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# Both a College Woman and a Professional Nurse: College Educated Women who Became Professional Nurses, 1890-1920

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# Both a College Woman and a Professional Nurse: College Educated Women who Became Professional Nurses, 1890-1920

## **Abstract**

Within the context of the rapidly changing society of Progressive Era America, educated women were looking for new occupations which would allow them to exercise their skills as independent thinkers, autonomous workers and group leaders. In such a search, some women found their way to professional nursing and entered hospital-based nurse training programs after their college graduations. This study is a history of these college women who became professional nurses between 1890 and 1920 - a period when both institutions for women's higher education and professional nurse training were at a transition point. Historians of women's higher education and historians of nursing alike have yet to focus on this population in their analyses of educated and professional women. However questions about what professional nursing had to offer college women elucidate in new ways the meaning of work to women, female empowerment and the unique opportunities afforded to women through higher education and professional nursing. This dissertation traces the efforts of college women as they looked to nursing as a potential profession through which they could affect social reform and meaningfully engage in the public realm. At the same time, nursing leaders attempted to recruit college women into the field in order to gain professional esteem. Overall the story of college women who became professional nurses from 1890 to 1920 is one of intersection and tension as the leaders of both institutions developed differing and irreconcilable visions of the future of professional nursing.

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**BOTH A COLLEGE WOMAN AND A PROFESSIONAL NURSE:  
COLLEGE EDUCATED WOMEN WHO BECAME PROFESSIONAL  
NURSES, 1890-1920**

**Katharine Therese Smith, MS, CRNP**

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**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: “The Greatest Potential Force for Reform:” The Vassar Training Camp for Nurses	29
Chapter 3: “If We College Women can Work Together:” The Search for Suitable Occupations	58
Chapter 4: “We Find her in the Hospital Wards Content:” The Recruitment of College Women	93
Chapter 5: “I Had it All My Own Way:” College Women, Control and Nursing	123
Conclusion	158
Bibliography	170

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## ABSTRACT

BOTH A COLLEGE WOMAN AND A PROFESSIONAL NURSE: COLLEGE  
EDUCATED WOMEN WHO BECAME PROFESSIONAL NURSES, 1890-1920

Katharine Therese Smith, MSN, CRNP

Patricia D'Antonio, PhD, RN, FAAN

Within the context of the rapidly changing society of Progressive Era America, educated women were looking for new occupations, which would allow them to exercise their skills as independent thinkers, autonomous workers and group leaders. In such a search, some women found their way to professional nursing and entered hospital-based nurse training programs after their college graduations. This study is a history of these college women who became professional nurses between 1890 and 1920 - a period when both institutions for women's higher education and professional nurse training were at a transition point. Historians of women's higher education and historians of nursing alike have yet to focus on this population in their analyses of educated and professional women. However questions about what professional nursing had to offer college women elucidate in new ways the meaning of work to women, female empowerment and the unique opportunities afforded to women through higher education and professional nursing. This dissertation traces the efforts of college women as they looked to nursing as a potential profession through which they could affect social reform and meaningfully engage in the public realm. At the same time, nursing leaders attempted to recruit college women into the field in order to gain professional esteem. Overall the story of college

women who became professional nurses from 1890 to 1920 is one of intersection and tension as the leaders of both institutions developed differing and irreconcilable visions of the future of professional nursing.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 1830s Mary Lyon, the founder of the one of the first institutions dedicated to a liberal education for women in the United States, wrote notes concerning the necessity of such an education. “Females (are) narrow souled sometimes...All can have enlarged souls. (Female education) aspires to this.” She argued such an education would provide “a knowledge of the physical system...of the mind...of human nature – of the passions of society – of succinctly philosophical, clear discriminating minds – (and the) ability to tell others by truth and great motives.”<sup>1</sup> Her notes described her resolution that higher education was a necessity for women if they were to realize their full potential as individuals. Her Mount Holyoke Seminary, established in 1837, would serve as the model after which the women’s colleges of the later nineteenth century would be designed. The most elite of these institutions - Vassar, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe and Barnard Colleges - were those most closely linked to the mission and design of Mary Lyon and are known today as the Seven Sister’s Colleges.

Close to fifty years following Mary Lyon’s notes, Florence Nightingale, the mother of modern nursing, wrote, “why have women passion, intellect, moral activity – these three – and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?...Give us back our suffering, we cry to heaven in our hearts – suffering rather than indifferentism;

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Lyon, Notes on Female Education, Unknown date, Mary Lyon Collection, Mount

for out of nothing comes nothing.”<sup>2</sup> To Nightingale professional nursing offered women a space and profession through which they could exercise their abilities to the fullest.

In the eyes of both Lyon and Nightingale, society had failed half of its individuals; for women were hungry for spaces in which they could grow their intellects and utilize all their capacities. Mary Lyon and Florence Nightingale would become the mothers of women’s higher education and professional nursing respectively. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries hundreds of institutions for women would be designed and built following the teachings of these women.

The following study is a history of women who attended college and then entered nurse training programs between the years of 1890 and 1920. It has the power to contribute to our understanding of the development of women’s work through a history of this unique cohort. It is focused in scope, investigating the graduates of five of the Seven Sister’s Colleges. It is these institutions that were most elite and progressive in nature, graduating women that were encouraged to be intellectual in mind and independent in spirit. Graduates from the institutions of Barnard and Radcliffe Colleges have been excluded from this research because the schools existed as annexes of men’s colleges, located aside the male universities of Harvard and Columbia. As such, they lacked the influential, all female communities that existed at the other Seven Sisters schools.

This research adds to our understandings of women’s experiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Questions about what professional nursing had

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2.

to offer college women promise to elucidate in new ways the meaning of work to women, female empowerment and the unique opportunities afforded to women through higher education and professional nursing. Historians of women's higher education and historians of nursing alike have yet to focus on this population in their analyses of educated and professional women. When discussing the professional trajectories of female college graduates from this period, historians of women's higher education have focused on women who challenged the conservative female roles of the time by entering traditionally male professions, such as medicine, academia and laboratory science.<sup>3</sup> Historians of nursing have looked at the profession as a route which women have gained access to social mobility. Patricia D'Antonio, historian of American nursing, has argued that professional nursing has been a venue through which working and lower-middle-class women have gained respect and status within their own communities as well as access to further education.<sup>4</sup> My work is positioned at the intersection of these two histories. I argue that between 1890 and 1920 college women were increasingly searching for new occupations. Some women found in nursing unique qualities, which were not available through other types of work. Nursing offered these women a professional life that afforded social and professional independence, control over their own work and space, the potential to hold professional positions of power and an avenue through which to affect social change and reform needed in Progressive Era America.

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<sup>3</sup> For example see Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and Mirriam Levin, *Defining Women's Scientific Enterprise: Mount Holyoke Faculty and the Rise of American Science* (Lenanon: First University Press of New England, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Patricia D'Antonio, *American Nursing: A History of Knowledge, Authority and the Meaning of Work* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

### Framework: A New Feminist Perspective

In their stories of college-educated women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians have revealed a bias regarding the value of women's choices after college. They portray women's decisions to enter traditionally male professions as the most socially challenging actions that had the greatest influence on the progress of empowerment for women. By far, the women who became physicians, journalists, scientists, and college professors are most frequently lauded. Their life paths are seen as creating the in roads that would lead to changing relationships between the sexes in the future.<sup>5</sup> These women certainly were courageous in their professional choices and their successes greatly impacted women's and future feminist movements. However by focusing on this type of woman only, the influence of women who made different choices is lost. Women who joined what were considered to be the female professions - teaching, librarianship, social work and nursing - are not investigated with the same rigor. Their contributions to the progress of women in the public sphere have been overlooked, their actions portrayed as conservative and not particularly empowering.

In her chronicle of American feminism, *The Feminist Promise*, Christine Stansell describes two types of feminist action in the United States, which she associates with different generations of women. She characterizes these varying types as the "politics of

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<sup>5</sup> Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*.

the mothers” and the “politics of the daughters.”<sup>6</sup> That of the mothers, she explains, encompasses generations of women who worked within the system and accepted social norms to create empowering spaces for women. Conversely, the ‘politics of the daughters’ existed as directly confrontational, often militant, challenges to a social order, which subjugated women to a lesser role. The ‘daughters’ fought a fight for liberal feminism, hoping to achieve equal political rights to their male counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Suggesting that women’s empowerment can be gained through differing types of actions, Stansell argues that women and men who never would have characterized themselves feminists or members of a woman’s movement may, nonetheless, have made decisions and taken actions that were influential in the greater arc of women’s empowerment. Through their work they increased the power available to women in the public domain even though it may not have been their intention to do so. In her investigation into evolving women’s movements throughout American history, she broadens the usual scope of actors to women and men who did not make women’s empowerment their most valued goal. “Most had other loyalties and affiliations. But it is...those for whom the cause of Woman was not the only cause who sometimes discovered another road to the future or pointed to roads not taken.”<sup>8</sup>

This dissertation extends the perspective of Stansell’s work. Understanding - as Stansell proposes - that empowering female actions may present themselves differently throughout history, offers a new lens through which to consider a woman’s choice to

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<sup>6</sup> Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to Present* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2010), xv.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Stansell, *The Promise of Feminism*, xix.

become a professional nurse between 1890 and 1920. We may be able to draw new meanings from women's actions to move from women's colleges to professional nursing when we approach their stories from this perspective. Although these women's actions supported many of the social norms regarding women's roles of the time, I ask might they have been empowering and challenging actions all the same? As Stansell suggests regarding some of her actors, might college-educated women who became professional nurses have "discovered another road to the future, or pointed to roads not taken?"<sup>9</sup>

### The Progressive Era and Women's Evolving Roles

What is commonly referred to as the Progressive Era marks a time of great change in the United States. Beginning in the 1890's and lasting into the 1920's Americans experienced large cultural, economic, and political shifts. These changes were sparked by the quick rise of industrialization that contributed to a growingly stratified society. The owners of industry and financial institutions saw record profits, creating an elite, wealthy, upper class. This class included both families that had inherited long held wealth from their ancestors and newly wealthy families that made their money in industry, such as the Carnegies and the Rockefellers. As the economic focus in the United States moved away from family farms that once supported the country, men, women and children moved away from their rural homes and into the urban centers where positions in industry were available. Joining these working class men and women in the cities were a large wave of

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. These low paid workers filled positions in factories, often lived in poverty in overcrowded conditions and had very little to no opportunities for upward mobility. Some sociologists at the time estimated that across the United States forty percent of the population was living in poverty from 1900-1910. To demonstrate the stratification and inequity that existed across the United States during this period, one professor at the time calculated that those living in poverty made up to 65 percent of the population but owned only five percent of the wealth. In contrast the richest families made up only two percent of the population, yet owned over sixty percent of the total wealth.<sup>10</sup> These gaps in wealth led to large gaps in quality of life. The richest and middle class families - almost all of whom were white, native born Anglo-Saxons - lived comfortable lives in spacious homes, worked in good conditions and did not depend on the women or children in the families to work for wages. Most hired domestic workers to help with the work in the home.

