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# Lucy Maynard Salmon

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# Lucy Maynard Salmon

July 27, 1853—February 14, 1927

CHARA HAEUSSLER BOHAN

Lucy Maynard Salmon, a professor of history at Vassar College for forty years (1887-1927), became the first woman elected to the Executive Council of the American Historical Association in 1915. She was also the founder and first president of the Association of History Teachers of the Middle States and Maryland. Renamed the Middle States Council for the Social Studies, it is the oldest regional council still in existence in the United States. Established in 1902, the Middle States Council preceded the formation of the National Council for the Social Studies by twenty years.

Salmon became a national authority in the field of history. She was particularly interested in social history and in the teaching of history. Earning an A. B. in history from the University of Michigan in 1876, only the second class to admit women, Salmon was a pioneer during the early growth of women's higher education in the United States. Continuing her studies, Salmon earned an A.M. from the University of Michigan in 1883 and later spent a year as a fellow in American history at Bryn Mawr College, at which she studied under Woodrow Wilson, then a young professor. Wilson and Salmon proved to be unsuited for one another and their professional relationship ended after one year.

As a long-time professor at Vassar College, Salmon's work in history and education came into prominence in the 1890s when she served on the American Historical Association's Committee of Seven, which made recommendations for the teaching of history in the nation's secondary schools. Active in numerous organizations, Salmon also served on the Executive Council of the American Association of University Professors, was a founding member of the organization that became the American Association of University Women, and was a leader in the national suffrage movement. Salmon was the Vice-President of the National College Equal Suffrage League, an auxiliary of the National American Woman Suffrage League, and helped organize the Vassar students' suffrage association despite a campus ban on suffrage activities. A progressive educator, she hoped to improve society through education.

In addition to her leadership in several national organizations, Salmon wrote nearly one hundred

publications, including several exhaustive works on the history of domestic service, the newspaper, general history, and education. Her most significant publications include *Domestic Service* (1897), *Progress in the Household* (1906), *The Newspaper and Authority* (1923), *The Newspaper and the Historian* (1923), and *Why is History Rewritten?* (1929), published posthumously. Salmon's study of domestic service stands as one of the first modern works of new social history. She conducted surveys and collected data for the study with the assistance of Carroll Wright, the first Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Labor. Such methods of research were typical of the new professional social scientists, whose work came into prominence in the early 1900s.

Salmon's legacy is particularly significant in the area of social studies and history education. Not only did she help to found and lead organizations that have been influential in affecting the development of social studies education in the United States, but, in her classroom at Vassar, she employed progressive methods of teaching history. Salmon encouraged students to examine their everyday world in order to observe history. She taught students to broaden their understanding of historical material beyond political and military leaders and events. For Salmon, history could be found in the backyard, kitchen, or main street, and she brought students to these places to discover history. From both her experience and beliefs, she wrote articles for teachers and assembled collections of documents for use by students. Her advice was direct and historical, "Go to the sources."

Salmon's unconventional approach to teaching and learning history garnered pointed criticism from colleagues who favored more traditional methods of teaching. Nonetheless, she earned considerable recognition for her academic accomplishments toward the end of her life. Salmon was awarded honorary doctorates from Colgate University and the University of Michigan, and a research fund was established in her name at Vassar. She died in 1927 from a stroke.

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