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# Historical Case Study of Stella L. Wood

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# HISTORICAL CASE STUDY OF STELLA L. WOOD

by  
Bonnie G. Ostlund

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## Abstract

The focus of this historical case study is to examine the life of Stella Louise Wood, an educator recognized for her leadership in public kindergarten and teacher training in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She spearheaded the campaign for free public kindergartens in the city in 1896, and was the leader of its teacher training school for the following fifty-two years. In that time, Stella Wood shared her strong commitment to the youngest students and her dynamic spirit with over 2,500 teacher trainees, known as Miss Wood's girls. She lived to approve a merger of her school with Macalester College in St. Paul, and assist in planning the merger.

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## Introduction

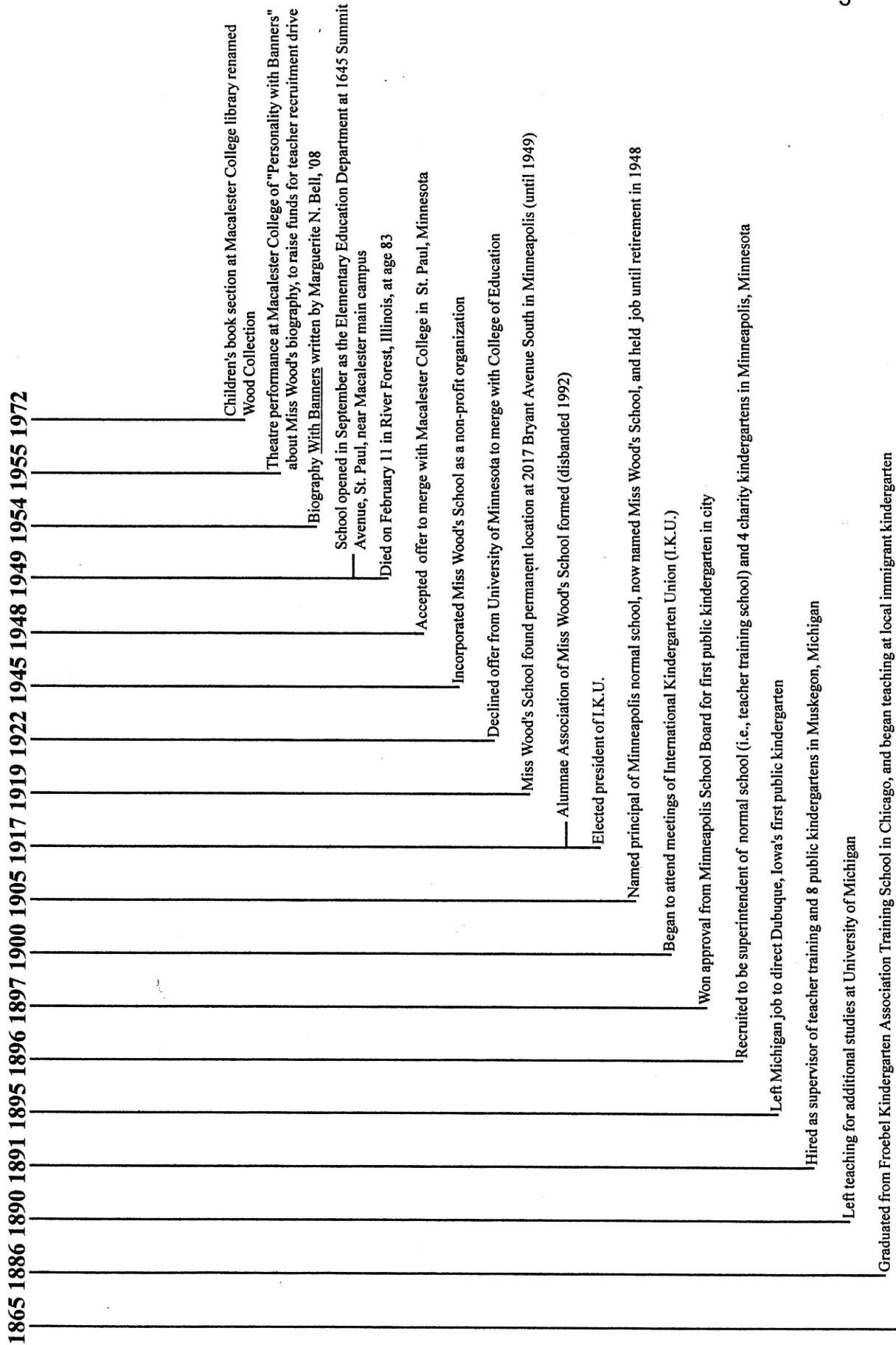
This historical case study examines Stella Louise Wood, a leader who built a career in Minneapolis, Minnesota, from the 1890s to the 1940s. The case study shows her to be a leader, despite the traditional thinking about women's role in society at the time. Stella Wood was a leader in education, which was a career field deemed appropriate for respectable young women. Her first great achievement was successfully advocating for the public kindergarten concept upon arrival in Minneapolis in 1896; the School Board granted her a room for the first public kindergarten for four- and five-year olds at Sheridan School in 1897. Her greater achievement came nine years later when Stella Wood was named principal of the Minneapolis Normal School, i.e., teacher training school, and it was consequently renamed Miss Wood's School in her honor. She held that leadership post from 1905 until her retirement in 1948.

Although Stella Wood died a few months after retiring, her influence extended past her lifetime through alumnae nationwide, particularly in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Examples of her enduring impact include: the biography written by a 1908 alumna in 1954; a theater performance based upon the biography in 1955; the alumnae organization's 75-year operation (into the early 1990s); and the establishment of the permanent Wood Collection of books at Macalester College in St. Paul in 1972.

The primary emphasis of this paper is the sociological and historical framework of Stella Wood's life, in order to determine her unique leadership

qualities. A white woman born in the Midwest after the Civil War ended, Stella Wood came to maturity in the conservative Victorian years. In nineteenth century America, gender had a great influence on women's opportunities in education and work. The traditional social and economic roles assigned to middle class women in America significantly impacted Stella Wood's life and career.

The case study adds the insight of contemporary leadership theory. From the multitude of contemporary leadership theories, this researcher examines and applies charismatic leadership theory, a type of transformational leadership, and classifies Stella Wood's style as charismatic leadership. She successfully changed the public education status quo in Minneapolis through her display of key charismatic leadership characteristics: self-confidence and purposefulness, speaking artistry, and a clear vision.



### Organization of Paper

What follows is an overview of Stella Wood's life, weaving together personal and professional aspects. The biography of Stella Wood, written by 1908 alumna Bell, provides the majority of information. Combined with historical references, the researcher paints a vivid picture of the educator and leader.