Poor families, however, were mostly new immigrants of eastern or southern European decent. Of the native born poor families many were African American or southern whites. These families lived in crowded conditions in urban centers or in rural areas. Those living in poverty worked in terrible conditions and struggled for enough money to feed and clothe their families. Many families had wives and children who also worked to support the income. Living in poverty at this time meant often living in poor health with little access to necessities like nutritious food, healthy milk and clean water. Poor children suffered from rickets and hookworm and adults were vulnerable to

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<sup>10</sup> John Whiteclay Chambers, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

tuberculosis and other sicknesses. The life expectancy of those living in poverty was ten years less than those in the middle or upper classes.<sup>11</sup>

As more Americans became aware of the terrible working and living conditions of the poor, social reform entered the minds of American groups, leaders and politicians. Working class individuals joined together to resist the power of corporations by forming active labor unions to incite change in working conditions and wages. Middle class and elite women mobilized their women's groups and volunteered their time to support social changes that they believed would result in better working and living conditions for poor families and women. Female activists such as Lillian Wald and Jane Adams began the settlement house movement. Settlement homes were community houses located in the slums of big cities. These homes served as community centers where middle class women volunteered to live among the urban poor. They worked to share with them their knowledge about health and education, as informed by their middle class values in hopes of alleviating some of the effects of poverty. Settlement homes became a popular destination for college women after graduation. Functioning at the intersection of volunteerism and professional work, some college-educated women dedicated many years after college to working in these communities. Sociology, a newly developed science, and the new social work professionals worked towards societal reforms that would address the overwhelming economic and quality of life disparities among Americans. Overall the belief of the Progressives was that poverty was not the result of individual failure. Instead the society in general was responsible for bettering the lives of

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<sup>11</sup> Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).



its members. Socially - scholars, professionals, scientists and volunteers could incite reform through their own work. Politically - an activist government could bring more power to the individuals of the country and away from corporate and industrial interests.<sup>12</sup>

With growing industrialization and increasing social reform activities, societal roles for women were adapting as well. Victorian ideals of womanhood, which prescribed strict separate spheres for men and women, were evolving with the social reforms of the Progressive Era. A sea change was occurring that altered societal expectations about women, their roles in and outside of the home and the ways in which women saw themselves. Springing from the Progressive Era was a new type of woman – the new woman. She enacted a more independent role that challenged accepted ideas of womanhood. Sara Evans, a scholar of women’s history writes, “into this industrializing, conflict-filled context the middle-class ‘new woman’ arrived... She enjoyed a measure of individuality and autonomy that frightened many of her contemporaries.”<sup>13</sup> She did many things previously reserved for men – she rode bicycles, she went to college, she was active in athletics and she often worked for wages. She was neither wife nor daughter. As historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains, “the new woman constituted a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon. Eschewing marriage, she fought

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) see chapter 2 for more in depth narrative specifically on social reforms, Chambers, *Tyranny of Change*, Diner and *A Very Different Age*. For a nuanced analysis of the Progressive Era with considerations of politics, race and imperialism see Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc, 1989), 146.

for professional visibility, espoused innovative often radical, economic and social reforms and wielded real political power.”<sup>14</sup>

The image of the new woman was often linked to that of the college woman. They were frequently one and the same. Middle class women of this generation saw college as an opportunity for a life very different than that available to their mothers. Many women looked to college education as a chance for intellectual self-fulfillment and independent action outside of the homes of their fathers or those of their future husbands.<sup>15</sup> Their mothers had matured in a Victorian culture that strictly prescribed their behaviors and identities as weak-bodied, yet morally superior women whose proper place existed solely in the private home. In comparison, Rosenberg argues, this generation of new women saw a college education as an opportunity to find their way into a public, professional world that had up until this point been reserved only for men. They had, “invested college education with their dreams of autonomy and power. It promised them a new identity.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Empowerment in All-Female Spaces*

In addition to the new identities and autonomy that middle class white women were finding on the campuses of women’s colleges, they were also discovering power in their all-female clubs, groups and newly developing institutions. Women’s groups had

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<sup>14</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 245.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Woman*.

<sup>16</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 253.

existed as part of the Victorian social blueprint. Women would meet together to discuss literature, music and, sometimes even, politics. By allowing membership only to other women, these groups conformed to the Victorian ideals of separate spheres. However with the development of the Progressive Era and the fomenting of various reform movements, these women's clubs often took on new purposes. Many began working for social change, fighting for varied causes from temperance to social uplift to suffrage.<sup>17</sup>

Historians often consider the social work done by many women's groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of a maternalist movement. This movement served as a way for white, middle-class women to organize and take action for common goals. Maternalists argued that women were inherently different from men and therefore their power laid in unique qualities such as moral superiority and maternal and caring senses. Thus by virtue of being female, they argued, their participation in the public and political spheres was necessary for the salvation of American society.<sup>18</sup> They worked together in these groups to influence political changes that they believed would uplift other women and American society more broadly. These clubs and organizations were unique in that they were spaces where women together and without the input of men decided on political ideals, made plans to enact them and went forth to do so. Some of the most powerful work of women's clubs and organizations in the late nineteenth century focused on temperance; arguing that alcohol led men to squander the family income and behave abusively towards their wives and children. They also focused on new populations that were becoming more marginalized in an increasingly industrialized

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<sup>17</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

American society. Women's organizations sought to protect working girls from exploitation by owners of industry and teach immigrant women to have a cleaner more hygienic home that resembled that of the white middle class.<sup>19</sup> Maternalist and feminist reform discourses in the late nineteenth century capitalized on claims of women's special knowledge of domestic and family work in order to gain for upper-middle-class women a route to power in the public sphere.<sup>20</sup>

Historian of women's history, Sara Evans, has argued that these women's reform movements were empowering to women by way of the processes through which they attempted to instigate change. It was the experience of women coming together in all female spaces, she argues, that provided new opportunities. An organization with entry open only to women and run by women assured that the planning, organizing, and authority positions would be held by women. As a group and individually women were given the opportunities to experience power as they decided on courses of action and undertook them. Evans refers to the power of such organizations, "as an open and democratic female environment – a free space within which women experimented and pushed their traditional self-definitions past the boundaries of domesticity and into the broadest demand for full political participation."<sup>21</sup> In her work, historian Martha Vicinius also explores woman only institutions as a way to examine how "women ordered their

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<sup>19</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty* and Nancy Cott, *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 89.

<sup>21</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 127.

space and time when given the opportunity.”<sup>22</sup> She argued that, “within them we can see the development of leadership skills, friendship networks, and a power base for public work.”<sup>23</sup>

Historians have included women’s colleges in this group of female organizations arguing that they too provided all female communities in which women acted, thought and engaged free of the influence of men.<sup>24</sup> Evans argued that boarding schools and women’s colleges provided periods of autonomy in women’s lives in which they were away from their family homes and the homes of future husbands. She states, “they lived in an environment that emphasized their capabilities and solidarity as women.”<sup>25</sup> But once women graduated from these all female institutions and entered back into a sexually integrated world, they were challenged to find a way to continue their work as independent thinkers and actors. “Certainly college-educated women found that society had little use for their newly acquired capacities.”<sup>26</sup>

Vicinus includes both women’s colleges and nurse training schools in her work. She argues these spaces provided alternatives to marriage and allowed for the self-determination of priorities and types of work and leisure for women. She emphasizes the power of women’s occupations in particular, as she claims it was the search for meaningful work that was at the center of women’s communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nurse training schools provide a fruitful case to delve into

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<sup>22</sup> Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty* and Vicinus, *Independent Women*.

<sup>25</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

the complexities of woman only spaces organized around wage-earning work. Yet, she argues, unlike the essentially woman-controlled spaces at women's colleges, nursing was fraught with issues of class and gender. Female nurses and nurse supervisors had to navigate the mostly male forces that ultimately controlled the work and organization of the hospital.<sup>27</sup> Yet, in her history of the Pennsylvania Hospital Training School, Nancy Tomes illuminates the ways in which the all-female community present in the school provided for new routes for female agency. She suggests that within nurse training schools, in particular, elite students were able to create a female only sphere where professional and social alliances afforded them routes to leadership roles, professional value and social respect.<sup>28</sup> Although different from the purely woman-controlled spaces of women's colleges and women's clubs, nurse training schools still existed as spaces where women were educated alongside each other, lived in female only communities and were mostly taught and supervised by other women.

Women's clubs, maternalist reform movements, women's colleges and early nurse training schools all serve as examples of female only communities where women gained power through participating in new activities previously reserved only for men, capitalizing on the gendered understandings of women's work or by creating a professional identity that allowed for a new conceptualization of professional women. This work begins at the height of American maternalist reform movements and all-women's clubs and organizations. Against this backdrop women's colleges and nurse

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<sup>27</sup> Vicinus, *Independent Women*, ch. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Tomes, "Little World of Our Own': The Pennsylvania Hospital Training School for Nurses, 1895-1907," in *Women and Health in America*, ed. Judith Walzer Leavitt (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

training schools were developing their own communities – all-female communities that provided a space for empowered female actions. Understanding the historical context in which these institutions developed allows us to question whether the all-female environment of nurse training programs was a factor in college-educated women's decisions to become professional nurses.

### The Parallels of American Nursing and Women's Higher Education

Investigating women's higher education in conjunction with professional nursing offers a unique glimpse into the ways that these two, commonly assumed to be separate roads, actually have many similarities in their places in women's history. Both professional nursing and women's higher education were situated in similar places by 1890. Both institutions were expanding at a rapid pace, struggling to establish for themselves what the meaning of their education would be and how it would affect the identity of its students. In their struggles to establish their positions in changing Progressive Era America, they opened up new opportunities for women. Modern nursing provided a new professional role that was not previously available to middle class women. Women's colleges offered environments where women could be away from domestic responsibilities and work to create an identity as independent thinkers and actors. Both offered all female spaces where unique opportunities for empowerment were available to women. Higher education for women and modern training for professional nurses opened up new roads for women in their understandings of

themselves, their professional identities and the possibilities for independence, empowerment and ability to meaningfully engage in the public realm.

