

Passing gift of Greek a tall but rewarding order

Connecticut teachers take leap into Attic

BY CARL STRANGE
Editor

"My school had had Greek until 1932, and I thought the administration and alumni would be interested in seeing Greek revived," Barclay said.

Greek, which has clung tenuously several rungs below Latin through times of lean enrollment, is actually tightening its small grip on the secondary ladder, thanks to effective promotion, the hard work and temerity of a few Latin teachers, and the posthumous stewardship of ACL president Ed Phinney.

Though for over a century colleges have taught far more Greek students, programs such as the *Greek Too!* website and the Phinney Fellowships are opening new venues for the language of Homer and Paul.

Mary Catherine Phinney, the late president's widow, established the fellowships in partnership with the Classical Association of New England not long after her husband's death in 1996. Always a champion of classics-for-everyone, Phinney toward the end of his life entertained a most avid interest in the promotion of secondary Greek and worked to support the handful of programs that existed. In 1995 some 55 secondary schools, mostly private or parochial, offered limited Greek, and the Phinney Fellowships aimed to shore up those offerings—and expand if possible. Today's high

school Greek roster, with 83 schools, suggests that expansion was no pipe-dream.

"I remember getting a mailing in the fall of 1997," remembered Latin teacher Nina Barclay of Norwich Free Academy in Connecticut, "explaining that they were proposing the grant to bring back Greek in secondary school curricula by directly underwriting the part of the teacher's salary devoted to Greek."

Barclay, at the time a part-time Latin teacher, thought the offer "sounded exciting."

"I immediately wrote to find out more," she said. "My school had had Greek until 1932, and I thought the administration and alumni would be interested in seeing Greek revived."

Like many Latin teachers, Barclay had occasionally taught a Greek student or two outside of regular classes, as had her Connecticut colleague John Higgins of the Gilbert School in Winsted.

"The first time I heard about it, I knew that this was something I wanted to do," said Higgins, "but I suppose all of us who have had some Greek as well as Latin dream about it."

Higgins's real motivation, he said, was "more personal than external."

"When I got to this school 20 years ago" he

remembered, "there was a Latin I and Latin II, and over the intervening time I got it to III-IV and then split it off into a separate III and a separate IV, each of which was a step toward developing a better program."

At about the time he heard about the Phinney Fellowships, the Gilbert School was piloting some classics courses in translation, which helped to spread a wider net for possible Greek students than just those who were taking or had studied Latin. Since 1999 Higgins has had a full-time colleague, Joanna Marcisz, who emigrated to the US from Poland and whose presence enabled him to think seriously about separate classes for Greek. Marcisz now teaches more Latin students there than does Higgins.

Gilbert offers two sections of Greek I and one of Greek II. The classes are "kind of the capstone of the departmental program," Higgins said. "Now we have four years of Latin and at least two years of Greek. The sophomores now in the program, I hope, will be able to go on to a third year, but there are not too many of them."

Of the many hurdles going Greek presents to the practicing Latin teacher, the first, professional preparation, has in many cases already been jumped.

"I started it in college, as most of us did," Higgins said. "I took my junior year abroad at Trinity College, Dublin, and studied the Odyssey with W. B. Stanford. What happened there was that I went right into pretty high level literature the year after I started, and it was a kick in the pants."

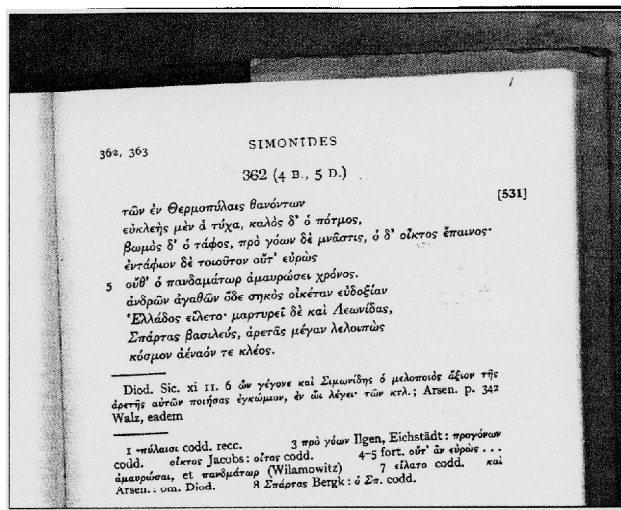
Next, for Higgins and Barclay, came the fellowship application process, which according to Barclay included gathering transcripts, recommendation letters, documentation of success in Latin teaching, and an indication that the school would support the program after the grant had run its course. With the grant in place, a CANE representative visited and observed a Greek class.

In her first year as a Phinney fellow, Barclay went to the CANE Institute at Dartmouth, fearful that much of her Greek had slipped away. To her delight, it was merely dusty.

"The support of Reg Hannaford and Alison Harvey was terrific and gave me confidence and the courage to go forward," said Barclay, who returned the next year. "The material from history, literature and art lectures as well as the actual language work gave me

a foundation to move forward on my own."

Starting the classes themselves has been an uphill journey for both teachers. Part of the challenge is marketing the idea successfully in the school, overcoming layers of administrative and curricular inertia. Once the project takes root, a student with enough interest in the classical world, whether originating in architecture, history, mythology, or language, may be interested in the class.



"I took my junior year abroad at Trinity College, Dublin, and studied the Odyssey with W. B. Stanford," Higgins said. "What happened there was that I went right into pretty high level literature the year after I started, and it was a kick in the pants."