The literature review section is next. Here the focus is first on the historical and sociological context. Views of American women's role in social and economic life in the nineteenth century are presented, as are perspectives of American women's role in the twentieth century. Then, charismatic leadership theory, a transformational theory, is examined and characteristics of this contemporary theory are applied to the personal qualities of Stella Wood in order to demonstrate the connection between leader and theory.

Finally, in the conclusion, key findings from the historical case study are highlighted and certain gaps in her general leadership are discussed. The focus is clearly on charismatic leadership theory and its fit with the educator Stella Wood.

### Overview—The Life of Stella Wood

Born on September 2, 1865, in Chicago, Illinois, Stella Louise Wood was the first child of Abram and Abbie (Walker) Wood. For nine years, she was an only child, talkative and energetic. In 1874, a brother and two foster sisters joined the family, and Stella's invalid grandmother moved in upstairs. From Stella's perspective, life was better with several companions and Grandmother Walker's stories of pioneer life.

Later, Stella would follow in her father's footsteps. Abram was well educated at an academy and had some college training; early in his marriage, he was employed as a teacher and school principal in Ohio. Bell (1954) wrote, "He loved to teach, and planned tirelessly for the future of his school" (p. 16). However, when Abbie became homesick for Chicago, Abram sacrificed the profession he loved to move there, and never again was employed as a teacher. When Stella graduated from high school, Abram strongly supported the idea for her to become a teacher. It was a liberal idea because most white middle class girls chose marriage, staying with parents as a dependent, or temporary careers in art or writing.

In the 1880s, kindergarten was not a standard component of the American public education system. Instead, there were only immigrant kindergartens and private kindergartens. The former were a response to the influx of immigrants from European countries. The immigrant slums of large

cities were sorely in need of charitable services, and immigrant kindergartens became an invaluable service for the youngest immigrants (under age six).

Stella Wood's career choice as a kindergarten teacher ("kindergartner") was generally thought well-suited to the natural mothering nature of women. In addition, the missionary nature of work with immigrants was traditionally valued for its philanthropic basis, even if prevailing conservative opinions held that it was an adventurous career for women. Bell (1954) describes Stella Wood's viewpoint, "(She) had not the slightest objection to a career that was an 'adventure,' and she yearned for a chance to put her tremendous energy to work to carve out something of her very own. But the family idea of *service* as the noblest goal of all had put its stamp upon her; she had always been taught that the only true aristocracy is the aristocracy of service" (p. 24).

After graduating in 1886 from a two-year kindergarten teacher training program in Chicago, Stella Wood found satisfaction as a kindergartner in the immigrant slum district of Chicago, choosing it over a private kindergarten for the children of upper-class citizens. She stayed for four years at the Hobby Street Kindergarten in the district called "Little Hell" by Chicago police.

The student teacher on her small staff is quoted by Bell (1954): "Swedish, Irish, German and Italian, all came and learned to live together and be happy, caught in the joy of their teacher" (p. 33). Because Stella Wood visited the students' mothers at home to make friends with them, the adult foreigners gained a better understanding of how to adapt to the American way of life. Friendliness, kindness and tact on Stella Wood's part gained their confidence.



Her experience at the Chicago charity kindergarten guided her later as the long-time leader of the normal school in Minneapolis. She required all her students to be student teachers in a charity kindergarten, so that they would appreciate the city's social problems and understand the cycle of poverty and ignorance.

Her teacher training was based on German Friedrich Froebel's theory of a child's continuous physical, mental and spiritual growth. He challenged teachers to guide this spontaneous growth by providing the youngest children with multiple opportunities for natural learning. In contrast, common educational methods were narrowly limited to rote drills. Stella Wood brought the Froebel style of teaching to Minneapolis in 1896 and based her teacher training school on it for over fifty years.

The similarities to the educational philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori are clear. Born in 1870, Montessori was a peer of Wood, credited with spreading worldwide interest in teaching methods (that bear her name) based on the natural learning process. Joseph (1953) quotes Sinclair Lewis in *A Sinclair Lewis Reader, The Man from Main Street, Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904-1950*, explaining why he admires Stella Wood more than Maria Montessori: "Here is the head of a Minneapolis school for kindergartners, a woman who is summoned all over the country to address teachers' associations. She will not admit candidates for matriculation until she is sure they have a gift for teaching. She does something of the work of a Montessori, with none of the trumpeting

and anguish of the dottoressa.” It appears that Stella Wood accomplished her work on behalf of young children in an unassuming and positive manner.

Bell (1954) reports that Stella Wood left the Hobby Street Kindergarten to escape romantic problems. She was 25 years old, the age when a decision between career and marriage was necessary. Her brother, Leslie, claims she refused many offers of marriage in her lifetime. In 1890, an inheritance from Grandmother Walker provided the opportunity to attend college away from home, at the University of Michigan. When Stella Wood finished her year at the University of Michigan in 1891, she decided to put all thoughts of marriage behind her and devote herself to a teaching career.

Subsequent kindergarten positions in Muskegon, Michigan, and Dubuque, Iowa, allowed her to supervise public school kindergartens and instruct prospective kindergarten teachers. This work directly led to her long professional career as an education leader in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A recommendation from the head of the Froebel Training School and her professional resume combined in the recruiting of Stella Wood to head a three-year-old training school for kindergarten teachers in Minneapolis.

The city lagged behind others in the United States in its support for public kindergartens in the late 1890s. A group of interested mothers took corrective action, forming the Minneapolis Kindergarten Association and recruiting Stella Wood to lead the effort for public recognition of the kindergarten concept. Consistently described as animated, poised, vivacious, and colorful, Stella Wood

first appeared publicly to garner support at a large reception given by Senator W. D. Washburn in October 1896.

Bell (1954) writes that her sincere persuasiveness and genuine charm gained the audience's interest and approval. In turn, Stella Wood first became aware of her natural ability to hold, persuade and charm the public. Her efforts to spearhead public support of kindergarten were highly successful, for less than three months after her arrival in Minneapolis, the school board granted a room for the first public (free) kindergarten.

Her logic had been accepted: children too young for formal school were both ready for, and needed, new experiences in their environment. An excerpt from Stella Wood's speech explains how children's natural capacities are more fully developed in the Froebel kindergarten (Bell, 1954): "The child is born into a world of *folks*, and his happiness and success depend upon his ability to adjust and to cooperate and to assume social responsibility. He gets in the kindergarten at least the beginnings of a realization that to seek the good of the group is better than to seek the good of one; that we must keep *our* kindergarten room clean and beautiful for *all*. In short, he has at least made a start toward becoming a good citizen in a democracy" (p. 54).

