their views clear in key positions on the central governing committee of the time, the academic policy committee.

In the College's first few years there was no personnel committee. Early personnel deliberations over issues including recruitment, interviewing, and selection of new faculty members, contracts, salaries, and fringe benefits, took the form of open critiques before the whole community. Before long, however, obvious privacy considerations led to a separate personnel committee, and the Academic and Personnel Committees were born.

The principles of ecology, which viewed life as a non-hierarchical, mutually supportive network, gave intellectual support to a democratic system of governance. This was a challenge, however, since the faculty had been educated in the university system, with its roots in conventional academic culture. Despite the strength of their vision, no one had real prior experience in a self-governing college.

The first year, 1972-1973, saw several steps toward democracy. The power of an entrenched faculty was minimized by College of the Atlantic's becoming one of the few American colleges without the

institution of tenure. Academic regalia were not required. Faculty dressed, and often looked like, the students. The model of education was not the lecture, where a priori knowledge was handed down from teacher to student, but the seminar table, where a joint inquiry was pursued. One aspect of Human Ecology as a subject is that it was itself undefined. With no prior degrees in it, students and faculty alike were at the beginning of a quest.

By luck, two students had transferred into the first class after three years of college. Thus, at the end of the first academic year, the college had two graduates, William Ginn and Catherine Johnson, and therefore could apply for provisional accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Critics said accreditation would begin the process of conformity. But since accreditation was required for many reasons, including financial aid benefits, protest was limited and the college took the road to the full accreditation it enjoys today from NEASC.

Because of the open government and the tabula rasa beginning, all aspects of academic structure were revisited: the concept of regularly scheduled classes, the concept of pay differences among trained and untrained employees, the concepts of seniority, faculty rank, grades, cafeteria food, library cards, academic requirements, course credits, and animals in the classroom. Out of those first-year all-college negotiations came the present basic principles of an institutional governance system appropriate to its intellectual mission.

The All-College Meeting also made decisions about curriculum. In Kaelber's view of human ecology, instead of a prescribed curriculum, human ecologists would face a problem with a completely open mind, figure out what needed to be known to solve it, and then acquire those skills. So before the 1972-1973 year was over, the All-College Meeting determined that no science could be done without mathematics. Carl Ketchum, who earned a Ph. D. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was hired, and successfully taught math and physics until his resignation in 1989.

The college also recognized the need for an overall intellectual coherence to the emerging field of human ecology, and hired philosopher Richard Davis, who previously taught at the University of Tennessee, the

University of Pittsburgh, and the University of Indiana. His energy and commitment to the College often seemed superhuman. Davis and Ketchum were followed the next year by a botanist, Fred Olday, and a geologist/ornithologist, William Drury, to deepen the life science area, which had been identified by the early trustees as central to the initial vision of human ecology. In 1975 COA hired an architect, Roc Caivano, who would oversee the college's building program as well as develop environmental design as a branch of the curriculum. He would go on to establish a successful private practice on Mount Desert Island and design COA's Blair-Tyson Dormitory.

Each appointment expanded and clarified the emerging concept of human ecology. By 1977, the first historian, Susan Mehrrens was hired, representing this future-minded school's somewhat belated commitment to the past. Mehrrens earned a Ph. D. in Medieval Studies from Yale University and was an assistant professor at Queens College before taking the position at the college. She was also the first full-time woman faculty member and became the first Affirmative Action officer as the recently enacted Equal Opportunity Employment guidelines took hold. In these years, the college's relatively spontaneous hiring modes were transformed into the orderly procedures of academic practice.

Meanwhile, other non-curricular needs were addressed. Although it was sometimes debated whether anyone should be paid for participating in such a community, it was President Kaelber's policy from the start that all work for the college be compensated. Tuition was kept relatively low, necessitating immediate and major fund-raising efforts by the president and staff.

A major early achievement at the presidential level was establishing the tradition of a Board of Trustees endowed with both academic judgment and fund-raising ability, but the development of such a board would take time. At several points in the early seventies, the employees were called together to announce late paychecks, but the administration and trustees—often with the help of Bar Harbor native Brewer—always came through with payments to employees. As a school legend has it, at one low point Kaelber was worrying in his office over financial straits when a student from the initial class walked in. At that time, with everything out in the open, students were completely aware of the ebb and flow of funding, and

the student said, "I wish I could do something to help out. How much are we in the hole?" "That's very thoughtful," Kaelber said, "but I'm afraid it's gone beyond the level where the students can help. The deficit is twenty thousand dollars." Whereupon the student talked to his financial advisor and within a few weeks the college received twenty thousand dollars.

