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Salmon, Lucy Maynard (1853–1927)

Lucy Maynard Salmon was a highly accomplished academic leader during the Progressive Era, at a time when opportunities for women were extremely limited. During her forty-year Vassar College career, she earned a reputation as a nationally prominent historian, suffrage advocate, author, and teacher.

Having earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Michigan in 1876 and 1883, respectively, Salmon took advanced graduate studies from Bryn Mawr professor, and future U.S. president, Woodrow Wilson. Before she began an academic career, Salmon worked in K–12 education. She taught high school in McGregor, Iowa; later, she became the principal of the high school. She also taught at the State Normal School in Terre Haute, Indiana. A pioneer educator, Salmon continued her career in education by teaching history at Vassar College from 1887–1927. In her work, Salmon clearly dismissed the notion that memory by itself was a primary value of history learning. She insisted that historical studies should cover a broad range of topics and that critical thinking skills and independent research should be encouraged for both mature and young students. Salmon's beliefs about the nature of history and her pedagogical practices constitute an important aspect of her legacy.

A leader in many fields, Salmon helped found the American Association of University Women, the American Association of University Professors, and the Middle States Council for the Social Studies. Clearly a prominent academic leader, Salmon was the only woman to serve on the American Historical Association's Committee of Seven and the first woman to be elected to its Executive Council. An advocate of the new social history, Salmon's teaching methods were novel at the time and continue to be relevant today.

Chara Haeussler Bohan