Hardly a person’s still here
Who’d remember events of that year;
Mr. Eisler, the Olins, have thoughts to compile;
We’ve interviewed Toddy and Phoebe Dent Weil;
Plus others who’ll speak through our history file.

But memories are slippery—people forget—
Gettens and Stout don’t agree how they met.
I kept this in mind, as I launched on the task.
What really happened? Depends whom you ask.
But there was much agreement, so please keep the faith
As I spin out the “Saga of Seventy-Eighth”!

Who preceded this fifty-year trek?
Craig Hugh Smyth, Harry Bober, of course Sheldon Keck.
Mr. Bober detailed how he asked both the Kecks
To lecture in Brooklyn on matters complex
Regarding the physical structures of art,
And IFA students went south to take part.
The following year the course was up here,
But scheduling problems now seemed to appear.
Mrs. Keck said these students had spoken in class
Contradicting art history teachers, alas!
And so the next year there were many seats free—
It competed with courses “required for degree.”

But at the same time, a conference evolved—
Discussing how technical needs could be solved.
It was then ’58, and the timing was stellar
To bring in support with the name “Rockefeller.”
History’d be made in the Doris Duke cellar!

A grant was prepared—you know how it came out—
Signed by Keck, Smyth, Murray Pease, and George Stout,
Along with Fred Adams of Morgan Lib’ry fame.
Flyers went out, and five students then came.
Three of group you will know well by name.
These are the three that were launched in fine style:
But there were two more that you may not have met—
Barbara Rumpf and an artist called Anna Held Audette.
In September of ’60 the students arrived,

But during the first year things barely survived.
The noise made the students go nearly berserk;
Plumbers and carpenters still were at work.
And what would be taught at this newly-born school?
Of course things were based on Stout’s “three-legged stool.”
They researched small objects within their basement lair,
And to study art hist’ry they’d go up the stair.

But Bober recalled that the staff felt a jolt
When all five of the students had planned a revolt.
Some wanted more hist’ry or they would depart—
Others complained, “Can’t we start treating art?”
A kerfuffle ensued, the dust cleared and then—
No one was left here but Toddy and Ben.

Ben said Colin Eisler took him out to lunch
And persuaded him to stay within the faithful bunch.
Toddy’d gone to Columbia—she already had an M.A.,
Then went away to Europe, but was back next year to stay.
While in London, Toddy found that paper was her fate,
And she of that small group was the first to graduate.
And yes our Phoebe graduated –she would persevere;
She worked with sculpture and the Kecks, but was back by the second year.

The history file has memories that you should hear about:
Ben Johnson told a telling tale about our George L. Stout.
He came down from Boston several times a month to teach,
And once there was a snowstorm—and no one left to reach.
The city sat in silence, no traffic moved at all;
Ben walked a few blocks to the Center and down the lonely hall.
And suddenly George Stout was there—he took the train all night
And walked up from Penn Station—to make sure “the kids were all right.”

Ben enjoyed his studies, the readings and critiques,
He knew an internship would come later
But Mr. Smyth in the elevator--
Said suddenly—“would you like to go to Italy?—be ready in three weeks”!

Larry Majewski and Violet Bourgeois were there from the very first day—
She was the first one hired—and had an art history B.A.
She’d worked for Frank Lloyd Wright, of course, at the first of the Guggenheims,
And found the notice for this job in the “female section” of the New York Times!
To be the Center secretary – she said she was awestruck—

Her interview committee was:
Stout and Keck and Gettens, Murray Pease and Richard Buck!

Larry told how he, Ed Sayre, and Stout
Had to clean the whole place out.
When Bober, Smyth, and Eisler saw what they had to do—
They said this had to be “the world’s most costly cleaning crew”!
Larry started as Research Associate; he said he wanted nothing greater,
But he became the chairman only six years later.

Phoebe in her interviews filled in a lot of blanks
About those early years, and for that we give her thanks.
Her first impression of the place, she said, was all about “white tile”
White tile floor and white tile walls, said Phoebe Dent, now Weil.

She said the group expected to be tutored by the Kecks,
But “Where were they?” she asked, and now when she reflects,
She remembers tell of a dinner with people from the Met
Discussing Renoir’s painting; one man was quite upset.
“*The Boating Party’s RUINED,***” said this man, who wasn’t shy,
And didn’t know the Kecks, who’d done the treatment, were nearby.
Now just imagine Mrs. Keck—I think quite a few of you can—
With fearsome pose
   and vivid prose
   she stood right by her man.
Ears must still be ringing from her torrid repartee;
I don’t believe she entered One East 78th up to this day.
She was not known for withholding any choice riposte,
But be warned:
Our file has one note
In which she wrote
   That she’d be one hell of a ghost.

But Sheldon soon was welcomed to teach in sixty-one;
Tom Chase and Heather Lechtman had come to join the fun.
Ed Sayre and Bob Feller with the teaching they’d been doin’
Next passed the torch of sciences to Dr. Seymour Lewin.
Jane Sheridan had joined the group, a scientist of soil,
And now there was a faculty that all agreed were royal.

A parade of famous experts helped complete the “Sixties’ Story”—
Like Plenderleith and Coremans and Stolow and Tintori!
The hardy groups of graduates, that Sixties’ generation,
Were soon in good positions all across the nation.

The Rockefeller fellowship diminished though that time—
And now I have another anecdote to put in rhyme.
Mrs. Bourgeois tells that what next supported us
Was raised by Colin Eisler while riding on a bus!
While traveling down Fifth Avenue, he managed to recruit
Myron Falk, Board member, of the Hebrew Technical Institute!
Thanks to them, tuition bills were something we could pay—
In those days before we had the blessed NEA!
One day my check was late; I was short the right amount,
Professor Majewski lent me funds from his own bank account!
I wondered how often kindly deeds like that might occur,
And Peggy Ellis told me that he did the same for her!