The financial history of the college, with its tradition of generosity from island residents, would make a separate study. Local supporters of the college have displayed a combination of significant material contributions, academic expertise, philosophical openness, and a commitment to the environment. Certainly the college would have had a different history without the tremendous leadership of its Board of Trustees chairmen. Leslie Brewer, Dr. Selden Bernstein, Thomas Gates, Jr., Thomas Hall, Robert Kanzler, John Dreier, Edward Blair, and, currently, Clyde Shorey, Jr. have proved outstanding leaders.

Several developments in the seventies fostered a sense of common purpose. Steve Katona's Allied Whale project focused many of the early students on marine mammal research and conservation, bringing much-needed media attention and providing the school with a living symbol of its aspirations. Research on whales and seals carried out from Mount Desert Rock (in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard in Southwest Harbor) and along the Maine coast helped define the college in the eyes of the general population.

Roc Caivano's innovative solar housing projects, including a home for Richard and Nora Davis on Norway Drive, commanded national interest and remain on the island as landmarks of energy conservation. Drury's efforts in island seabird restoration also helped place college activities in public view.

COA ended the seventies with a student body of 182, nearly six times its beginning size, an expanding faculty and staff, a financial endowment, and a growing network of friends and supporters both on and off the island as its reputation grew. Growth had been rapid on all fronts.

President Kaelber, who had steered the college through tempest and calm for ten years, indicated his desire to step down. Although the trustees

prevailed upon him to stay another year or two, by 1981 the school was searching for his successor.

The process was not limited to a search committee. The trustees adopted the All-College Meeting style of procedure in which candidates appeared before the entire community and were judged by a committee of the whole. When the procedure was completed, the community recommended Dr. Judith Swazey, a Wellesley- and Harvard-trained bioethicist, to be the college's second president. Before coming to COA, Swazey was the Executive Director of Medicine in the Public Interest, Inc., a health policy research organization in Boston.

For the first decade, the faculty had declined to accept the traditional leadership of a dean. Now, however, Dick Davis was named to the position of Academic Vice President, to help with the presidential changeover.

In the fall of 1982, during the first days of the Swazey presidency, the community was optimistic that the college would continue to grow under new leadership. Then, in early September, Davis collapsed with heart failure and died. He was only 41, and the loss of his energy was felt throughout the institution.

To replace Davis as Dean, Swazey appointed a new faculty member, the sociologist Paul Dubois. Dubois earned his Ph. D. in Business and Public administration from Cornell University in 1977. Under the leadership team of Swazey and Dubois a period of self-searching and turbulence began on several fronts. Controversy came to a head during the search for Davis' replacement as philosopher. The position of philosopher was especially important, since Davis had made it the moral and conceptual location for the definition of human ecology.

Having reviewed four candidates during an orderly search process, the college community locked horns with the administration over the final choice. Both in public and in executive session, a debate ensued with the result that in late spring of 1983 the Personnel Committee met under the leadership of Financial Vice President Albie Smith and decided that no candidate would be chosen. To many, the stalemate seemed a wise decision,

given the heat of passion over a search that had become an affirmative-action battlefield.

Later that summer, in the early morning hours of July 25, the main college building, which had been named after President Kaelber upon his retirement, burned to the ground. No one was injured, but most of the library and classroom space, as well as the irreplaceable contents of several faculty offices, was consumed. The origin of the fire was never determined, but arson was suspected.

Within less than 24 hours, the Board of Trustees, led by Chairman of the Executive Committee John Dreier, voted to reopen the college in the fall. Prior to the fire, Roc Caivano and Harris Hyman, an engineer, had been restoring an adjacent historic building on the campus, the Turrets, designed by Bruce Price, who was also the architect of the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City. The building was quickly commandeered for administrative and classroom functions. Stewart Brecher, an architect, and Hyman did a fast track renovation and expansion of the carriage house and garage, which became the arts and sciences building. With heroic efforts from the whole community, and an outpouring of support from friends and sympathizers, the 1983-1984 year began on schedule.