In 1899, Stella Wood's parents moved to Minneapolis to live with her (until their deaths in 1907 and 1918). Her father used his bookkeeping skills to aid Stella in her work (beginning in 1903) as Secretary-Treasurer of the prestigious International Kindergarten Union (I.K.U.). Her mother was again her devoted daily companion, just as during Stella's first nine years when she was an only

child. Stella Wood's keen interest in nature and the outdoors was satisfied by hikes, skiing and picnics with a group of young people called "The Pickwick Club." Bell (1954) observes, "Stella's gay and youthful spirit sought out friends more inclined to active pursuits than those of her own age; indeed, most of her contemporaries were married, raising families, absorbed in their own tight little domestic concerns" (p. 67).

At the time, Stella Wood was categorized by society as a spinster. This was not a disparaging label; it was applied to women who remained single beyond the usual age of marriage. For Stella Wood, her teaching career always took precedence to marriage. "Combining the two was nearly unthinkable for middle-class women in those days" ("Miss Wood's School," 1993). Bell (1954) reports that Stella had heard the woman's rights pioneers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, speak in 1890 in Chicago, and ". . . was much entertained by Miss Anthony's forthright attitude toward her condition of spinsterhood" (p. 36). Stanton (1815-1902) and Anthony (1820-1906) were feminist collaborators. Winning the right to vote was the capstone of their social struggle; they first sought the right to speak publicly and legal and economic rights (such as owning property) for nineteenth century American women.

In 1917, Stella Wood was elected to the presidency of the fast growing I.K.U.. The women of I.K.U. were dedicated to the welfare and education of children worldwide, and World War I had strong impact on the organization's new leader. The goal of international peace and goodwill was stressed by Stella Wood at the 1918 Silver Anniversary convention of the I.K.U.. Her chosen

theme for the convention was the responsibility of the kindergarten teachers to instill love of peace in young students.

During the convention, Stella Wood's mother died of natural causes. Bell (1954) explains the significance of the loss, "Stella adored her mother, and had a fellowship with her that was more than merely filial" (p. 106). The sudden loneliness of living alone was conquered by writing daily letters to her brother, Leslie, who responded as frequently. Stella Wood also began writing to her alumnae in the annual *Newsletter*, a recap of the prior year's activities at school. Beginning in 1919, each *Newsletter* brought a flood of letters to Stella Wood from her alumnae, linking them again.

She forged a link to post-war Europe in 1920 with a visit to the pioneer American kindergarten unit for orphans in France. Located in a devastated area near Lens called Lievin, it was supported by I.K.U. member gifts. When she returned there in 1922, a sign over a doorway mirrored her I.K.U. convention theme of 1918: "We who love peace must write it in the hearts of our children."

Upon her return from Europe, Stella Wood was presented with a formal offer by Dr. Lotus Coffman to merge Miss Wood's School with the University of Minnesota. The university wanted to form a new department of elementary education in the Department of Education. Although Miss Wood's School had far more high caliber applicants than capacity allowed, a problem that could be solved with the merger, Stella Wood declined the offer. She held lengthy, serious discussions with Dr. Coffman, but her consultations with alumnae

representatives and the State Commissioner of Education, James M. McConnell, supported her decision to refuse the merger.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the depression of the 1930s had a strongly negative effect on enrollments at Miss Wood's School. Public school kindergarten in Minneapolis was threatened with total elimination due to drastic budget reductions. Stella Wood is credited with securing public support to save the kindergartens, speaking on radio and before numerous audiences. Enrollments at Miss Wood's School began to recover in 1935 and reached a robust level by 1937, although coeds from the University of Minnesota's Elementary Education department now competed with Miss Wood's girls for student teaching assignments.

The American entry into World War II in 1941 caused a downturn in enrollments once again. Young women joined the Armed Forces and became nurses to the extent that a teacher shortage developed. Stella Wood, at age 75, saw this scenario: a low supply of teachers which caused high demand and record high salary levels. Miss Wood's School marked its fiftieth anniversary in 1943. Despite the improving economics of a teaching career, the 1940s saw a continued drop in the number of specialized schools like it. A four-year degree in education was required for teachers, a trend that concerned Stella Wood.

Several key developments soon occurred. In 1944, the University of Minnesota offered to credit Miss Wood's graduates with two years' credit toward a four-year education degree. The following year, Miss Wood's School was incorporated as a non-profit teacher training organization, and a Board of

Trustees was established to help Stella Wood operate the school. The Board promptly began to seriously study the possibility of converting it to a four-year course. An effort by Governor Luther Youngdahl in 1948 to solve the teacher shortage problem meshed with the Board's task. At a conference of liberal arts college leaders, Governor Youngdahl proposed that they add elementary education teacher training to their curricula. Shortly afterwards, Stella Wood was presented with an offer to merge from Dr. Charles Turck, President of Macalester College in St. Paul. She accepted.

At 82 years of age and in poor health, Stella Wood nevertheless participated in merger planning meetings with Macalester President Turck and his committee. Bell (1954) documents that Stella Wood was both relieved and happy with the arrangements made: "Wonderful that this comes while I am still here, and active in it all" (p. 157). Eventually, illness forced Stella Wood to resign from her job of fifty-two years in September 1948. According to the obituary published in the Minneapolis newspaper, she died of a heart ailment at her brother's home in Illinois on February 11, 1949. Her survivors per se included more than 2,500 women teachers in 46 states, Panama and South Africa.

In 1948, shortly before her death, Stella Wood remarked, "What a wonderful thing it is to be allowed to build oneself into the life of a young and growing city [Minneapolis] and live long enough to see cherished plans materialize, and results come" (Bell, 1954, p. 159). She successfully led the effort to introduce public kindergarten for children under six to Minneapolis and

then directed its teacher training school for over a half-century. In addition, Stella Wood had been an inspirational role model to several hundred young women.



## Literature Review

### Sociological and Historical Context

This section begins by examining the life and leadership of Stella Wood in the context of the sociological and historical role of American women<sup>1</sup>, and ends by presenting charismatic leadership theory in relation to Stella Wood's leadership qualities. First, information about the last four decades of the nineteenth century is presented to provide a view of American life when she was born, began her teaching career, and assumed a leadership role in education. Then, data on modern women's position and role in social and economic life is described and integrated. The contemporary perspectives included are Jamieson's (1995) framework of double binds and Friedan's (1963) concept of the feminine mystique. Similarities and differences between modern women and Stella Wood are highlighted.

### Focus on the Nineteenth Century

Gender has consistently had a great influence on opportunities in education and work in America. Because Stella Wood is a white, urban, middle class woman, the researcher focuses on that demographic group. Matthaiei (1982) asserts that the economic role of American women changed forever when the Industrial Revolution separated work from the home. Wage earning moved

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<sup>1</sup> The reader should assume white woman whenever "woman" appears in the paper.

outside the home--to factories and other places of commodity production--and men daily left the home to carry out their roles as providers for their families.