And next the tales I’ll tell are based on times when I was there—
And in my second year, we students welcomed Norbert Baer.
In 1969 as we plowed through science tomes
Norbert made comparisons to last night’s Sherlock Holmes!

The Monday science labs that we had had the previous year
Weren’t quite so fun, except for breaks to drink raspberry beer.
Paul Schwartzbaum knew a place where he’d take us for each spree,
Where after one or two, the beers we had were free.
Guest speakers might come too on their final afternoon—
I remember beer and dancing with the famous Hermann Kühn!
He liked the flavored beer and the dancing too, we guessed,
Since Shelley Fletcher never could sit down and have a rest.

Larry had a Christmas party at his place each year
And Paul would notice objects placed atop the chiffonier.
So when we studied metals, and we had to make a choice,
Paul’s project pick was certain to make LJM rejoice!
And Paul was quite resourceful too with furniture he made—
His bookshelves were constructed from a police barricade!
And he was in that great place with the overhead tableau
That Philip Vance had painted à la Michelangelo!

Stefano and Wynne and Mr. Krill were also there;
John onstage in opera and the London cast of Hair.
We’d sing from Cabaret while doing studies after dark
And jump-roped with lab tubing during days in Central Park.
(These were welcome breaks from study for a chem exam)
But the champion rope jumper was our own Ron Cunningham.
He had been a boxer in a previous career,
And provided savvy tips to all of us when he was here.

Mondays featured science—in my first year it was Sayre—
Tuesdays took me to museums with sweet A. Hyatt Mayor.
Wednesdays with Majewski—painting treatments were my goal,
But I remember hours with a salt-encrusted bowl.

The “Upstairs Classes” sometimes seemed as far away as Fargo;
Remember slides in black and white and studying each Targo?
Rosenblum and Lavin and José Lopez Rey
weren’t exactly keen to hear what we conservators might say.
And next the museum studies class had us go and get
an object from a dealer to market to the Met!
Dietrich von Bothmer often made the students cry
for lack of proper study of an object they might buy.
I was truly terrified, but in the end I scored;
The lofty group had never seen a wooden “dummy board.”
You saw these dummy boards if you happened to go
across the street to see the recent “Age of Rembrandt” show.

John Krill was social chairman so the parties were quite good;
He turned the Oak Room Teas into Sangrias when he could.
The Upstairs Christmas party for 1969
had three of us in opera hose, singing for our wine.
I rewrote the lyrics for a song from Kiss Me Kate—
and we danced “Brush up Your Janson” down the stairway on that date.
Was Janson there? I didn’t know, but Connie Lowenthal
told me that she found him in the little entry hall.
He was there outside and shedding happy tears, said she,
to her he said, “inside they’re singing lyrics about me!”
We sang it twice so he could come inside and have a look;
on Valentine’s he wrote inside a copy of his book:
“This book is inscribed to Joyce Hill
Who gave me the pleasantest thrill—
   With her chanson On Janson
      Delivered with pants on
What charm, what grace, and what skill!”

Our little class that finished in ’72 and ’73
ended up with two—just Shelley Fletcher and then me.
But as you know the numbers later started to advance
as in came Barbara Appelbaum and also Tony Frantz.

But I kept coming back by trains and buses or subway
to help with six-month issues of our A-A-T-A.
I might be off on contract treating Whistlers or a Sully,
but Norbert Baer kept funding it by wooing Alice Tully.
14 East was different then—I’m guessing that no more
Can scholars sleep as I did—on the topmost floor?

The Center moved across the street in 1983,
and two years later had a silver anniversa-ree.
By then I’m heading WUDPAC, but I kept up with things here
at the student conferences where we met each year.
At Getty-sponsored workshops all our methods were crossbred—
With Peggy, Chris, and Ian we all camped at Arrowhead.

Since 1987, Peggy’d been the Chair
And also came to lecture to us in Delaware.
She modified curricula, diversified resources,
And added for the older folks some new refresher courses.

Paintings conservation now was taught with great finesse
From 1991 as paintings came here through the Kress.
Students reached the Chan house after dodging New York traffic
To be treated to new studies with some projects ethnographic.
They also left the comfort of an upper-east-side street
For digs in Turkey, Israel, or Italy and Crete.
They’d study fakes and forgeries, what was real or fraud,
And continued hosting yearly special students from abroad.
Nora at the Met now could assist with the creation
Of a solid specialty in photo conservation.

Larry had turned 80 and his kindness would still shine
At his special birthday bash of 1999.
Far from being trapped between Charybdis and Scylla,
Students now could fly between Manhattan and a villa
In the hills of Italy – isn’t that perfection?
Studying and treating precious things in that collection?

The saga now continued so near Fifth Avenue
As M. D. Marincola took the helm: 2002.
Curricula keep changing, and each year new programs start;
Treatments have expanded now including modern art.
All were pleased to learn about the angels in the mud
Who rescued many masterpieces from the Florence Flood.
A conference at the Villa, where grads could intermixin
With heroic rescuers, was held: 2006.
Next Dr. Hanne Roemich came from Brussels to take part
As a leading light on lasers, sciences, and art.
A cast of stellar lecturers for students to enjoy
Continues: Chris Stavroudis and Glenn Wharton! Ashok Roy!

We’ll have to keep an eye out up through 2062
Tracking all the graduates that we must interview.
Please keep me on alumnae lists—you know I would agree
To write another poem for the 100th jubilee!