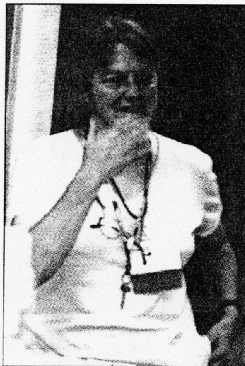
Most but not all of the 20 Greek I students at Gilbert last year had had Latin; about half were enrolled in Latin concurrently. At Norwich Free Academy first-year Greek counted eight students, the upper levels six. "It doesn't seem that it's taking away from the Latin," Higgins said.

"There has been a very large range of ability levels in the students who have been interested in signing up for Greek," Barclay said. "Also, this year I have a 'one room schoolhouse' classroom of Greek I-II-III which meet together and are happiest working together."

She added that, like Higgins, she has used the *Athenaze* series, which she supplements with small Homeric, Koine or modern Greek units as the students' interests demand. "About half of the students have begun the Greek after two years of Latin," she said. "Almost all of the students feel the Greek has been easier than Latin or the modern language they had taken earlier."

Barclay said she has also worked to nurture the students and make them comfortable with the pace—"and at times we have gone very slowly," she added. "The *Athenaze* newsletters which Prof. Gil Lawall edits and publishes had many helpful suggestions," she said.

Going Greek has been “a dynamic experience,” according to Barclay, who is gratified that teaching it has boosted her confidence with the college and graduate Greek courses she once took.



4. ΠΡΟΣ ΤΗ ΚΡΗΝΗ

38

Singular

Plural

<i>Nom.</i>	ἡ	καλή	κρήνη	αἱ	καλαὶ	κρήναι
<i>Gen.</i>	τῆς	καλῆς	κρήνης	τῶν	καλῶν	κρήνῶν
<i>Dat.</i>	τῇ	καλῇ	κρήνῃ	ταῖς	καλαῖς	κρήναις
<i>Acc.</i>	τὴν	καλήν	κρήνην	τὰς	καλὰς	κρήνας
<i>Voc.</i>	ὦ	καλή	κρήνη	ὦ	καλαὶ	κρήναι

Note:

1. The genitive and dative, singular and plural, of the feminine definite article have circumflex accents, just as do those forms of the masculine and neuter (see page 27).
2. When adjectives and nouns of the type seen above are accented on the final syllable in the nominative case (e.g., καλή), they change that final syllable in the genitive and dative, singular and plural (again, see page 27 for the same thing with masculine and neuter adjectives and nouns).
3. The nominative plural ending -αι is counted as short in determining the accent, thus κρήναι has a circumflex accent.
4. The genitive plural of all first declension nouns (see next paragraph) has a circumflex accent on the final syllable.

ural. Be sure

μεν
τε
σι(ν)

or declension of

For students, the alphabet is the first big challenge, which Higgins said “takes a little while.”

“I asked them what their general reactions have been, and an awful lot of them said that the different alphabet was an asset at this point, for a couple of reasons,” Higgins said. “One kid said that it was really cool and fun to have a new alphabet.”

Barclay said she actually expected students to find Greek harder than they did.

“I was surprised that students who had trouble with Latin found Greek easier,” she said. “Perhaps the extra year, or the slower pace, helped them with the concept of declension.”

“Someone said that when you’re dealing with Latin, the alphabet looks the same,” Higgins said, “and it looks as though it should make sense. You don’t even think about endings or anything of that sort. You look at the Greek, and it’s foreign, it’s a bit distant, and so it helps you to remember that you’re dealing with something foreign. I’d never thought of that before.”

Going Greek has been “a dynamic experience,” according to Barclay, who is gratified that teaching it has boosted her confidence with the college and graduate Greek courses she once took.

“I’ve found it at times an oasis in my day,” she said. “From the time my ninth grade English teacher Alfred Boren wrote *timé* and *hubris* on the board, I’ve loved the language, its shapes and sounds. I love working as a ‘peer’ learner with my Greek students. That has been a new aspect in my teaching.”

For both new Hellenists the classes have already produced academic spinoffs. Barclay, who has used some Greek activities in Latin classes to give prospective Greek students a sense of what they’re in for, has written an exploratory Greek reader, *Euclides’ World*, designed for use with the *Ecce Romani* series. “I can do a half hour of Greek every week or 10 days as part of

the flow of the *Ecce*,” she said. “CANE instructional materials will publish it in the fall.”

Higgins, who says his students do “a little bit” of oral work, plans to use some of it, modified so as to mesh with modern Greek, in preparation for a spring trip to Greece.

“I’m going to do a bit of conversation work so that at least they can say, ‘Hello, Where am I? Do you speak English?’ This will be for all the Greek students I have then as well as my 14-year-old son, who will be going with me.”

The tour will start and end in Athens and include stops at Epidaurus, Mycenae, and Delphi. “These are the highlights, reachable areas,” said Higgins. “They’re also the places that are mentioned in *Athenaze*, so that’ll be neat.”

The interest in Greek spreads beyond the Greek classes at Gilbert, according to Higgins. A classics-in-translation course draws strong enrollments, too, sometimes helping routinely reluctant students who may not have been in a high academic track to take a stab at Greek itself.

“Classics has turned out to be a relatively low-level course,” Higgins explained, “which is fine, because if we have something important to say, we have it to say to them, too.”