Faculty offices were rented or improvised, classrooms were created in the Turrets, but of all the tales of resourcefulness from that stressful period, the library stands out. Under Librarian Marcia Dworak's supervision, salvageable books were dried out and restored, while from all over the country gifts poured in that actually exceeded the number of lost volumes. Using a vacant building owned by the Town of Bar Harbor at the corner of Eden and Mt. Desert streets, Dworak set up a temporary library that sustained the needs of the college until the Thorndike Library opened in the new Kaelber Hall in December 1988.

The fire brought a decline in morale, enrollment, and finances. Word began to leak from the administration that the faculty would have to be reduced in numbers in order to accommodate the smaller student body. The term "financial exigency" became a commonplace as the community wondered which employees would have to leave.

The faculty's response typified the self-sacrifice of the time. The faculty voted to balance the budget on their own by accepting an overall reduction in salary rather than let their ranks be thinned. Some found temporary employment in other colleges, some got external grants, some reduced their lifestyle to weather the hard times.

At the same time, a review by the trustees of Judith Swazey's administration began, ultimately resulting in the resignation of both Swazey and Vice President Dubois in June 1984. The system of self-governance thus proved its practical worth in managing the leadership crisis. An exciting, but less-than-complete history of this period from an outside perspective may be found in *Less Whales--More Latin* by Denise Wilbur.

By the fall of that year an interim president had been hired, Dr. Louis Rabineau, who served in that capacity for two years before prevailing in a national presidential search. Rabineau was a career administrator trained in the Harvard education program. He had previously served as Chancellor of Higher Education in Connecticut.

Rabineau faced the task of major reconstruction. The physical plant had to be rebuilt, the Board of Trustees, which had been destabilized by the events of 1982-1984, had to be reconfigured, the student body expanded, and faculty salaries raised from their emergency levels. Above all, campus morale had to recover from its state of shock.

Helped by new and long-term supporters, Rabineau began a five-year period of renewal that included the planning of the new campus and the construction of the central complex of Kaelber Hall, Blair Dining Room, Thorndike Library, and Gates Center, as well as completion of the restoration of the Turrets building and renovation of the adjoining Seafox estate as a student dorm.

Rabineau approved a plan that boosted faculty to student ratio to one to ten in order to ensure that more curriculum planning would be accomplished and so that more students could be admitted in the future. Following the customary system of community input to determine academic needs, positions were added in landscape architecture, sustainable agriculture,

marine biology and ichthyology, education, and music, among other fields. These moves were backed financially by a series of grants from the U.S. Department of Education under the Strengthening Institutions Program (Title III). The grants not only provided for the initial hiring of several faculty members, but also brought computer resources to competitive levels and enabled the building and renewal of physical space. Following curriculum restructuring and physical rebuilding, student enrollment rebounded.

The new facilities, designed by Brecher and several Yale-trained architects—Daniel Scully, Turner Brooks, and Roc Caivano—are a fine example of turning disaster into opportunity. These buildings include the airy, spacious Blum reading room in the Thorndike Library opening to the sea, the elegant seminar room, and the Blair Dining Hall that has become the social center of the community.

In 1993, Rabineau retired, leaving an enlarged and stabilized institution with a reliable donor base, an effective admissions and recruitment team, reasonable salaries, and long-term accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. A small but vital graduate program was in place, leading to the Master of Philosophy in Human Ecology. After a period of exceptional challenge, the college could be once more confident in its future.

A further proof of the maturing school's ability to stand on its own was the selection that year of a president from its own faculty, Dr. Steven Katona. A founding faculty member, he was a well-known author and marine mammal researcher.

In 1993, College of the Atlantic was quite different from the institution Rabineau inherited in 1984, as were its challenges. Enrollment was climbing toward the school's envisioned full capacity of 250 students and 25 faculty members, with a complement of 50-plus administration and staff. No longer was it possible to expect the whole community to assemble in a single place. The sense of intimacy, community, self-direction, and ongoing experiment had to be maintained in the context of a maturing and stabilizing institution.