### *The Development of Professional Nursing*

With the advent of new scientific developments in the late nineteenth century, specifically the germ theory of disease, antiseptic techniques and new medical technologies, modern medicine was experiencing ever increasing success in outcomes. As a result more and more patients sought care outside of their homes and in new scientifically advanced hospitals. More patients seeking care in hospitals, combined with increasing industrialization and immigration led to a sharp increase in the development of new modern hospitals and with them a greater need for modern and scientifically trained nurses. As a result individual hospitals opened their own training programs for nurses to increase nursing staff at their institutions. These programs served as both professional training opportunities for young women as well as a source of labor for the associated hospitals. Nurses trained on the floors of the hospitals, serving as both nurse and student.<sup>29</sup>

This fast burgeoning of hospitals and nurses' training led to a large diversity in schools. There existed elite schools such as Massachusetts General Hospital Training

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<sup>29</sup> Cynthia Connolly, "Hampton, Nutting and Rival Gospels at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and Training School for Nurses, 1889-1906," *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 30 (1998): 24. For a comprehensive analysis of the development of modern hospitals see Charles Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).



School for Nurses, Johns Hopkins Hospital Training School for Nurses and the Illinois Training School for Nurses. These schools attracted women from mostly middle class families with strong academic backgrounds. Most had high school diplomas. Some even came with college diplomas from the best women's colleges. At the opposite end of the spectrum were small schools that had lower to no requirements for education of applicants. At the most, one or two years of high school education was required for admittance. Across the board there was no standard for what students needed to be taught while in training school, or even how many years a nursing course should last. The more elite schools provided formal theoretical instruction and limited work hours, while others sent students to learn while doing on the hospital floor. Such a range in training programs brought with it a large diversity in the backgrounds – social, economic and academic – of nurses in training and the positions these nurses entered once graduated.<sup>30</sup>

Some nursing leaders saw this lack of standardization as the greatest threat to the further advancement of professional nursing. The top superintendents at the most elite schools first came together in 1893 to address the state of the profession during the Columbian exposition in Chicago. It was here that a vision for modern nursing was first publicly articulated in the United States. As members of the Congress on Hospitals and Dispensaries, leaders of the nursing profession joined together to develop a new

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<sup>30</sup> Lavinia Dock and Isabel Maitland Stewart, *A Short History of Nursing from the Earliest Time to the Present Day Fourth Edition* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1938), D'Antonio, *American Nursing*, Susan Reverby, *Ordered to Care: The Dilemma of American Nursing, 1850-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers*.

orientation and plan for advancements in the field. As a result of the congress the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses was established. The Society stood as the first professional organization of nurses in the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Dr. John S. Billings, the director of the Congress on Hospitals and Dispensaries dedicated one section of the congress to nursing and appointed Isabel Hampton as its chairman, who had the honor to be the only woman to speak at the general session.<sup>32</sup> Hampton was the superintendent of the prestigious John's Hopkins Training School of Nurses. With the opening of the school in 1889 she established a new ideal in nursing education. She implemented a course that emphasized the importance of theoretical instruction and evaluated students through rigorous tests and grading.<sup>33</sup> In her speech entitled, "Educational Standards for Nurses," she addressed the current status of nurses' training nationwide. She described the qualities that in her eyes the ideal nurse would have upon entering training school. Acknowledging that at the time many believed that any woman could adequately take up the work of nursing, Hampton argued that a woman who would become a trained nurse must be exceptional. "She must be strong mentally, morally and physically, and to do thorough work she must have infinite tact, which is another name for common sense."<sup>34</sup> In conclusion she stated that these qualities in a woman, especially her intelligence, were necessary in order for a nurse to do valuable

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<sup>31</sup> Isabel Maitland Stewart, "Introduction" in *Nursing of the Sick 1893*, ed. National League of Nursing Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc, 1949) and Dock and Stewart, *A Short History of Nursing*.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Connolly, "Hampton, Nutting and Rival Gospels."

<sup>34</sup> Hampton, "Educational Standards for Nurses," in *Nursing of the Sick 1893*, ed. National League of Nursing Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc, 1949), 3.

work rather than simply becoming a “mere machine.”<sup>35</sup> Concerning the educational requirements of women entering nurse training schools, she suggested that all should have graduated from the best high schools in the country with a sound background in English, arithmetic and an ability to express oneself with sophistication and grace.<sup>36</sup> These qualities, set forth by Hampton, were adopted by the elite nursing leadership as they worked to further improve the standard of professional nursing. Leaders of the powerful American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses continued to build on this idea of the ideal nurse candidate in order to determine which women they believed should be most sought after in the field and which women should be excluded.

Scholars of nursing history have argued that beginning with the establishment of the first national organization of nurse educators; nursing leaders were deeply engaged in a professionalizing project.<sup>37</sup> The Progressive Era marked a time of expanding professionalism in an array of occupations including law, medicine, business, social work and nursing. Attainment and recognition of professional status provided a certain level of esteem and reflected an occupation’s autonomy, possession of expert knowledge and ability for self-definition.<sup>38</sup> Scholars of women’s history have argued that professionalization played out in gendered ways. In particular, women who gained

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<sup>35</sup> Hampton, “Educational Standards for Nurses,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> Hampton, “Educational Standards for Nurses.”

<sup>37</sup> Susan Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, Barbara Melosh, “*The Physician’s Hand: Work Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), Patricia D’Antonio, *American Nursing*, Susan Armeny, “Resolute Enthusiasts: The Effort to Professionalize American Nursing, 1880-1915” (PhD Diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1983), and Tomes, “Little World of Our Own.”

<sup>38</sup> Burton J Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978).

access to male dominated fields such as medicine, law and academia, were met with resistance from their new male colleagues as they were denied positions of power, visibility and influence. While female dominated occupations turned their efforts towards excluding other women to attain professional status and esteem. These professional women worked to establish distinctions between themselves and unprofessional or amateur women in an effort to align their work with that of the male professionals with whom they had to collaborate and compete with for power.<sup>39</sup> It was within this context that nursing leaders attempted to elevate the status of the field and essentially obtain professional esteem. Thus controlling who could earn the status of a trained nurse.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Development of the College Woman*

With the opening of women's institutions of higher learning at the end of the nineteenth century the daughters of white middle class families were leaving their homes to attend college in increasing numbers.<sup>41</sup> Although Mount Holyoke Seminary was first established in 1837, it was not until 1865 that Vassar College, the first four-year

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<sup>39</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), Beth Linker, "The Business of Ethics: Gender, Medicine and the Professional Codification of the American Physiotherapy Association, 1918-1935," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 60 no. 7, (2005), Sheila Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1978). In chapter 3 I explore much deeper this literature on professionalization in female dominated professions and use it as the basis from which to analyze nursing leaders' attempts to recruit college women.

<sup>40</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, Melosh, *The Physician's Hand*, and Dock and Stewart, *A Short History of Nursing*.

<sup>41</sup> Cott, *No Small Courage*.

institution chartered as a women's college, opened its gates. Within the next twenty years many women's colleges that offered a curriculum parallel to that offered to men at the best colleges and universities were established. Most notable and prestigious of these institutions were the leaders in the northeast, Vassar, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe and Barnard Colleges. These schools developed in reference and reaction to each other. Their structures were based on the same mission to offer a liberal education for women provide a community away from home where young women could develop intellect and independence. Leading into the twentieth century a second generation of women were entering these institutions. For these women the idea of attending a four year college was no longer novel. However the purpose of such an education in an individual woman's life and the identity of the new college woman had yet to be established. A significant number of these women went on to have professional careers after graduation. Some worked for a few years before marrying, but others found that with a growing number of professional opportunities available to them due to new reform movements, increasing industrialization and the expanding realm of science in the Progressive Era, they had the potential to live lives as professionals, outside of the domestic sphere.

New professional opportunities and the promise of financial independence that came with suitable work offered these New Women additional lifestyle option. Overall college women between 1890 and 1920 married in much lower rates and significantly later in life than their non-college educated counterparts. Historians have estimated that

over this time period almost fifty percent of college educated women never married.<sup>42</sup> College women found themselves in new living arrangements. Some women supported themselves financially and could live alone, but most unmarried women lived with their unmarried friends and companions or in communities of single working-women such as settlement homes, boarding schools or colleges. Overall new professional opportunities and new colleges for women provided for middle class progressive era women new ways to step out of the domestic sphere and engage in the public realm in a meaningful way.

Historians have been investigating the development of these institutions of women's higher education in the United States from their inception. The intentional record keeping and archiving that was common among the earliest women's colleges has provided rich data through which to investigate the story of women's higher education. Beginning in the 1980s several histories of the first and most prestigious women's colleges were written.<sup>43</sup> Together they tell a story of the unique experience of these women within the campus gates. Understanding the experience of a student at one of these women's colleges provides the context necessary to understand their efforts to find suitable work after graduation. For during the four years a woman spent as a college student she developed qualities and gained skills that set her apart from other women of their time. These qualities were understood to be a "broad educational background," "culture," physical and mental strength and leadership experience. These skills imbued in graduates from the sense that they were privileged in their training and many desired

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<sup>42</sup> Cott, *No Small Courage*, Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for Women* (New York: Harper, 1959) and Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*.

<sup>43</sup> Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education* and Horowitz, *Alma Mater*.

the ability to put their new found abilities to work.<sup>44</sup>

The establishment of the original academic course at Vassar College serves as an informative example that can be used to understand the state of and aims implicit in the academic curricula at the five elite women's colleges. The academic course consisted of nine academic departments: English, ancient and modern languages, mathematics and physics, astronomy, natural history with the addition of a thorough course in hygiene and physiology. The addition of hygiene and physiology was important for it underscored the emphasis implicit in women's education that training the female body was a necessary adjunct to training the female mind.<sup>45</sup> Each school began with a dedication to such a classical curriculum for it was believed that if women could succeed at such a course of study, it would prove to opponents that women were indeed suited for higher education.

In addition to the academic curriculum, the all-female communities present at women's colleges provided a fertile ground for the establishment of organizations, clubs and groups developed, maintained and controlled by women. This wealth of activities is what historians refer to as the "extracurriculum," suggesting that the activities college studies participated in offered an education as important as the academic. Many of these activities were similar to those offered at men's and coeducational institutions, such as student government, competitive athletics and literary groups. Yet existing in the all-female community of the women's college it was assured that women would hold the power positions in such groups. Thus these activities outside of the academic curriculum

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<sup>44</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* and Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* In chapter five I explore in depth the how this emphasis on physical fitness for college women affected their choices to work as professional nurses.

became integral to the development of college women. They allowed women to try, many for the first time, roles that were not available to them in an aging Victorian society dedicated to the ideal of separate spheres for men and women. Women became political leaders, social powerhouses, athletic stars, valued artists, musicians and actors and developers and leaders of numerous clubs and societies.<sup>46</sup>

Women felt the power of developing their own female literary societies, where their creativity was recognized, honored and encouraged. They had the opportunities to be the leaders of athletic and debate teams, which represented their schools in intercollegiate competitions. And most importantly, at the women's colleges, they constituted and led their own self-governmental structures within their schools.<sup>47</sup> Barbara Solomon, an eminent scholar on the history of women's higher education, explained the importance of this opportunity, "Class elections and assembly meetings also gave women an education in organization, leadership, working together, and articulating their views. This form of political involvement was a new experience for women."<sup>48</sup> Solomon suggested that these experiences had the power to change the self-consciousness of college-educated women. She labels competitive athletics, literary societies, theater and student government as "symbols of emancipated womanhood" and characterized their overall effects on students. "In their whirl of studies and activities, undergraduates agreed that they had the responsibilities to think, act and contribute as adults, not only

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<sup>46</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*.

