

FWS – WOSA IDENTITY DEBATE
Written by Glenn Conrad on April 20, 2017

WHY A SEPARATE ORGANIZATION IN NORTH AMERICA?
(Whether it is called KWF, KWI, WOSA-NA or FWS)

In the 1970s it became clear that foreign Christian churches were ending their traditional “missionary presences.” Their missionaries in India had been the core constituency for Woodstock. Indeed the school was funded almost exclusively by funds and personnel from those foreign churches. A corollary of the changing pattern was the recognition by people like Bob Alter that over time, Woodstock’s financial viability would come primarily from two sources: a) more realistic balance between cost and revenue from tuition, and b) financial support from alumni, in lieu of churches. The Kodai-Woodstock Foundation (KWF) was established in the USA with the latter source in mind, though initially it served as a route through which the old churches continued to provide some support.

But the long-range projection proved accurate. By the end of the 1980s, the Board of KWF still had mission secretaries from American denominations attending meetings, but often they had no idea what Woodstock was, where it was, and that led to baffled questions about why they were sending money to an “elite private school” in India. By the mid-1990s the Board of KWF, *by then renamed KWI*, was made up almost entirely of alumni of Woodstock and Kodai. In an effort to further organize Woodstock alumni, KWI had encouraged and/or sanctioned the formation of an affiliated WOSA-North America. WOSA-NA was an unincorporated but “constituted” association – meaning it wrote and adopted its own Bylaws, and was governed by an elected “Council.” This “WOSA Council” existed up until the formal merger of WOSA-NA and FWS in 2012. The relationship between FWS and WOSA-NA was always a bit murky. WOSA-NA’s function at first was primarily social – keeping alumni in touch with each other, organizing an annual reunion that eventually morphed into the FWS annual meeting. Finances and so forth were handled by the staff of KWF-KWI-FWS, but the WOSA-NA Council did become increasingly assertive in representing alumni opinions to Woodstock School, and in fundraising as time passed.

Despite the organizational ambiguity, the proponents of the arrangement felt WOSA-NA had value as a Woodstock-specific sub-unit within a shared organization. The “brand” recognition was another advantage as KWF-KWI-FWS continued to evolve. WOSA-NA never had its own tax exemption, however. It operated under KWF-KWI-FWS’s. WOSA-NA Council operated as a sort of Woodstock-alumni-specific committee of KWI-FWS.

Most alumni organizations operate out of their parent school. In Woodstock’s case that has proved impractical for functions that go beyond social. Most importantly, if donations that eventually benefit Woodstock are to be tax-deductible they must be made and controlled independently by an organization that is exempt under US tax laws – a “501(c)(3)” organization. That organization must have an “exempt” purpose. *Alumni activity is not an exempt purpose.* Support of education is. This is one reason that WOSA-NA never proceeded to get its own exemption. At this point FWS is basically an alumni organization, but it is one whose purpose is defined as supporting education, not as a social link for old students.

WHAT IS TO BECOME of “WOSA”

As far as I am concerned, WOSA is alive and well. It is the overarching alumni association arising out of Woodstock School, just as it has always been. Its present manifestation in the United States, made necessary by American tax law, is FWS. There is no reason that the US manifestation could not be officially renamed, now or at some point in the future, as WOSA-NA. In fact, at the time WOSA-NA and FWS formally merged, the By-Laws specified that the organization “was also doing business as WOSA-NA.” It’s just about the name.

In summary, FWS can’t, doesn’t, and shouldn’t run Woodstock. And Woodstock can’t, doesn’t, and shouldn’t run FWS. Ideally, they recognize that they are joined at the heart, but must function independently, without any winking and nodding.