A faculty that had suffered years of financial sacrifice had justifiable expectations of equitable pay. Increasingly, the college's first choices for new faculty positions were opting for more generous offers from other academic institutions. Like every organization, COA felt the pressures of the health care crisis as costs went up.

To meet the financial requirements of the future, in 1997 the Trustees and President Katona launched a \$20-million endowment drive which, at this writing, is nearing a successful conclusion. The Silver Anniversary Endowment Campaign will enable increased financial independence, more aid for students, increased faculty salaries, and a stronger library. In the course of the campaign, the college established its first endowed chair, the Elizabeth Battles Newlin Chair in Botany³, and currently has several others nearing completion, including a chair in Environmental Studies named for Rachel Carson.

For years the enrollment trend had been drifting toward younger students, the majority coming right from high school and demanding greater attention from the college. The Elizabeth Blair⁴ and Charles and Barbara Tyson⁵ dormitories, which opened in 1996, along with a full-scale dining program, reinforced the *in loco parentis* role of the college. These and other changes reassured parents that their children would not have to fend for themselves in Bar Harbor during their first year at the college.

The nineties also saw a trend toward a preponderance of female students. The average over the decade ran around 60 percent of the student body. Women's programs were strengthened and female faculty members were increased. A new program in identity studies acknowledged gender, sexuality, and ethnic identity as significant academic concepts.

At the same time, faculty and students have expanded ecology beyond the original definition of "environmentalism." With the Ethel H. Blum⁶ Gallery and new appointments in the arts and literature, the aesthetic and humanistic side of the curriculum has developed. New depth in the faculty has kept students from having to transfer to other colleges to satisfy special interests.

College of the Atlantic has received its share of honors in recent years. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation recognized the college for its innovative liberal arts program by awarding a \$750,000 support grant in 1996. The next year, the college was the recipient of the Down East Environmental Award, given annually by the editors of *Down East* magazine to an individual or organization that has played a major role in preserving the environment of Maine. Most recently, in April 2000 the New England Environmental Protection Agency recognized the college with an Environmental Merit Award. The awards, given out since 1970, pay tribute to individuals and groups who have shown "particular ingenuity and commitment in their efforts to preserve the environment."

The International Studies Program, sponsored and supported by Dean Richard Borden and recent faculty appointments in Latin American studies, has established an ongoing base of operations in partnership with the Autonomous Universities of the Yucatan and of Quintana Roo in Mexico, giving students much-needed language and cross-cultural opportunities while maintaining the human ecology vision in the context of another country. In 1999, the former Gardner property adjacent to the campus was acquired, and its main building was transformed into the Kathryn W. Davis⁷ Center for International and Regional Studies. The recently acquired Beech Hill Farm near Somesville provides a base for the study of sustainable agriculture, an area of perpetual student interest. Programs in regional studies emphasizing the downeast coast are physically supported by the acquisition of Mount Desert Rock and the southern 11 acres of Great Duck Island through the Island Lights program in 1999.

Bar Harbor is a much-changed place since the college arrived in 1972. Those who remember the deserted streets and boarded-up businesses in the early winters would be surprised to walk around in January and find Reel Pizza Cinema offering first-run movies and great food, Rupununi's providing live entertainment, and Café This Way and Havana serving exotic meals. These and other establishments were started by COA alumni and are providing new economic and cultural benefits to the communities of Mount Desert Island.

Small as it is, the college's student and employee body may well have made the difference in moving Bar Harbor toward the bustling year-

round community it now is. COA has a significant annual impact of over \$12 million on the economic well-being of Mount Desert Island and Hancock County as evidenced by an impact statement commissioned in 1998.

Interactions between the island and the college have been historically positive. Students have served as managers of the Islesford Lobsterman's Coop, babysitters for innumerable island families, cooks and waitresses for the summer trade, whale-watching entrepreneurs, harbor masters, boat captains, architects, historians, gardeners, teachers and tutors, kayaking guides, park rangers, naturalists, and lab researchers. The students and graduates bring to these jobs the social and environmental concerns emphasized on campus and, while they learn something of the reality of the work-a-day world, they bring their own visions of human ecology to their jobs.