<sup>47</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater* and Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*.

<sup>48</sup> Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*.



within their families but in the larger society.”<sup>49</sup> When considering the ways in which higher education affected how women understood and saw themselves, their creation of and participation in the social lives at their colleges is central to painting the picture. At these institutions women not only had the opportunities to participate in activities that they had been excluded from in the past based on gender, but they had the chance to try on new social identities and roles, gaining empowerment through having a voice in the development and management of student groups and organizations.<sup>50</sup>

A college education afforded middle class women new opportunities that were previously not available to them. The liberal education provided them with the academic knowledge that had previously been reserved only for men. Being encouraged to engage as serious students they were able to develop their academic skills and see themselves as serious intellectuals. The extracurriculum provided college women with the opportunities to practice leadership qualities in an all-female environment that assured they would hold the positions of power. They gained skills as athletes, club leaders and student government officials. The academic and social experiences that women were afforded on college campus prepared them to step out of the college gates prepared to engage in the social world. However they often lacked the information and specialized training needed to enter these new professions. With increasing frequency between 1890 and 1920, they searched for professional opportunities that would allow them to utilize their newly developed capacities.

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<sup>49</sup> Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 114.

<sup>50</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* and Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*.

In the following chapters I look to college educated women who became professional nurses to illuminate the ways that nursing offered an empowering role for these New Women. Set against the backdrop of the Progressive Era nursing was a way through which college women could affect social change while also establishing economic freedom and independence. Some nursing leaders argued that college women were an untapped resource for the field. Citing their broad education backgrounds, sophistication and leadership qualities some nursing leaders argued that college women should be filling the visible and influential professional roles as superintendents, instructors and administrators. However the intersection of college women and professional nursing was one fraught with tension. Some nursing leaders felt that an emphasis on college education threatened both their own positions as well as that of nurses who were qualified through their character and dedication. Additionally there existed anxiety about whether these middle class, educated women would be unable to do the highly disciplined, physically demanding and often unclean work that nursing required. Yet some college women appreciated just these qualities, as they were ways to better develop their physical strength, endurance and emotional restraint – all qualities that they had learned as college students demonstrated the power they contained within themselves.

In chapter two I set the scene with the story of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses - a recruitment effort during World War I that brought college educated women and nursing together on a large scale. The Vassar College administrators who developed the camp hoped to interest their college women in nursing for it offered a way for these

women to fulfill influential roles in a changing profession that was closely tied to some of the world's most challenging social problems of the time. Chapter three steps back in time and looks at what set the Vassar Training Camp in motion. It examines the actions of students and alumnae of Vassar, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley and Bryn Mawr Colleges as they were searching for ways to engage in meaningful work after college. Realizing that there was little information available for college graduates regarding suitable vocations other than teaching, they took it upon themselves to create networks to bring this information to each other. Chapter four turns to the efforts of nursing leaders to specifically recruit college women into the profession. Building on the existing scholarship concerning the gendered ways that professionalization played out in the Progressive Era, I argue that nursing leaders actively recruited college women to fill the most visible and executive positions in the field in hopes that this would help to gain professional status for the field as a whole. However these efforts were met with opposition from other leaders who felt that college women would not make well-disciplined and hard-working nurses. Finally chapter five delves into the experiences of these elite educated college women as they were students in nurse training schools and worked as professional nurses. It demonstrates that college women offered representations of themselves as women who found within nursing roles as independent actors, powerful leaders and organizers of their own space, time and work. College women turned professional nurses emphasized the ways in which their roles as professional nurses allowed them to exercise control over their own physical and

emotional abilities, supervise other workers and control their own work and work environment.

## Chapter 2: “The Greatest Potential Force for Reform:” The Vassar Training Camp for Nurses

In the summer of 1918, Priscilla Barrows, a 1916 graduate of Wellesley College and a student nurse at the newly conceived Vassar Training Camp for Nurses wrote home to her mother.

We are a highly selective bunch, physically and mentally....We are expected to have a hand in solving many of the world’s most serious social problems. And among other things we are to disprove the suspicion that a college education is in any way a disadvantage to the nursing profession.<sup>51</sup>

Barrows was one of the 435 female college graduates who walked through the gates of Vassar College in June of 1918 to begin a 3 month nurses’ preparatory course as members of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses. The camp was developed as a joint collaboration between Vassar College and American nursing leaders in order to train a large number of women to address the vast nursing shortage created by World War I. In the winter of 1917 American troops had been involved in the war in Europe for over ten months. American civilians were daily making sacrifices at home on the domestic front to support the war effort. The troops were in great need of supplies, support and most importantly, nurses.<sup>52</sup> Trained nurses were needed both to care for soldiers abroad as well as fill domestic positions left by nurses who had already gone to Europe.

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Gladys Bonner Clappison, *Vassar’s Rainbow Division: The Training Camp for Nurses at Vassar College* (Lake Mills: Gladys Bonner Clappison, 1964), 40.

<sup>52</sup> Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

Although this shortage provided the profession with an opportunity to expand in great numbers, it was also fraught with tension as calls for new training methods were made to quickly fill the vast number of openings. The professionalizing project that had long been underway by nursing leaders was focused on establishing increased standards for nursing education. The gold standard was a three-year's course of study that incorporated both theoretical and practical training. Any entrance to practice requiring less than this was seen by many as a threat to the professional status of nursing and the caliber of women who would call themselves trained nurses. In order to prepare more nurses at a faster rate, the military was willing to accept a system where volunteers were trained as nursing aids. Their work was to supplement that of traditionally trained nurses. To some nursing leaders this posed a potential breakdown to the fragile standards of professional nurse training by offering a shortened course and creating a new and less rigorous pathway to nursing practice.<sup>53</sup> The training camp proved to be a great experiment in both nurse's training and professional preparation for college women. It was unique in its population, serving as the first large-scale effort aimed at recruiting college women into nursing. Additionally its accelerated structure separated theoretical training from practical training. At a time when both women's higher education and professional nursing were at a potential turning point, the training camp offered new possibilities for both nurses' education and professional training for women on their college campuses.

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<sup>53</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*.

Other training camps aimed at college graduates were already in development and underway to prepare graduates for war work. In nearby Plattsburgh New York, a military training camp had been established specifically for training male college graduates. It was dedicated to providing college men with intensive and accelerated training to become army reserve officers.<sup>54</sup> Similar to the immense nursing shortage, the medical needs posed by the challenges of World War I aided in the establishment of a new allied medical field for women – physiotherapy. In the summer of 1917 the United States Army medical department, in conversations with their Orthopedic Advisory Council (OAC) articulated a need for specific rehabilitative workers to aid in the recovery of injured soldiers. Discussions ensued over who these reconstructive aids, or physiotherapists, should be. Once it was decided that they should be women, not men, the question arose as to whether nurses would be appropriate for such work. As historian Beth Linker has argued, it was eventually decided that the nurturing and caring aspect of nurses’ work would be more harmful than helpful. For what the injured soldier needed was someone who would encourage his strength in overcoming his new disability, not whose “acts of womanly kindness and care” would lead to further dependence.<sup>55</sup> Once establishing that these new rehabilitative aides should not be trained nurses, the OAC looked to trained physical educators as the source for their new professionals. As Linker explains, “such a woman, they believed, would be more of a drill sergeant than a bedside nurturer – a medical assistant who could stretch and manipulate heavy limbs rather than lend a

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<sup>54</sup> Weldon B. Durham, “‘Big Brother’ and ‘Seven Sisters:’ Camp Life Reforms in World War I, *Military Affairs*, 42, no. 2 (1978), 57-60.

<sup>55</sup> Beth Linker, *War’s Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 65.

sympathetic ear.”<sup>56</sup> As students in college or normal schools these women would have participated themselves in physical education courses and were prepared to become gym teachers at all –women’s schools or colleges. Additionally recruits were required to be between the ages of 25 and 40, meet certain physical fitness requirements and considered to be “of good character.”<sup>57</sup>

In order to recruit these women and train them as physiotherapists the OAC established a handful of war emergency courses to be held on college campuses over the summer, much like the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses. The largest of which was held at Reed College and trained 200 women for war work in the new field of physiotherapy. Other training courses were held across six women’s physical education schools. These schools and physical education departments offered the OAC a training environment that already had the physical structures and equipment needed to train this new group of physiotherapists. In a similar manner, the Vassar College campus offered a similar benefit in the training of college women for professional nursing. The modern and high quality scientific laboratories for which elite women’s college were often known for provided space for learning the scientific, medical, surgical and dietetic techniques necessary for the training of the nurse outside of the hospital.<sup>58</sup> Additionally both training programs capitalized on the college woman as a source of their new forces. Physiotherapists, having trained as physical educators, brought with them knowledge of

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<sup>56</sup> Linker, *War’s Waste*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Beth Linker, “The Business of Ethics: Gender, Medicine, and the Professional Codification of the American Physiotherapy Association, 1918-1935,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 60, no. 3 (2005): 326.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the scientific education offered at women’s colleges see Levin, *Defining Women’s Scientific Enterprise*.



the body, physical strength and training and, as Linker has suggested, experience in serving as a commander of drills and exercises. In terms of the Vassar Training Camp, college women brought with them a broad educational background, including an education in the sciences, which, nursing leaders used to argue to superintendents of nursing schools, made it such that they should be eligible for a shortened course in nurse's training.<sup>59</sup> Both the physiotherapy training camps held at Reed College and other physical education schools and the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses offered college and post-secondary educated women an opportunity to find a new role through which to support the troops abroad. But beyond providing women a way to use their capabilities in the war effort, it also opened up new professional roles for these women.<sup>60</sup>

There is currently a paucity of literature on the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses. Older and more descriptive histories of nursing include short descriptions of the camp as part of their discussions on World War I nursing and advances of nursing education. They characterize the camp as a project spearheaded by the nursing leadership in order to bring nurses' training closer to college and university education.<sup>61</sup> The only work focused solely on the camp was a recollection piece written by Katharine Densford

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<sup>59</sup> Philip Kalisch and Beatrice Kalisch, *The Advance of American Nursing* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 303.