This transformed work and family into a distinct economic sphere and a distinct domestic sphere, respectively. The economic sphere was male, and the domestic sphere was female. Consequently, a woman's position and role as homemaker was elevated by Victorian society in what historians label as the cult of domesticity. Married women were kept at home, with homemaking and motherhood as their vocation. At the same time, parenting became more complex, because the role of children<sup>2</sup> dramatically changed. Children were no longer seen as little workers and apprentices, but as young people to be trained in responsibility, ethics, and correct social behavior; mothers and the schools would train them (Matthaei, 1982).

Hogeland (1973) writes of the myth that women were assumed to be good, selfless, and morally better than men. From the widely held belief sprung the idea that women were actually destined to be full-time wives and mothers. It's clear that women's prescribed roles held no power, as generally defined in terms of economics, education and politics. Therefore, women's status was utter powerlessness.

Sochen (1974) theorizes that powerlessness was the reason that women became involved in all major American reform movements of the latter nineteenth century. Working with other powerless groups--orphans and black slaves, for example--brought nineteenth century women a new sense of personal

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<sup>2</sup> Analysis is limited to children from white, middle-class and upper-class urban American families.

power over their daily lives. Immigrant kindergartens, abolition, temperance and women's suffrage are some historical reform movements that attracted heavy female involvement. The reform movements also propelled women into formal leadership roles.

Some of the reform activities, but not all, were deemed socially acceptable for women because the activities fell into the church and philanthropy spheres. These domains, in addition to home, were considered women's proper spheres, according to Hogeland (1973). In fact, philanthropic work outside the home is termed social homemaking by Matthaehi (1982). This work outside the home was regarded as direct mothering of the needy, an extension of women's natural role. It fit the prevailing conservative frame of reference for women's role.

Thus, women teaching children outside the home was viewed in a favorable light in the nineteenth century; Harris (1978) cites teaching as a proper career for spinsters<sup>3</sup>. However, most teachers were males, and female teachers were paid 30 to 50 percent less than male teachers. The wage disparity, based solely on gender, continued even when the Civil War created a drastic teacher shortage, as male teachers left their jobs to fight in the war.

In addition to a manpower shortage in teaching, urban areas experienced worker shortages in civil service, office work and retail trades during the Civil War (Harris, 1978). Of necessity, women filled these vacant jobs. Meanwhile, on the battlefields, the staggering numbers of wounded Civil War soldiers created an immediate need for nurses. This dire need, met by women, created the

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<sup>3</sup> Spinster is not a derogatory term like old maid.

profession of nursing. It is evident how mothering the injured men fit nicely with the traditional view of women's proper role as mothers.

After the Civil War, women retained most teaching jobs, which began the sex-typing of the profession. Hogeland (1973) notes, "When women have entered an occupation in large numbers, this occupation has come to be regarded as low status and has been rewarded with low pay. Examples of this are readily found in the teaching and nursing fields" (p. 19). By 1900, men abandoned completely any occupation that had become dominated by women, according to Hogeland (1973).

Table 1 on page 19 illustrates the sex-typing of nursing and teaching that had occurred by 1900 (Matthaei, 1982, p. 206). Percentages, rather than the actual numbers, are shown to clearly represent how participation in the labor force differed greatly by gender. Table 2 on page 20 illustrates the comparison between employed males and employed females in three years from 1890 to 1920, showing percentages (Matthaei, 1982, p. 142). A trend of increasing labor force participation by women is evident. Yet, the figures reveal that less than 25% of women worked in each year depicted. Most women stayed in their prescribed sphere, the domestic sphere.

A better understanding of women in the labor force over three decades is gained through Table 3 on page 20 (Matthaei, 1982, p. 142). Its breakdown of working women by age group reveals that young women were more likely than

Table 1

**Sex-typing of Selected Professions, 1900**

|  | <i>% males<br/>employed<br/>in occptn.</i> | <i>% females<br/>employed<br/>in occptn.</i> |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Masculine Professions</i>               |  |  |
| Physicians and surgeons                    | 94.4                                       | 5.6  |
| Professors in colleges<br>and universities | 93.6                                       | 6.4  |
| Lawyers and judges                         | 99.6                                       | 0.4  |
| Clergymen                                  | 97.0                                       | 3.0  |
| <i>Feminine Professions</i>                |  |  |
| Nurses                                     | 6.4  | 93.6   |
| Librarians                                 | 27.5                                       | 72.5   |
| Teachers                                   | 25.4                                       | 74.6   |
| Social workers <sup>a</sup>                | 25.0                                       | 75.0   |

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SOURCES: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports: Occupations at the Twelfth Census*, Table 1 (for persons 10 years and older); idem, *Census of the Population: 1960, Occupational Characteristics*, Table 21 (for persons 14 years and older); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Bulletin #1450, (1966-67); U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Occupational Trends in the U.S. 1900-1950*, Working Paper #5, pp. 10-15, 22-27.

a. These are estimates made by Elizabeth Kemper Adams in *Women Professional Workers* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1921), p. 173.

All figures in Table 1 are percentages, calculated by dividing the number of men and/or women in the occupation by the total number in the occupation.

Tables 2 and 3

**Labor Force Participation Rates by Sex, 1890-1920**

|      | <i>Males</i> | <i>Females</i> |
|------|--------------|----------------|
| 1890 | 84.3         | 18.2           |
| 1900 | 85.7         | 20.0           |
| 1920 | 84.6         | 23.6           |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 132.

All figures in Table 2 are percentages, calculated by dividing the number of women and/or men in the labor force by the number of women and/or men in the population.

**Labor Force Participation Rates of Women by Age, 1890-1920**

|      | <i>Age</i>   |              |              |              |              |
|------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|      | <i>10-15</i> | <i>15-19</i> | <i>20-24</i> | <i>25-44</i> | <i>45-64</i> |
| 1890 | 10.0         | 29.7         | 30.3         | 15.0         | 12.0         |
| 1900 | 10.2         | 32.3         | 31.8         | 17.6         | 13.8         |
| 1920 | 5.6          | 34.5         | 37.6         | 21.7         | 16.6         |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, Series A 119-134, p. 15, and Series D 29-41, p. 131. For the 10-15 age group, *Census, Population, 1930*, Vol. V, General Report on Occupations, p. 45.

All figures in Table 3 are percentages, calculated by dividing the number of women in the labor force by the number of women in the population.



any other age group to be in the labor force. On average, nearly one-third of all 15-19 year olds and 20-24 year olds were working in 1890, 1900 and 1920. The trend of women's increasing participation in the economic sphere is evident, especially for the 15-19 age group and the 20-24 age group.