College of the Atlantic moves into the new millennium with a number of academic and social challenges. As part of its strategic planning process in 1996, the college community composed a "Vision Statement" summarizing the institution's hopes and aspirations:

The faculty, students, trustees, staff and alumni of College of the Atlantic envision a world where people value creativity, intellectual achievement, and the diversity of nature and human cultures. With respect and compassion, individuals will construct meaningful lives for themselves, gain appreciation for the relationships among all forms of life, and safeguard the heritage of future generations.

Maintaining the experimental and democratic flavor of the early college remains an important goal. The crises and confrontations that helped to form College of the Atlantic's identity are now in the past, and no stable organization would wish to repeat them. Yet the college's ethos has always been one of reformation and change.

One of the college's newest initiatives, in the area of leadership, democracy, and decision-making, recognizes the need to provide better more effective methods for these activities, including ways to use electronic

communications to assist with the tradition of self-governance. Providing students with the experience of democratic self-direction within a stabilized environment will be a challenge for the fourth decade of the college's existence.

On the eve of graduating its thousandth student, College of the Atlantic looks forward to following its vision far into the future. It seems fair to conclude that this small institution, conceived by forward-looking citizens 30 years ago on the shores of Frenchman Bay, has succeeded beyond the dreams of even its most optimistic founders.

A founding faculty member of College of the Atlantic, William Carpenter is currently completing his 28th year as professor of literature, writing, and critical theory. He is the author of several award-winning volumes of poetry and two novels. For assistance in writing this article, he would like to thank the following friends and associates: President Steven Katona; President Emeritus Edward Kaelber; Alexandra Lincoln '00; Founding Trustee Leslie Brewer; Former Director of Public Affairs and, currently, Director of Communications and Marketing at the Maine Community Foundation Carl Little; and Thorndike Library Director Marcia Dworak.

Notes

This article draws largely on the files of College of the Atlantic, generously opened to the author, and on the recollections of many of the persons acknowledged above.

Of special value are:

Bethany Aronow, ed., *Such a Frail Bark: An Oral History of College of the Atlantic's Early Years* (College of the Atlantic, 1983).

COA News, college newsletter, June 1977-present.

COAAA News and *The Peregrine*, newsletters of the College of the Atlantic Alumni Association, January 1979-present.

College of the Atlantic Annual Report, 1990-present.

"College of the Atlantic Silver Anniversary Endowment Campaign," campaign booklet, 1997.

Samuel Eliot, ed., *Silver Anniversary Annual Report, 1996-1997* (includes timeline).

Also Valuable

Jeff Clark, "Learning to Ask the Right Questions," *Down East Magazine*, May 1997.

"The Economic Impact of College of the Atlantic, Hancock County, Maine 1998," County Economic Research Institute Inc., Overland, Kansas.

Samuel Eliot, "How to Start a College Whose Ultimate Goal Is to Render Itself Obsolete," *Harvard Magazine*, August 1973.

Max Hall, "A Distaste for Walls," *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 1994.

Denise Ellen Wilbur, *Less Whales—More Latin: A Study of Judith P. Swazey's Presidency at College of the Atlantic, 1982-1984*, thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, 1986.

¹ Samuel Eliot is a descendant of Charles W. Eliot, the president of Harvard from 1869 to 1909. Charles W. Eliot built the first summer home in Northeast Harbor in 1881. Eliot was instrumental in the founding of Acadia National Park.

² The College of Atlantic Internship Program is a requirement for graduation and is a full term commitment. The internship allows students to apply their knowledge and skills, develop new skills, and clarify future goals. Students are also often able to make a contribution to the community.

³ Elizabeth Battles Newlin was a longtime summer resident of Northeast Harbor. The chair was given in her name by her children William V. P. Newlin and Lucy Bell Newlin Sellers.

⁴ Elizabeth Blair was a long-time summer resident of Northeast Harbor. She was born and educated in Baltimore, Maryland.

⁵ Barbara Tyson is a summer resident of Somesville. Her late husband, Charles Tyson, was a Life Trustee of College of the Atlantic

⁶ Ethel H. Blum was a long-time summer resident of Indian Point, Bar Harbor. She was an accomplished watercolorist and studied at the Art Students League and the Brooklyn Museum Art School.

⁷ Kathryn W. Davis is a summer resident of Northeast Harbor. She holds a B. A. from Wellesley College, 1928; and M. A. from Columbia University, 1931. She has been a writer, lecturer, and foundation executive.