<sup>60</sup> I will further discuss how the professionalization process played out for these physiotherapists in comparison to the professionalizing projects of nursing leaders in chapter three. But for more on the development and the gendered nature of the professionalization of physiotherapy see Linker, *War's Waste* ch. 3, Beth Linker, "Strength and Science: Gender, Physiotherapy, and Medicine in Early-Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no 3 (2005) and Linker, "The Business of Ethics."

<sup>61</sup> Kalisch and Kalisch, *American Nursing*, Esther A. Werminghaus, *Annie W. Goodrich: Her Journey to Yale* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950) and Dock and Stewart, *A Short History of Nursing*.

Dreves, a Vassar Camp alumna and influential nurse leaders, published in the *American Journal of Nursing* in 1975. In this article she suggested that the impact of the camp was to bring the attention of colleges to professional nursing as well as work to interest more college women in nursing.<sup>62</sup> In this chapter I argue that the training camp was not a project developed by the nursing leadership for its own professionalizing purposes. Instead it was conceived of and developed by Vassar College administrators and alumnae who were interested in nursing as a profession for their college women.

The idea for the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses was developed by Minnie Cumnock Blodgett, a new trustee of Vassar College, and soon gained the support of the president, faculty and alumnae association who worked to develop the logistics of the course, the recruitment of its members, and the involvement of the nursing leaders and organizations that were crucial to the implementation of the project. The Vassar College alumnae, administrators and trustees involved with the camp saw it as an opportunity for college women to more easily enter a profession that influenced some of the country's most pressing social issues of the time. Additionally they saw their college women as aptly suited to instigate and carryout reform within the profession. As nurses, these women would have the opportunities to affect social change on a large scale. Dedicated to the causes of social welfare, public health and political change, the Vassar College leaders saw an opportunity to develop their college women into instigators of change in the public realm. At the time professional nursing was developing at a quick pace, reaching out into areas of public health, child welfare and mental health. Additionally

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<sup>62</sup> Katharine Densford Dreves, "Nurses in American History: Vassar Training Camp for Nurses," *American Journal of Nursing* 75, no. 10 (1975): 2000-20002.

due to the educational reform movements underway within the profession, Vassar Nurse Training Camp nurse graduates, as seen by the developers of the camp, would be positioned to influence these greater social problems and highly impact the development of an important profession.

### MacCracken, Mills and Blodgett

Henry MacCracken, President of Vassar College from 1914 to 1946, Herbert E Mills, Vassar College professor of economics, and Minnie Cumnock Blodgett, Vassar alumna and member of the board of trustees, were integral to the inception, development and implementation of the camp. It was not by chance that these three Vassar College leaders spearheaded the project. Each stood as figures in a debate over the liberalization of the Vassar curriculum. Historians have argued that in the first decade of the twentieth century Vassar President James Taylor, the long-standing members of the board of trustees and the more conservative faculty were fighting against the calls of students who were asking to change the status quo. To Taylor and the conservative trustees and faculty, Vassar College should serve as a protected community where women dedicated their studies to a liberal arts curriculum isolated from the political and social upheaval of the Progressive Era. But MacCracken, Mills and Blodgett serving as the newly appointed president, progressive faculty leader and new female member on the board of trustees respectively, stood on the other side of the debate. They aligned themselves with the

student body who was asking for more occupation education while in college in their attempts to bring Vassar College into the twentieth century. From their unique positions, each worked to liberalize the campus, opening the doors to lecturers on political causes and social activism, allowing for a more democratic structure for the students and faculty and most importantly altering the curriculum so that students had the opportunity to connect their academics to the work they wished to do in the public realm upon graduation.<sup>63</sup>

Herbert Mills had been a member of the Vassar College faculty since 1890. But by the time of MacCracken's appointment as president in 1914, Mills was positioned to become a leader in the liberalization of the college. For by this point he had established himself as a successful professor, academic and member of the college community. As his colleagues described him in a volume of essays from his students published posthumously, his numerous publications on economics, labor and government earned him a reputation as an expert on some pressing social issues, including poverty, social welfare and socialism. His support of Vassar College students and continued interest in their development as potential social reformers earned him the respect and appreciation of many students.<sup>64</sup> In 1914 Mills became chairman of the faculty and led a movement among his colleagues arguing for a curriculum that connected students' academic pursuits with the realities of growing social and economic issues. Beyond pushing for changes in the curriculum, Mills worked to encourage and mentor his female students to

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<sup>63</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater*.

<sup>64</sup> Herbert E. Mills, *College Women and the Social Sciences* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971).

become publicly engaged agents of social change upon graduation. He encouraged their interest in social justice, public health, child welfare and problems of government and industry. Thinking about their futures after graduation he urged them to become suffrage workers, child welfare advocates, social workers and nurses, among myriad of other progressive activists. Through these efforts, Mills supported his female students to become influential contributors to a changing society.<sup>65</sup>

But Mills was not alone in his efforts to modernize the campus community and academic curriculum at Vassar. Henry Noble MacCracken was appointed President of the College in 1914. Outgoing Vassar College president Taylor, saw the college, as Helen Horowitz, historian of women's higher education, has argued, as "a haven devoted to learning, protected from political agitation."<sup>66</sup> His efforts to protect his female students from such distractions existed in response to the quickly changing social picture of the Progressive Era. Taylor and other conservative administrators and trustees attempted to keep conversations of women's suffrage, social reform and other progressive social movements outside of the college gates. However by 1914 Taylor's ability to control the political efforts on campus faltered as the students found champions among newer, more progressive faculty and trustees.<sup>67</sup> That year Taylor resigned and MacCracken was appointed as the new college president. This transition in leadership brought with it reform and liberalization among the college community. Students organized women's suffrage and Socialist clubs and social activists, such as Jane Adams,

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<sup>65</sup> Mills, *College Women* and Bonner Clappison, *Vassar's Rainbow Division*.

<sup>66</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 222.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*

made appearances as invited speakers on campus. MacCracken's new presidency worked to encourage what Horowitz explains as the, "independence, cooperation and political expression of faculty and students."<sup>68</sup>

The idea for and early development of the camp has been credited to Minnie Cumnock Blodgett. Blodgett was a Vassar College graduate of the class of 1884 and while at Vassar had become close with two women who would become renowned reformers of child welfare and women's work, Julia Lathrop and Ellen Richards. Lathrop was an active social reformer advocating for child welfare, education and social policy. In 1921 she became the first woman to hold a United States Bureau office as the director of the newly formed Bureau of Children's Services.<sup>69</sup> After graduating with a degree in chemistry from Vassar, Richards became the first woman to attend the prestigious Massachusetts Institute for Technology. There she applied her scientific training and research methods to the expectations of middle class women's traditional domestic work and developed the new field of domestic science.<sup>70</sup> Through her friendships with Lathrop and Richards, she was active in the developing public health movement. After graduation Minnie Cumnock married John Blodgett, a wealthy businessman. Her social connections and her wealth allowed her to fill positions of influence in various committees, clubs and organizations. At various times during her life after the Vassar Training Camp she

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<sup>68</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 296.

<sup>69</sup> Jaqueline Parker and Edward Carpenter, "Julia Lathrop and the Children's Bureau: The Emergence of an Institution," *Social Service Review* 55, no. 1 (1981): 60-77 and Eileen Taylor Appleby, "Julia Lathrop," *Social Work* 44, no. 4 (1999): 399-400.

<sup>70</sup> Emma Seifrit Weigley, "It Might Have Been Euthenics: The Lake Placid Conferences and the Home Economics Movement," *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1974): 79-96.

served as director of the Child Study Association, a member of the National Organization for Public Health Nursing and National Committee on Mental Hygiene.<sup>71</sup>

In 1917, at age fifty-five, Blodgett was elected as a member of the Vassar College Board of Trustees. As a newcomer and one of the few women on the board and at time, she was a minority on the board. Historians have suggested that she was dedicated to social reform and representative of the more progressive generation of leaders on campus who were pushing for a greater connection between school academics and the opportunities for students to engage in the social reform movement after graduation.<sup>72</sup> Blodgett was an important actor in the movement led by MacCracken and Mills to expose Vassar students to the social problems of the changing Progressive Era and provide educational opportunities that would help to prepare them to engage in the public realm. To Blodgett, the training camp was another step in her efforts to address the country's social problems through public health projects. She believed strongly that educated women should have the opportunity to learn the science behind child welfare, domestic work and hygiene in order to go out in the world to address issues of public health.<sup>73</sup> A training camp for college women in the nursing profession would provide just this opportunity.

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<sup>71</sup> Obituaries, "Minnie Cumnock Blodgett," *New York Times*, October 14, 1941.

<sup>72</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 296.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Eisenmann, *A Historical Dictionary of Women's Education in the United States*, (Santa Barbara, Greenwood Publishing: 1998), 145-146. Blodgett later donated \$550,000 to establish Vassar College's division of Euthenics, which served as an epicenter for education in domestic science and young childhood development.

## Development of the Camp

In the midst of World War I Vassar College was continuing academic business as well as conducting war efforts overseen by students and faculty alike. Excerpts from the student newspaper, the *Vassar Miscellany* tell of the war activities students participated in and the spirit with which they were engaged. They competed with the efforts of other schools, raised money for war bonds and war related efforts and knitted warm clothes for soldiers overseas. Additionally, administrators and faculty had begun to offer classes to prepare women to fill professional jobs left open as male workers left the country to join the ranks of the military.<sup>74</sup> Reporting to the board of trustees, President MacCracken spoke of the efforts underway on campus.

..the faculty and students had subscribed \$3,000 to the Red Cross fund and \$15,919.46 to the national student fund and had purchased \$51,325.00 (in) Liberty bonds; also that preparedness courses in personal hygiene, shorthand, typewriting and conversation in German, French, Italian and Spanish were being conducted.<sup>75</sup>

During this meeting a larger and more widely influential war effort was about to be launched. Among other orders of business on that day, the board received and read a letter from the Vassar Alumnae Association. The Alumnae Association, as well as those of other women's and men's colleges, was active in promoting current students' and graduates' participation in supporting the war effort. A large scale program held at

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<sup>74</sup> See For example: *The Vassar Miscellany* 2, no. 22 (1917): 1, *The Vassar Miscellany* 2, no. 33 (1918): 1 and *The Vassar Miscellany* 2, no. 38 (1918): 2.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes of the June 11, 1917 Board of Trustees Meeting, Vassar College Board of Trustees Records, 1861-2013, series 1, set 1, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.