In the last four decades of the nineteenth century, Harris (1978) asserts the great majority of American females chose marriage and motherhood over a career. Undoubtedly, family and societal disapproval for choosing otherwise played a great part. The choice was perceived as either/or, not both/and. Some educated women rebelled against matrimony; opponents of higher education for women used this result as proof that women should not go to college. Those opposed to higher education for women claimed education caused unnatural behavior and untraditional attitudes. The stereotype of the educated spinster arose; this woman saw a career as a lifetime alternative to marriage and homemaking, not just a brief phase before marriage.

Increased opportunities in higher education had a causal relationship with participation by women in the economic sphere. In the nineteenth century, and especially after the Civil War, women's colleges and seminaries were established, many with the purpose of training women to be teachers. In 1870, women accounted for 21% of total enrollment in higher education institutions, according to Jamieson (1995). Because teaching was seen as a logical extension of the cult of domesticity, that formal profession was seen as professional mothering (Matthaei, 1982). Coeducation state universities were also founded. State universities could not discriminate against the daughters of



taxpayers, so political and economic necessity combined to expand opportunities for women. According to Sochen (1974), "In 1900 5,237 women and 22,173 men graduated from colleges" (p. 202).

In addition to the well-established nursing and teaching professions, single, college-educated women concentrated in the so-called female professions of library science, home economics and social work. Amott (1991) links the influx of European immigrants prior to 1900 to women's involvement in a social work career. According to Amott (1991): "By the turn of the century, poor immigrant families made up one-third to one-half of the population of major U.S. cities" (p. 113). These immigrants had many needs for welfare services and also needed personal help in adapting to life in the United States.

This need led American women in large cities to establish settlement houses in immigrant slums. Sochen (1974) notes that groups of single, college-educated women lived in the settlement houses and taught English, citizenship and middle-class values. Public health nurses, all women, provided rudimentary health care services as well.

By 1900, the helping professions--social welfare, nursing and teaching--were included in the women's sphere. Although these are non-domestic careers, they neatly fit the traditional domestic role of women. Consequently, social welfare, nursing and teaching were judged to be permissible jobs for women (Amott, 1991). In effect, there was no revolutionary change in women's role during the decades Stella Wood reached maturity and began a career. She wasn't a groundbreaking pioneer who gave precedence to career over marriage

and motherhood. Nonetheless, by making the choice of career woman, she was definitely in the minority of women.

### Focus on the Twentieth Century

Jamieson (1995) claims that cultural constraints or double binds have kept women in their so-called place throughout history. She cites abundant evidence in civil law and religious doctrine as well as social custom. Womb/Brain is Jamieson's phrase for one "classic no-choice choice" (p. 55) that women have been offered. The choice is presented as an either/or: either marriage and children or career. The underlying thinking is that a woman's function is limited by her biology. Thus, societal approval accompanies choosing the former, and societal disapproval accompanies choosing the latter.

The researcher's experience in corporate positions has allowed observation of the effects of the Womb/Brain double bind. In Appendix B is an irony-filled magazine column from 1980 titled, "He Works, She Works Nine to Five But What Different Impressions They Make!" from the researcher's files. It includes many Womb/Brain dilemmas, such as this: a photograph of the family on an employee's desk signals HE is a solid family man, but SHE is more committed to family than career. This 1980 management perspective mirrors wider society's traditional perspective of women's role.

Roughly one hundred years ago, Stella Wood held a plainly liberal perspective about her role, choosing to pursue a career after high school graduation. Societal conventions and constraints at the time combined to limit

the vast majority of young women like her to dependent roles of wife or unmarried daughter. Teaching, particularly kindergarten teaching, was a unique exception to the general disapproval of careers for young women. It was valued and approved because the work was viewed as mothering the youngest students. Jamieson (1995) relates that women's progression from home to work was smoother when work related to duties that were natural in the home sphere, such as caring for children and others. Since women were thought to be centered on lives of domesticity, career that meshed with these traditional assumptions were deemed suitable. The researcher's experience in the 1970s supports the endurance of this thinking, since teaching and nursing remained the dominant career paths for college coeds like her.

Stella Wood became a leader in education, acquiescing to the boundaries that society placed on women's economic role. She also apparently accepted the prevailing image of women, for example in Bell's (1954) quote of her address to teacher trainees on the first day of school, "When you work with little children intelligently and lovingly, your essential womanliness is growing. . ." (p. 73). Stella Wood herself made the either/or choice of matrimony and motherhood or a career, choosing the latter at age 26. With no children of her own, she subsequently adopted her graduates, writing newsletters to "her children" throughout her career. The surrogate family responded in kind, as evidenced by a 1927 newsletter Stella Wood wrote: "Children, there were 876 Christmas greeting from you this year, and I felt really overpowered with humility. . ." (Macalester College archives).

Bell (1954) documents that a majority of Miss Wood's School graduates never taught, but chose marriage upon graduation. This outcome is in line with Jamieson's account of women's strictly limited choices. However, from Stella Wood's perspective, the choice of marriage did not mean a girl's education was for naught. She believed her married graduates would utilize their teacher training in their new roles as parents. The implicit assumption that woman's natural role is motherhood endured.

Friedan's (1963) theory of the feminine mystique challenged the long-standing implicit assumption that women were fulfilled by having babies and a husband, and thus did not need a professional career to be content. She called it a lie that trapped women and restricted them from escaping Freud's sweeping pronouncement that "anatomy is destiny." Friedan acknowledges that the Depression and World War II combined to create a strong need in American women and men for the security and comfort represented by home and family. Still, she argues that middle class American suburban women's lives had become dramatically dull by the early 1960s. They had busy lives, filled with tending husband, home and babies, but the domestic routine left women in suburbia unchallenged and wanting more.

Friedan gave examples of the passivity required of women in the role assigned them, examples as diverse as 1950s popular women's magazines and 1930s Nazi philosophy. She found that stories in women's magazines never focused on current events, but rather on makeup, cooking and breastfeeding. She links the Nazis' pat definition of German women's role--*Kinder, Kuche,*

*Kirche* (translated: children, kitchen, church)--to the feminine mystique also.

Women occupy a small world, that of home and family, under the powerful lie of the feminine mystique. They were led to believe that their true identity is found as children's mother and husband's wife. Even though prejudices and barriers to politics (i.e., the vote), higher education, and the professions were removed by the mid-twentieth century, Friedan (1963) contends that career woman was undeniably a negative label.

Friedan provides a harbinger of Jamieson's (1995) double bind called Femininity/Competence by claiming, ". . . women in America are not encouraged, or expected, to use their full capacities. In the name of femininity, they are encouraged to evade human growth" (p. 305). Jamieson asserts that the Femininity/Competence double bind is a control mechanism based on the assumption that femininity is at odds with leadership, toughness and decisiveness. In effect, it is a distinct contradiction to be both female/feminine and competent.

In sum, these contemporary theorists show the traditional female role of wife and mother has been historically enforced by cultural double binds and the feminine mystique. Women's lives in the twentieth century seems to be a throwback to the Victorian cult of domesticity when they were assigned a passive role in the domestic sphere, with no true power. An examination of Stella Wood's leadership in education shows she was personally driven and remarkably successful despite the disadvantage of gender.

### Charismatic Leadership Theory

This section examines a transformational leadership theory, namely charismatic leadership, in relation to Stella Wood. Characteristics of this contemporary theory are described and applied to personal qualities of Stella Wood. Her career success as an educator is shown to be tied to her charismatic characteristics. Because her gender is female, analysis from a women in society perspective is threaded throughout the section.

A theory of charismatic leadership was originally written in the German essays of sociologist Max Weber in 1924. Lindholm (1990) credits Weber with many firsts: “. . . Max Weber was the first to introduce the term ‘charisma’ into sociology, the first to attempt to analyze the inner content of the charismatic’s character, the first to argue that charisma implies a relationship between the great man and the followers, . . .” (p. 24).

The word charisma was taken out of its religious context by Weber. Of Greek origin, it meant “gift of grace” and was used by early Christians to signify a divine man. This historical context included a mystical overlay, which Weber strengthened by listing prophets and shamans as prototypes of charismatic leaders. Although English translations of Weber’s essays began to be available in the late 1940s, scholars and academics did not embrace charismatic theory or deem it worthy of extended study. Conger (1989) asserts that the 1980s brought an increase in interest, due to the rise of Lee Iacocca and Steven Jobs, to whom

the label charismatic leader was frequently applied. Both were seen as bold men and supreme motivators who made change happen.

Unfortunately, the media's continuous misuse of the term has created a misconception in popular thinking today. Hollywood personalities are labeled charismatic, when glamorous would be the more appropriate term, and the dark side of charisma, embodied by Charles Manson for example, has added to confusion about the concept. Lindholm (1990) concentrates his study of charisma on the dark side, examining volatile charismatic leaders of cults such as Manson and Jim Jones. In contrast, this researcher presents Stella Wood as a representative of what Lindholm describes as mild and tame charisma.

Willner (1984) acknowledges charismatic leadership as a subtype of leadership, differentiated by four essential dimensions: leader-image; idea-acceptance; compliance; and emotional. Two dimensions are particularly applicable to Stella Wood: leader-image dimension and the emotional dimension. The first of these, leader-image, refers to followers' beliefs in the supreme wisdom and ability of the leader to accomplish set goals. The emotional dimension is defined by Willner in terms of an attachment or bond to the leader, and can include: ". . . affection, admiration, trust, and even love" (p. 7).

Like Willner, Conger (1989) reports positive value in charismatic leadership. He emphasizes the transformational impact of charismatic leaders, their ability to successfully create change. A model charismatic leader has four key skills, succinctly listed by Conger: visioning, communicating, building trust,

and motivating. Visioning is the bedrock skill. Conger, Kanungo & Associates (1988) claim that a vision of what could be makes the charismatic leader a revolutionary, a change agent who wants to overturn some part of the status quo. For Stella Wood, the status quo in public education was unacceptable because it did not include the youngest learners. She was committed to changing that situation, but could not succeed alone. Like any change agent, she had to share her vision and gather support for it, in order to make her vision of public kindergarten a reality.

Conger (1989) claims, "In many ways, communication skills are just as important as the content of the vision itself" (p. xviii).<sup>4</sup> A charismatic leader's persuasive ability is key to conveying the vision in a manner that wins its support. The power of speech is multiplied by an enthusiastic delivery, which audiences or followers find attractive and then are engaged in listening. Bell (1954) recounts that Stella Wood initially felt unprepared to speak publicly in Minneapolis to 300 citizens about the need for public kindergarten. But after her first speech in 1896, Bell asserts, "Stella. . . was newly conscious that she could hold an audience, could teach, persuade and charm them" (p. 55).

Others' perception of Stella Wood, according to Bell (1954), was in sync with charismatic leadership theory: "All Minneapolis knew her and was proud of her charm and competence. . . There is little doubt that Miss Wood's lively and vigorous charm drew the crowds, but she gave them solid food for thought, and a deepening interest in the purpose of her school" (p. 4).

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<sup>4</sup> "The medium is the message" is apt .



Conger (1989) points out that the charismatic leader builds trust in two ways--through expertise and commitment. The accomplishments and successes of an individual speak to their expertise. For Stella Wood, her track record prior to coming to Minneapolis was impressive, with educational leadership positions in teacher training schools and public kindergartens in three Midwestern states (Illinois, Michigan and Iowa). Although kindergartens in the public schools of communities throughout the United States began to multiply in the 1880s, Minneapolis lagged behind other cities in the mid-1890s, and was fortunate to recruit a woman with her depth of experience. Once in Minneapolis, Stella Wood then impressed its citizens with her clear self-confidence and sense of total commitment to her vision of public kindergarten.

A leader's total commitment to their vision is a required quality that applies to leadership theories in general, as does communication competence. Yet Conger (1989) argues charismatic leaders are better at demonstrating these leadership qualities than noncharismatic leaders. A charismatic leader is more successful at building their leader-image, a concept of Willner's previously mentioned (see page 28). At the heart of charisma is interaction of the charismatic leader with others. Both Conger et al. (1988) and Lindholm (1990) hold that charisma is displayed only in the interplay of leader and followers, because charisma is based on perception. A leader cannot self identify as a charismatic; charismatic leadership is truly in the eye of the beholder. In other words, charismatic leadership is attributed to an individual only when it's the perception of their followers.

Suggestive of Stella Wood's charismatic appeal is Bell's (1954) account of how some young women graduates of Miss Wood's School came back after teaching and further study to join the faculty. Stella Wood selected women (and some men) who shared her ideals and purposes for faculty positions, and then, "...she gave them the kind of loyalty a good mother gives her family, built them up with her confidence in their powers, praised them, admired them" (Bell, 1954, p. 92). Bell explains that this leader behavior yielded two desirable results in Stella Wood's followers: "...fervent loyalty, and . . . teaching that sought constantly to better any previous 'best'" (Bell, 1954, p. 94).

Stella Wood's sincere care for her faculty extended to a larger group of followers, her teacher trainees, who were called Miss Wood's girls. Bell (1954) details how Stella Wood personally interviewed all applicants to her school, and explains how she showed true interest in her girls. An example quoted in Bell of her trust-building manner was a note Stella Wood penciled on a student's paper: "I want to know you better. May I?" (p. 83). Stella Wood referred to alumnae as her children and called herself their kindergarten mother, indicative of the deep emotional bond between leader and followers. Conger (1989) claims, "...this bond of unusual intensity between the leader and the led is an outcome of charismatic leadership" (p. 126).