Vassar College and supported by the alumnae association would not only offer opportunities to its students and graduates, but it would bring favorable light and recognition to the school. The letter requested that the board create a committee tasked with establishing a summer training camp for, “Young women for patriotic service in whatever line of work offers the greatest opportunities or present the greatest needs.”<sup>76</sup> The letter did not specify what type of training this camp would be used for, yet it requested that it be open to Vassar College graduates and “suitable students, (and) alumnae of other colleges.”<sup>77</sup> The committee was to be composed of members of the board of trustees, a faculty member and a member of the alumnae. Blodgett, the newest member of the board, was picked to be chair of the committee. The board accepted the request of the alumnae association and elected three additional trustees from the building and grounds committee to develop and oversee the training camp. Later in a speech given to the graduates and faculty of what would become the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses, Blodgett stated, “I have often wondered how many of that ancient and honorable body turned down the job, before it was passed over to me – the newcomer on the board.”<sup>78</sup> With her interest and dedication to social reform and public health, the request of the alumnae association became a well-suited project for Blodgett.

In September of 1917 Blodgett attended a meeting of alumnae from various colleges in New York City. As described in the proposal placed before the Board of

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

<sup>78</sup> Minnie Cumnock Blodgett, Address to the Graduates of the Vassar Training Camp, n.d., series 3, folder 1.13, Vassar College Training Camp for Nurses Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

Trustees in June this meeting was one of the terms requested by the alumnae association in its original letter. Its purpose was to ensure the cooperation of the other elite colleges.<sup>79</sup>

It included representatives from the other most prestigious women's colleges, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Smith and Bryn Mawr Colleges, to discuss the details of the plan.

Blodgett later described that the idea that the training camp be a camp for nurses was "born at the great mass meeting in New York."<sup>80</sup> She described a presenter who spoke of the current war situation and the number of nurses that were needed. She recalled thinking to herself that not only was there a need for nurses in this war, but when so many American nurses were sent to Europe, what would happen to the rest of the country who depended on their care here on the home front? She thought of other training camps that were already successfully underway.

One doctor to 8,000 people! No nursing force. America was prepared to send three million men into France. With every million soldiers were to go 10,000 nurses. 30,000 nurses! What would become of America, when half of her trained nursing supply had gone overseas? Nurses. That was the need. Why, of course, a training camp! A college woman's Plattsburgh! Nurses taught at Vassar, practically educated in the big hospitals, and graduated on the battle-fields of France."<sup>81</sup>

In November Blodgett addressed the board of trustees and reported that the committee had decided the training camp requested by the alumnae association would be a camp for nurses. The following January, the committee, which was now the committee for the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses, contacted the National Emergency Committee on Nursing. This committee was tasked by the National Council of Defense with the

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<sup>79</sup> Minutes from the Board of Trustees Meeting, June 11, 1917, Vassar College Board of Trustees Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

<sup>80</sup> Blodgett, Address to the Graduates of the Vassar Training Camp.

<sup>81</sup> Blodgett, Address to the Graduate of the Vassar Training Camp

emergency effort to recruit large numbers of women into nursing service. The chairman was Adelaide Nutting and other members included Mary Beard, Lillian Clayton, Jane Delano, Annie Goodrich, Julia Lathrop, Lillian Wald and C. E. A. Winslow. These individuals stood as the most powerful nursing and public health leaders of the day.<sup>82</sup> They were the heads of prestigious nursing schools, health boards and agencies and served on many of the same health and welfare reform committees. Part of their plan to increase recruitment of nurses was already focused on college women. When contacted by the Vassar Board of Trustees they were already in the process of asking training schools to consider a shortened course for these women in order to hasten the preparation of educated women as nurses. They specified that college women were well suited to fill the need for administrators, teachers and public health nurses because of their education and maturity. “We have turned first to college women because their educational preparation and comparative maturity justify us in thinking that they could be most speedily prepared for responsible nursing work.”<sup>83</sup>

At the December meeting of the Emergency Committee of Nursing it was announced that the committee had been approached by Vassar College to approve a training camp for nurses consisting of a summer intensive training course in theoretical nursing to be followed by a two year shortened clinical course in hospital training. Blodgett and her committee was requesting permission from the National Emergency Committee on Nursing to carry out the camp, their help in developing the curriculum and

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<sup>82</sup> Kalisch and Kalisch, *American Nursing*, ch. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Correspondence from the Committee on Nursing, The Council of National Defense, n.d., Series 1, Folder 1.3, Vassar Training Camp for Nurses Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

their efforts to secure clinical placements for graduates in the best hospitals in the country. Although such a course had previously been suggested within the Committee on Nursing, Blodgett's request brought with it certain benefits that would quell some of the fears about establishing a shortened course of study. Overseen by Vassar College, the training camp would assure that the best college educated women would enter this shortened course and that they would receive their theoretical training at one of the most elite educational institutions for women. The committee considered the proposal and at their next meeting it was announced that the Emergency Committee on Nursing, would not only approve the program, but would also take responsibility for designing the curriculum in consultation with Vassar. Additionally it would secure hospital placements for these women to train clinically after completing their theoretical work.

On February 12, 1918, Blodgett returned to the Vassar College Board of Trustees. She reported on the plan for the training camp and informed the board that the National Council of Defense agreed to support their efforts. She announced the plan was for a "summer school for intensive theoretical training for hospital nurses and limited to college graduates who shall be recruited from all the colleges recognized by the Association of Collegiate Alumnae beginning with the graduates of 1918 and extending back 10 years."<sup>84</sup> Limiting recruitment to schools recognized by the Association of Collegiate Alumnae assured that all the women who entered the camp were graduates of respected institutions of higher education. She went on to explain that before the plan

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<sup>84</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting February 12, 1918, Vassar College Board of Trustees Records, 1861-2013, series 1, set 1, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

could be finalized they were waiting on the Council of National Defense's Committee on Nursing to "submit a curriculum, shall counsel as to the teaching force and shall provide sufficient hospital service and support to ensure completion of student training at the end of the summer term."<sup>85</sup>

The board accepted the plan with the stipulation that the committee would not receive any more funds than were already in hand. Yet through Blodgett's excitement, efforts and energy the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses was underway. As Blodgett's daughter once recalled of her mother's enthusiasm, "I was at home at the time the Vassar Camp was set up. I have dim recollections that Mother was working very hard on the whole project, stumping the country to recruit young women who would become nurses, trying to get money out of foundations and, in general, getting this ambitious project off to a successful start."<sup>86</sup>

### Recruiting Representative College Women

Early in the spring of 1918 a full-fledged effort began to recruit applicants into the training program, which was to be held that upcoming summer. The New York branch of the Vassar Alumnae Association was in charge of this recruitment effort. They enlisted the support of an advertising expert, Thomas H. Simpson, in New York City to handle publicity measures. Additionally Henry Mills, the would be dean of the camp, and

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid*

<sup>86</sup> Katherine Blodgett Hadley, quoted in Bonner Clappison, *Vassar's Rainbow Division*, 16.

Vassar College president, Henry MacCracken, made public statements in support of the idea that college women should join the nursing force. The Alumnae Association itself, worked to recruit college graduates through other alumnae associations and senior leaders from various clubs on college campuses.

The documents of the Alumnae Association recruitment effort offer insight into the plan and hopes for the camp. Only women from “colleges of recognized standing”<sup>87</sup> were considered eligible, suggesting that Vassar College was not seeking just any college graduate, but those who had proven themselves at the best colleges and universities. In regards to these colleges, a Vassar alumna wrote, “Our Boston branch AAUC (American Association of University Collegiates) covers this territory (eastern Massachusetts); so does the Boston Wellesley club the Bryn Mawr club of Boston, the Smith club, Boston University, Jackson, Radcliffe, MIT and Mount Holyoke.”<sup>88</sup> This list represented the most prestigious colleges for women in the northeast at this time. Recruitment strategies were aimed at tapping into the alumnae associations of nearby colleges and asking them to enlist representatives from the senior classes of highly respected colleges. They were asked to hold recruitment meetings and invite fellow senior class members. At these meetings speakers introduced the camp and encouraged students to apply.<sup>89</sup> By going through the alumnae clubs, the recruiters were most likely to reach college women most like themselves. For those who were involved as undergraduates in student government, student associations and clubs were also most likely to continue such involvement after

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<sup>87</sup> Recruitment Letter, 1917, Series 1, Folder 1.1, Vassar College Training Camp for Nurses Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*

graduation through their respective alumnae clubs. Additionally the efforts that were held on the college campuses worked to assure possible candidates that the women who were considering signing up for the training camp for nurses were those who would be the best representatives of college educated women.

President MacCracken offered his efforts in recruiting college women as well. Several articles appeared at the time publicizing the camp. The messages imbedded in these articles spoke to the idea that college women were aptly suited to become leaders in the nursing field. In the May 15<sup>th</sup> 1918 issue of the journal *Outlook*, a publication of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae edited by and for female college alumnae, MacCracken wrote,

Women who are more than nurses are needed, for they must have some initiative, sympathy, and understanding of social problems... There is one class of women especially equipped for the duty that is calling to women. The college woman, well grounded in history, languages, sciences and sociology, and presumably, possessed of an alert, acquisitive mind, can bring to the study of nursing equipment which makes possible intensive training in the simpler, specialized aspects of the nursing profession.<sup>90</sup>

In a similar manner MacCracken wrote in the journal, *The Independent*, “The ‘Plattsburg’ for college graduates is the first practical effort to enlist women who are by instinct and education as peculiarly fitted for nursing as they are desperately needed in that branch of their country’s service.”<sup>91</sup> Additionally in this article he brought attention to the idea that the profession of nursing was currently at a potential transition point, that the reputation and understanding of the profession was improving in the public eye and that it would

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<sup>90</sup> Henry MacCracken, “Training Camp for Nurses,” *Outlook*, May 15, 1918.

<sup>91</sup> Henry MacCracken, “Girls Who Want to go to France,” *The Independent*, May 11, 1918.

soon be a career more suitable for college women. “Nursing will one day occupy a position of equality with the other learned professions. The picture of the trained nurse as a bedside servant is a misconception today... Nursing is preeminently and exclusively women’s work. It is, moreover, a form of service in which, other things being equal, the best educated woman qualifies highest.”<sup>92</sup>

Vassar College, by way of President MacCracken was at the time attempting to convince the representative college women and college graduates that they held special qualities which suited them to become leaders in the nursing profession. These suggestions were aimed at breaking down assumptions that nursing was not a profession for college women. Additionally they provided enticing reasons for college women to consider nursing – professional influence, service and a way to put their college educations to use.

Mills, as dean of the camp, saw it as an opportunity to aid in developing a significant number of college women into influential social reformers. He had a long time interest in professional nursing, one time arguing strongly against the hiring of a public health nurse in Poughkeepsie because she did not have the official distinction as a registered nurse.<sup>93</sup> Camp members routinely recognized Mills as providing the “spirit” of the camp.<sup>94</sup> In his speeches and addresses to the students he directly connected the work

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<sup>92</sup> MacCracken, “Girls Who Want to go to France.”

<sup>93</sup> Unknown Author, “Professor Mills’ Stands for Nursing Ideals,” *American journal of Nursing* 12, no 1 (1911): 1-10.