Bell (1954) emphasizes that Stella Wood instructed her girls that teaching was not just methods, "... but a continuing process of growth and development, a way of life" (p. 72). Miss Wood's girls strongly identified with Stella Wood's committed, positive traits when they graduated and began teaching. Bell (1954)

describes the process of identification, “The thought of ‘what Miss Wood would do’ carried them through uncounted crises. One young teacher wrote, ‘Miss Wood, you are my smile when things go wrong, . . .the goal before me always.’” (p. 101).

Max Weber believed, “What alone is important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority” (Willner, 1984, p. 15). It appears that Stella Wood, with her charismatic leadership style, was regarded as a role model in the utmost sense. According to Conger et al. (1988), several characteristics mark a charismatic or transformational leader, of which the following have been linked to Stella Wood in this section: “. . . creating and maintaining a positive image in the minds of followers, . . . exhibiting a high degree of confidence in themselves and their beliefs; . . . providing a personal example for followers to emulate; . . .and possessing a high degree of linguistic ability. . .” (pp. 100-101).

Bell (1954) summarizes certain key indicators of Stella Wood’s impact as a charismatic leadership: “Miss Wood ‘was’ the school. It was not a building; it was she who drew students by the sheer magnetism of her own spiritual strength. . .It was an honor to be ‘a Miss Wood’s girl.’ Sister followed sister; in time, mothers who were themselves graduates, were to send their daughters to the school” (p. 101).

Stella Wood is a representative of charismatic leadership theory because she demonstrated what Conger et al. (1988) term personal idiosyncratic power. Certain aspects of her personality combined to project an image that others

found attracting over the decades of her career. A friend, Ruth Raymond, wrote about this memorable appeal in a letter: “It seems appropriate that Miss Wood’s name is Stella—a star—for she was and is a radiant person whose light has lightened all of us who came in contact with her” (Macalester College archives).

Nonetheless, Stella Wood falls short in demonstrating certain characteristics of charismatic leadership theory and leadership in general. The case study has shown she was not a revolutionary leader because she didn’t challenge traditional social norms for women or her teacher trainees. She was a leader in a field deemed acceptable for women (the education of young children) and never seriously considered that a career and marriage could be combined for herself or Miss Wood’s girls. Her success as a change agent leader was likewise limited by her acceptance of the social and economic boundaries set for women. Further, Stella Wood’s education credentials are lacking. Despite having the resources of time and money, she never completed a college degree; Stella Wood inexplicably missed a critical role model opportunity.

## Conclusion

The case study intended to examine the life and leadership of Stella Louis Wood by focusing primarily on the sociological and historical context.

Information on the economic and social role of women in America in the last four decades of the nineteenth century was presented and synthesized. Stella Wood, by virtue of her gender, was clearly impacted by certain societal constraints. A twentieth century perspective showed the enduring nature of some constraints.

In addition, Stella Wood's style was identified as charismatic leadership, a type of transformational leadership. As a change agent, she spearheaded the introduction of public kindergarten in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the late 1880s, then continued to be a leader in education for over fifty years. She earned public recognition for her achievements, as when the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association called her a Minneapolis Woman Leader in its October 1928 quarterly magazine. The text beneath her photograph read, "Training teachers to understand and teach the nation's youngest has made Miss Wood outstanding in the field of education and a vital factor in Minneapolis schools. Her work is another chapter in the story of what Minneapolis women leaders are doing for the city and the state" (p. 22).

From the literature review of charismatic leadership theory, it is evident that Stella Wood displayed many characteristics of charismatic leadership. Some examples include: committed to a vision; motivating and attracting;

confident and competent; and an accomplished, enthusiastic speaker. Facing the retirement of Stella Wood, the Trustees who then operated her teacher training school acknowledged her charismatic power: “. . .[The Trustees] regretfully agreed that without the magic of Miss Wood’s personality the school would have too little drawing power. . .” (Bell, 1954, p. 150).

Her retirement thus brought about the merging of Miss Wood’s School with Macalester College’s elementary teacher training. Indeed, a weakness of Stella Wood’s leadership was an absence of successor planning, which left a large void in her school’s organization when she retired. Additionally, her role model value to the young women known as Miss Wood’s girls was weakened by her acquiescence with the social and economic roles generally assigned by society. Further, her formal credentials were lacking in that she never completed a college degree.

Nonetheless, Stella Wood was a leader. She definitely chose a safe path to leadership and never pushed the limits set for her gender. But as a young educator, she spearheaded the campaign for the first free public kindergartens in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Then she successfully led kindergarten teacher training in the city for several decades. In true charismatic leadership style, her dynamic spirit and strong commitment to the youngest students was shared with over 2,500 followers—the teacher trainees who graduated from Miss Wood’s School.

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A reunion is stirring fond memories of a woman who brought the kindergarten concept and a new brand of instruction to Minneapolis.



**Educator, storyteller and inspiration: Stella Wood in 1938.**

## Pioneering teacher's work still endures

**By Chuck Haga**  
*Star Tribune Staff Writer*

Judith Blix Moe plans to celebrate her 95th birthday today in the company of other girls.

That's what they called themselves: Miss Wood's girls.

"Most of the girls were from well-to-do homes,"

### Twin Cities Journal

said Moe, who lives in St. Paul. "I was from a poor family. My father died when I was 11, and my mother took in boarders.

"But I was accepted by Miss Wood as well as anyone was. It was the mind she was more interested in."

said Moe, who lives in St. Paul. "I was from

Fifty years after the last class graduated from the little training school for primary teachers on Bryant Av. S., a few of those teachers returned this weekend to reminisce about the care of young minds.

In 1896, Stella Louise Wood arrived in Minneapolis to champion pre-primary education. She became superintendent of the Minneapolis Kindergarten Association Normal School, but within a few years she was forced to call it what everybody else did: Miss Wood's School.

She was a pioneer in the national movement to make kindergarten an important part of public school systems.

Wood also was a nationally known storyteller, revered for her way with children — and their teachers. "If you ever become angry with a little child," she said, "take his hand and lay it in yours; look how really small it is and think what a great deal you are making of him!"

Her two-year school graduated about 3,000 teachers, all women, before it was merged into Macalester College in 1949. About 20 have returned to participate in Macalester's commencement this weekend and to remember their Miss Wood.

"She was small in stature but powerful and large in personality," said Dolores Fletcher, of Minnetonka, Class of '49. "She had very particular standards, and students had to meet those, or they were asked to leave. I was in awe of her."