<sup>94</sup> As expressed in multiple a letters from a camp members reprinted in Clappison, *Vassar’s Rainbow Division*.



of nursing with the social reform movements that he so valued.<sup>95</sup> In a 1918 article he announced the idea of the camp for potential recruits.

The great health movement of the last decade or two has rapidly changed this situation (nursing). In every direction have opened lines of work which only the nurse can do. In the schools of nursing, women of capacity and broad education are needed as superintendents and assistants, as instructors and dietitians...It is thought it (the training camp) will develop a new outlet for college women; that it will furnish a supply of those preeminently to enter social service nursing, and who ought in due time to occupy administrative and executive positions in the nursing profession.<sup>96</sup>

Mills argued to potential recruits that as nurses they would have the opportunity to obtain influential professional positions through which they could address some of the world's greatest social problems of the early twentieth century.

#### The Summer of 1918

On June 24, 1918 four hundred and thirty seven college graduates descended on the Vassar College campus to begin their three-month theoretical course in nurse training. The intensive course consisted of classes in history of nursing, cookery and dietetics, hygiene, bacteriology, chemistry, psychology and social economics, a curriculum similar to that of the best nurse training programs. Classes were taught by volunteer faculty. The faculty was made up of the most renown and respected nurse educators and leaders in public health, missionary healthcare and nursing education. C.E.A Winslow, an accomplished professor of public health at Yale University and a powerful leader of

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<sup>95</sup> Unknown Author, "Professor Mills' Stands for Nursing Ideals," *American journal of Nursing* 12, no 1 (1911): 1-10.

<sup>96</sup> Herbert Mills, *Survey* 40 (1918): 94-95.

public health reform, taught courses on bacteriology and hygiene. Practical nursing was taught by some of the most prominent nurse educators: Anna D. Wolf from John's Hopkins School of Nursing, Nina Gage instructor at the Hunan-Yale Hospital in Changsha, China, Bertha Harmer from St. Luke's School for Nurses, Isabel Maitland Stewart, professor at Teacher's College and Anne Hervey Strong, instructor of public health at Simmons College. Wolf, Gage, Harmer and Strong were all themselves both graduates of the five most elite women's colleges and professional nurses.

The structure of the camp and expectations of its participants were such that it required students to be disciplined with their time, strong in their physical endurance and controlled in their behavior. These were qualities that were central to nurses' training throughout hospital based training programs. Discipline, strength and control were widely viewed as necessary qualities of the trained nurse.<sup>97</sup> To prepare these college women for their futures in hospital based training programs the camp established strict routine and structure. Students followed a regimented schedule filled with academic and laboratory classes, speakers and other activities which began at 5:50 in the morning and ended with students retiring to their dorms at 10:15. From noon on Saturdays until Sunday evening students were free to engage in social activities as they pleased, being allowed at these times to leave campus once signing out. The importance of such a regimented schedule was explained in the rules and regulations given to the campers at the start of camp. The purpose of the rules was, "two-fold: to secure orderly performance

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<sup>97</sup> D'Antonio, *American Nursing*. These ideals within nursing of discipline, strength and endurance and their impact of college educated nurses will be more fully explored in chapter five.

of the presented work and to educate prospective nurses in promptness, regularity and obedience.”<sup>98</sup> Emphasis was placed on their attendance at all classes and lectures. In regards to attendance students were told, “absence from class because of illness will be considered to indicate physical unfitness for nursing. Absence for any other reason will be regarded as indicating temperamental unfitness for hospital work.”<sup>99</sup> Additionally their behavior was to be disciplined, conservative and upstanding; training them in developing the appearance of moral superiority that was expected of the professional nurse.

Students are reminded that entirely innocent but unconventional action on the part of young women, especially on the part of women students, is often exaggerated or evilly misinterpreted. For their own sakes, for the reputation of the profession they are entering and for the reputation of the college whose guests they are the students of the Training Camp are urged to avoid any cause of criticism or gossip.<sup>100</sup>

Anxieties that these college women would not have the discipline and strength necessary to succeed as professional nurses were addressed through the regimented and strict expectations of the students while at camp. The attempt was to begin college women’s training in obedience before they even stepped foot in a hospital.

Letters written home from campers to their families provide a glimpse into their own understandings of that in which they were participating. A letter sent home from a camp participant describing her fellow students demonstrates the success of the earlier efforts to recruit accomplished college women. On the first day of the camp she wrote to her mother describing her classmates

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<sup>98</sup> Government and Rules of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses, Quoted in Clappison, *Vassar’s Rainbow Division*, 20-21.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*

Dearest Mother... Your idea of the rather sketchy nature of the girls who would be here was not well founded... as a whole it is a very representative bunch... there are presidents of this years senior classes at Smith and Vassar, presidents of students associations – etc., and a very well dressed lot from all the leading colleges.<sup>101</sup>

She went on to write how unexpected it was that the most elite women turned out to be the most serious and dedicated to joining the nursing profession, noting, “One queer thing is that the girls who are best off socially and financially seem to be the really serious ones, those who are going into it with the highest idealism and idea of sticking.”<sup>102</sup>

Finally she commented on the intellectual capacity of the students at the camp, as if she expected only the academically average to sign up for nurse training. “There are a lot of girls from the middle West and farther, most of them have been teaching and they are very amusing, but it’s a bit terrifying to be in classes with women who have been teaching the very subjects we are studying, there is also an alarming showing of Phi Beta keys which strikes me with awe.”<sup>103</sup>

In another student’s letter to her mother, Priscilla Barrows wrote of the momentous nature of the camp. She described the addresses made by Vassar leaders and leaders of the nursing profession as focusing on the challenge that was placed at the feet of her and her classmates; to lead in the next generation of social change and to demonstrate that the structure of the camp was a new and successful step in the progression of nurse education. “One would have thought from the gist of all speakers

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<sup>101</sup> Letter to Mother, Unknown Author, June 24, 1918, Series 1, Folder 1.4, Vassar College Training Camp for Nurses Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid*

<sup>103</sup> *ibid*

that the eye of the world were upon us; that the opening of this school was an epoch.”<sup>104</sup>

Based on her observations of the spirit and caliber of her classmates within the first week of camp she saw the group as one that was perfectly poised to become a force for change in the nursing profession. “We are going to have an innovation in the profession all right, and one that will not lack pep and efficiency and imagination.”<sup>105</sup>

### An Official Send Off

A graduation ceremony was held upon completion of the camp on September 13, 1918. Several speakers addressed the crowd of campers, faculty and administrators sending them to embark on the next step of their nursing education. Adelaide Nutting and Herbert Mills gave the most prominent addresses. Considering these two speeches in conjunction with each other, Nutting’s and Mills’ differing views on the success of these women becomes clear.

Nutting addressed the campers from the perspective of a long-time experienced nursing educator who had her hand in the changing place of the profession. She chronicled the long history of nursing education in the United States from its early days when she began her education. She described that there were only thirty-five schools in 1889 and that there were no dedicated lecturers, time spent in the classroom was minimal and took second priority to providing care on the hospital wards. There were no national

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<sup>104</sup> Priscilla Barrows, “Letter Home to Mother,” reprinted in Clappison, *Vassar’s Rainbow* Division, 40.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid*, 41

standards for the structure or guidelines of schools. Much had changed since then, she noted. According to Nutting, at the time of her address there were three large national associations of nurses, three professional journals and 46 states had enacted laws that required certain educational standards to be maintained. In her eyes nurse training schools were changing. The focus was moving toward a system that emphasized both theoretical work as well as practical training.<sup>106</sup> Some nursing schools had even developed programs in connection with colleges and universities. She credited this progress to the women who had long been serving as hard-working, trained nurses. She contrasted their background with the college-educated women to which she was speaking. “No understanding of the situation can be reached without full and accurate knowledge born of intimate experience. The nurses of the present generation with meager preparation and few advantages have brought their beloved profession to the point where it stands now.”<sup>107</sup> She established a line between those nurses who had earned their places among the ranks of the profession and fought to bring about its progress without educational or economic advantage and the women before her who were in her eyes still outsiders to the profession.

Nutting’s remarks demonstrate the hesitation she felt about these women’s dedication to the field. For although they came with educational advantages she feared that they lacked the commitment to withstand the physical and emotional challenges that were required of a successful nurse. She admonished them that their training had just

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<sup>106</sup> Adelaide Nutting, “Apprenticeship to Duty,” *American Journal of Nursing* 19, no. 3 (1918): 167.

<sup>107</sup> Adelaide Nutting, “Apprenticeship to Duty.”

begun. The theoretical education they had just completed, she warned, was only one small tool needed to perform the duties of a trained nurse and the more practical aspects of the work should not be underestimated. For although the practical tasks of nursing may have seemed simple to these educated women, they could only be obtained through long physical and emotional work.<sup>108</sup>

The tools of nurses are many of them simple enough, but the range of sources from which they are drawn must be very wide, and their uses perfected by long and arduous effort. Sense and perceptions must be trained to their finest adjustments. Behind that quick sure touch, that fine and delicate manipulation, must be months of toil and practice, experiment and failure, as well as progress. Behind that sure judgment lie long stretches of experience and careful study of persons and situations; of comparison of methods and results.<sup>109</sup>

Fearful that the Vassar women would think their theoretical training would be enough for them to glide through the practical training of nursing, she emphasized the long and trying hand work that was the only way, she believed, through which a woman could gain all the skills of a nurse. Before they can influence change, she warned them in their graduation address, they must first prove themselves through physical strength, endurance and dedication.<sup>110</sup>

To Nutting it was their possible lack of dedication that would stand in their way of success. She warned them that their future would be laden with “anxiety and apprehension” and that if she could protect them from anything throughout their careers as nurses it would be themselves- their self doubt, fatigue and potential loss of vision.

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<sup>108</sup> D’Antonio, *American Nursing*

<sup>109</sup> Nutting, “Apprenticeship to Duty,” 163.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*

There will be days when everything will seem sordid, when you will be tired and disheartened and ready to give it all up. It will not seem to you worth the effort. But we are relying on you to still see, even through dimly, the 'vision splendid' to listen to no voices of defeat and to realize that, 'tasks in hours of insight willed, can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.'<sup>111</sup>

Mills' address to the camp graduates differed in tone and content from Nutting's. Speaking from the perspective of a college administrator he did not warn his students about the perils of the training ahead of them. He did not express anxiety that they would not be strong enough or dedicated enough to withstand the challenges that would undoubtedly face them in the hospital wards. Instead he challenged them to instigate change within their newfound profession. He spoke from his perspective that college women, as nurses, would have the opportunity to obtain influential professional positions through which they could address some of the world's greatest social problems. He cited their special attributes as college graduates as reasons why they were aptly suited to become reformers within the nursing profession.