What Fletcher admired most was Wood's ability to tell stories.

"She sat on a stool," she said. "She had arthritic hands, but they were so expressive. As she told a story, I don't think one student moved. She was spellbinding."

Fletcher taught briefly in Waseca and Excelsior, then in Robbinsdale for 32 years.

Does she still call herself “a Miss Wood’s girl”?

“Oh, yes,” she said. “We’re very proud of that.”

And does she have daughters or granddaughters who give her a hard time about that?

“I do,” she said, laughing.

Moe, Class of ’25, remembers the storytelling, too.

“But most of all, it was *herself*,” she said. “Here was this woman, this remarkable woman. She never had children, but she knew children so well. She loved them, and they loved her.”

### Unhappy romance?

Wood was born in Chicago in 1865, the year the Civil War ended. She studied at the University of Michigan and later at the University of Minnesota, but she “never bothered” taking a degree.

One old newspaper account said she was engaged when she arrived in Minneapolis. Another said her move was a way out of “an unhappy romance.” Either way, she never married.

Wood was 31 and in charge of the first public kindergarten in Dubuque, Iowa, when she was brought to Minneapolis in 1896 by a group of young mothers who believed in kindergarten. It was a concept that had not been embraced yet by the Minneapolis school system — or by most others in the country.

The mothers’ group had a private kindergarten in a church. Wood turned it into the state’s first model school for kindergarten teachers.

“Education begins in the cradle, not in the first grade,” she said in an early speech. “The child is born into a world of folks, and his happiness and success depend upon his ability to adjust, to cooperate and to assume social responsibility. He gets in the kindergarten at least the beginnings of a realization that to seek the good of the group is better than to seek the good of one. In short, he has at least made a start toward becoming a good citizen.”

Three months later, in January 1897, the Minneapolis school board offered the kindergarten association space in a school building: the city’s first public kindergarten. Three more soon opened, and the district assumed responsibility for operating them.

In 1905, the association deeded the training school to Wood, and she became its principal.

Teaching was not a matter of techniques alone but a continuing process of personal growth and development — a way of life, she told her students.

“Mediocrity in teaching, as in everything else in life, stems from lack of definite aim. Develop to the utmost all your gifts. Know your own strong talent and use it.

“We need most of all a ‘yes-yes’ department for little folks — the right kind of an answer to their urges to make noise.”

She took her students on tours of art galleries, flour mills, welfare clinics and fire stations. She had them work in settlement houses, keeping notes on the daily appearance and activities of children. She made sure they understood nutrition — and the impact of malnutrition.

Wood served terms as president of the national Association for Childhood Education and the kindergarten section of the National Education Association. Fiercely independent, she made two solo trips to Europe and frequently drove alone to vacation in New England.

Sinclair Lewis was a fan.

“She will not admit candidates for matriculation until she is sure that they have a gift for teaching,” the author wrote. “She does something of the work of a Montessori, with none of the trumpeting and anguish.”

### She found ‘em

Her teachers had to play well with children. She did not want “some dried-up, desiccated old coconut in the research line who would not have any contacts with children at all and be just academic and not human,” she said.

“I am so proud of that faculty of mine!” she once wrote to her brother. “I looked around at them and said to myself, ‘Well, I didn’t make ‘em, but I selected ‘em.’ ”



She must have pushed and challenged them, too. "Don't thank God for Friday," she'd say. "Thank God for Monday."

She moved the school into a frame house at 2017 Bryant Av. S. in 1919. Three years later, the University of Minnesota suggested a merger; Miss Wood declined, not wanting to lose her smallness and intimacy.

But as she entered her 80s and began to anticipate retirement, she accepted merger with Macalester, a smaller school, which promised to keep her spirit alive in its teacher-training program.

Wood retired in 1948. "It's a wonderful thing to have lived so long," she said, but she developed heart problems and died the next year. She was 83.

An obituary called her "champion of the cause of the youngster," and suggested that she "never really left kindergarten" herself.

In 1955, Macalester and the Delta Kappa Gamma honor society for women in education sponsored a play based on Wood's life to raise money for a statewide teacher recruitment drive. In 1972, Macalester renamed its children's center in her honor.

Mamie Sherwood, 98, Class of '21, sent regrets from Redding, Calif., that she wouldn't make it to the reunion.

"I have many pleasant memories of my years there," she wrote, "especially of Miss Wood."

SATURDAY, MAY 22 • 1999



Miss Wood, or at least that's how the boys knew Stella Wood, sat with her Plymouth Sunday school class in 1903. She was in her late 30s at the time, and well on her way to becoming a teacher of choice in the Twin Cities area. A couple years after this photo was taken, she began leading a teacher training school.



**HE WORKS, SHE WORKS  
"NINE TO FIVE"**

***BUT WHAT DIFFERENT IMPRESSIONS THEY MAKE!***

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>The family picture is on HIS desk:</b><br>Ah, a solid, responsible family man. | <b>The family picture is on HER desk:</b><br>Hmm, her family will come before her career. |
| <b>HIS desk is cluttered:</b><br>He's obviously a hard worker and a busy man.     | <b>HER desk is cluttered:</b><br>She's obviously a disorganized scatterbrain.             |
| <b>HE'S talking with co-workers:</b><br>He must be discussing the latest deal.    | <b>SHE'S talking with co-workers:</b><br>She must be gossiping.                           |
| <b>HE'S not at his desk:</b><br>He must be at a meeting.                          | <b>SHE'S not at her desk:</b><br>She must be in the ladies' room.                         |
| <b>HE'S not in the office:</b><br>He's meeting customers.                         | <b>SHE'S not in the office:</b><br>She must be out shopping.                              |
| <b>HE'S having lunch with the boss:</b><br>He's on his way up.                    | <b>SHE'S having lunch with the boss:</b><br>They must be having an affair.                |
| <b>The boss criticized HIM:</b><br>He'll improve his performance.                 | <b>The boss criticized HER:</b><br>She'll be very upset.                                  |
| <b>HE got an unfair deal:</b><br>Did he get angry?                                | <b>SHE got an unfair deal:</b><br>Did she cry?  |
| <b>HE'S getting married:</b><br>He'll get more settled.                           | <b>SHE'S getting married:</b><br>She'll get pregnant and leave.                           |
| <b>HE'S having a baby:</b><br>He'll need a raise.                                 | <b>SHE'S having a baby:</b><br>She'll cost the company money in maternity benefits.       |
| <b>HE'S going on a business trip:</b><br>It's good for his career.                | <b>SHE'S going on a business trip:</b><br>What does her husband say?                      |
| <b>HE'S leaving for a better job:</b><br>He recognizes a good opportunity.        | <b>SHE'S leaving for a better job:</b><br>Women are undependable.                         |

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