In addition to the great opportunities in reconstruction and public health work of which so much was said to you this summer, another chance for usefulness reveals itself. The privilege of college education has made you more quick to appreciate and to resent things that are wrong in nursing training. While you submit as a part of your discipline to the conditions that exist and while radicalism would be disastrous, you are justified in looking forward to reasonable progress.<sup>112</sup>

He reminded the graduates that due to their special status as college women they were aptly suited to instigate reform in nurse training. "The privilege of college education has

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<sup>111</sup> Nutting, "Apprenticeship to Duty," 159-160.

<sup>112</sup> Herbert E. Mills, Address to Graduates, 1918, Series 3, Folder 1.12, Vassar Training Camp for Nurses Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.



made you more quick to appreciate and to resent things that are wrong in nursing training.”<sup>113</sup> He was encouraging and motivational in his statements to the Vassar graduates. He called on them to be the future of professional nursing. “It becomes your additional duty to continue in the hope of making hospitals and training schools what they should be. You are one of the greatest, if not the greatest, potential force in the country for bringing improvement....there is still much need for struggle for better conditions in nurse training. Your duty is to ‘carry on.’”<sup>114</sup>

In the following chapters I return to the roots of the story that culminated in the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses of 1918. Since the growth of both institutions of higher education and professional training schools for nurses, the paths of these two groups of women overlapped. Sometimes these women were one in the same, becoming both college women and professional nurses. The following chapter takes us back to a transitional moment in the history of higher education for women. Starting in 1900 female college students began to express dissatisfaction with the guidance they were receiving regarding potential occupations after graduation. Most college women became teachers by the default. But as new careers were opening to women and their roles in Progressive Era America were changing, college women were becoming aware of growing opportunities in new and varying professions. In order to find new paths to more suitable occupations college students and alumnae began working together to provide information to graduating students based on their own occupational experiences.

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<sup>113</sup> *ibid*

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*

### Chapter 3: “If We College Women Can Work Together:” The Search for Suitable Occupations

In the July 1911 issue of the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* Smith College graduate, Elizabeth Kemper Adams, wrote in regards to a new and increasing need facing college women - the need for greater access to information regarding potential suitable professions.

Half blindly, perhaps, but no less surely, we college women are emerging from the old comfortable, hap-hazard belief that a college education in itself by some magic fits a woman into just the right place in the scheme of things...But I believe that if we college women can work together, without trying to do too much at once, and can collect and interpret the occupational material at our disposal or available with little effort. We can present a body of facts hitherto unusable, and can draw from it some conclusion that will be invaluable not only to college women or those turning to them, but also to the colleges themselves and so to modern society.<sup>115</sup>

Adam’s sentiment, that by joining together college women could provide access to this information, was shared by many of her peers. Between 1900 and 1920 students and graduates of the best women’s colleges united to offer their own experiences and develop networks and organizations designed to help women like themselves find paths to suitable and satisfying occupations.

At a time when the professional world and women’s place in it was expanding at a rapid pace, college women were looking for new ways to put their education to use. In their investigations of middle class women and their new access to higher education

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<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Kemper Adams, “The Vocation Moment and the College Woman,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1911): 176-177.

historians have argued that these women combined the socially accepted expectations of their roles as keepers of the home and family with the overwhelming societal needs resulting from Progressive Era inequalities, in order to create new professional opportunities.<sup>116</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, a scholar of women's history and work, explains, "Expanding options in education and social activity fused with emerging concerns over urban and industrial conditions to create jobs for middle class women. Taking their cue from the appeal to maternal roles, women transferred the injunction to guard morality at home into a force for the country's welfare."<sup>117</sup> This new interpretation of women's roles allowed for expanded action beyond the domestic realm and into community and political spaces in such a way that was legitimized by already accepted ideals of womanhood. These new professional women expanded their roles arguing that, "women, better than men, could point the way to a more virtuous and rational society."<sup>118</sup>

Out of this expanded conceptualization of women's work, new professions and professional roles were created for women at an ever-increasing pace. The progressive perspective and emphasis on social reforms provided opportunities for women in social service and investigative roles. College women entered settlement homes to work with the urban poor. The new profession of social work offered women a professional role through which to participate in social reform on the ground. Women such as, Ellen

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<sup>116</sup> For more on women's work and professional opportunities in the Progressive Era see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981) and Shelia M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books In. Publishers, 1978).

<sup>117</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 114-115.

<sup>118</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 115.

Richards, combined women's traditional roles as household caretakers with the growing emphasis on scientific techniques to create the new field of domestic science. In this way new opportunities opened to women in children's welfare, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, investigative reporting, physiotherapists and the increasing professional field of nursing.<sup>119</sup>

In the context of a changing labor market for women and its focus on social reform, women's higher education found itself at a transition point. Students and the more progressive college faculty and administrators were pushing for a college curriculum that more closely linked academics to social problems. In this way women more readily had the opportunity to use their education to develop meaningful professional roles. For the first two decades of women's higher education, college graduates were most often faced with two choices post-graduation. They could return to the domestic sphere as their mothers had before them or, if they sought work outside of the home, they most frequently became teachers. A small number of women were pioneers in male dominated fields such as medicine, law and academia. However as new opportunities were opening in the reform minded Progressive Era, college women were looking for more information regarding potential occupations other than teaching. It was in this environment that college women began developing roads towards new and less frequently explored occupations.

In this chapter I argue that through their strong collaborative networks, college women used each other as resources to gain access to information needed for graduating

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<sup>119</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked* and Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*.

students in order to make informed choices about their future occupations. Within these conversations, students and alumnae often argued that professional nursing offered opportunities to affect social change and reform. Between 1900 and 1910 the majority of these efforts were made through women writing for each other in their college student newspapers and alumnae magazines about their own experiences in particular occupations. Beginning in 1910 and developing through 1920 there was a significant increase in these efforts resulting in the creation of formal networks which worked more efficiently to bring information regarding occupations to college women. This chapter presents the efforts of these women to learn more about and gain access to new occupations as evidenced through various data sources including the student newspapers and alumnae magazines of women's colleges as well as formal publications authored by successful female professionals for an audience of college women seeking professional guidance.

### Vocational Education in America

Conversations calling for more guidance and preparation for occupations after college occurred within a historical context that marked a transformation in American education. Beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century education and social reformers were arguing for vocational training as part of the educational system. In the social and economic context of a growing industrial and corporate economy there was an increase in specialization in jobs and a decreased emphasis on the apprenticeship model.

These changes in the labor market required a new way of preparing young people for work.<sup>120</sup> In response, reformers such as Jane Adams and John Dewey argued that the purpose of schooling for young people should be to prepare them for work and socialize them into the occupational structure of their future work worlds.<sup>121</sup> The majority of this vocationalism movement played out within public high schools transforming public education away from the traditional liberal arts course and towards courses directly connected to the realities of the economy and workplace. New courses taught job related skills, both manual and personal. The educational structure changed to begin selecting and sorting students for industrial or professional training paths. For women specifically, this meant more girls shunted into courses on domestic science and economy. The skills taught in such courses were understood to best prepare women for their ‘true vocation’ as wives and mothers and for the feminized professions.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Harvey Kantor, “Vocationalism in American Education: The Economics and Political Context, 1880-1930,” in *Work, Youth and Schooling* ed. Harvey Kantor and David Tyeck (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 14-44.

<sup>121</sup> The essential aim of vocationalism was understood to be different by various reformers. Most relevant to this work are the ideas of Jane Adams and John Dewey. Adams believed that by better educating industrial workers about the science and knowledge behind their work the drudgery associated with it would be decreased. Dewey believed that vocational education was necessary to teach workers about the social meaning and implications of their work in attempts to make connections between the worker, his work and economic and social reform. Harvey Kantor, “Work, Education and Vocational Reform: The Ideological Origins of Vocational Education, 1890-1920,” *American Journal of Education* 94 no.4 (1986): 401-426, Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyeck, Introduction: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education,” in *Work, Youth and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education*, ed. Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyeck (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 1-13.

<sup>122</sup> For more on vocational education and how it played out in schooling for girls and women and the focus on vocational training to prepare women for work in the home see: John L. Rury, “Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women’s Education in the

With the growth of vocationalism, a tiered system unique to higher education in the United States arose. As argued by David Labree, historian of education, at the top of this hierarchy was the traditional college, whose ideal was represented in the Ivy Leagues. Seen as sister colleges to the seven Ivies, the best women's colleges in the northeast can be seen as fitting this class in the system of higher education for women. These colleges had a strong commitment to a liberal education whose purpose was to provide a broad education in which students gained knowledge for knowledge's sake and did not learn skills for any one occupation or profession. This liberal college remained dominant and demanded prestige above the other forms of higher education. The establishment of the land-grant institutions, following the Civil War, offered students a public university education that focused on utilitarian courses to provide knowledge and promote skills for future occupations. As such, many of these in the Midwestern and Western states were known as agricultural colleges. A tier below the land-grant institutions were the normal schools which were designed solely for the education and preparation of teachers. Not four-year institutions, they did not have the status of college or university. And the lowest tier, according to Labree, was occupied by technical and industrial training courses, which evolved into the junior colleges and eventually the community colleges of today.<sup>123</sup> It was in this context of changing educational goals and

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United States, 1880-1930," *History of Education Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1984): 21-44 and Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse": Educating Women for Work," in *Work, Youth and Schooling*, ed. Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 223- 267.

<sup>123</sup> David F. Labaree, "Mutual Subversion: A Short History of the Liberal and the Professional in American Higher Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 46 no. 1 (2006): 1-15.

hierarchical view of institutions of higher education that elite women's colleges were negotiating their identity. By and large administrators and trustees held tight to the ideal of the liberal arts education which did not prepare women, or men in the male colleges, for any specific occupation or profession. But as the labor market was opening ever increasing professional roles and occupations to women, female college students at these institutions became hungry for more guidance and preparation for future possible occupations.

In their conversations surrounding potential work after graduation, students, alumnae, advisors and experts used varied language regarding their work. The terms vocation, occupation and profession were frequently used interchangeably. Existing within a cultural milieu of debates surrounding liberal and vocational education this chosen language is important to consider. For vocation was laden with cultural meaning with unique aspects in regards to women's work. Specific vocational training programs for women were originally directed at working class women to provide them with particular skills that would allow them to find work outside of the poor working conditions of factories. This movement was defined in part by the maternalist actions of middle and upper class women to uplift working class girls and women. Over time the vocational training movement spread to middle class women who were looking for work outside of the home. Yet the movement was complicated by social and political questions concerning women's proper place and stoked by a fear that training for wage-earning work would lead women away from their domestic roles. Historians of women's education and labor argue that in response to these fears, vocational training was



presented as providing skills for middle class women that would be directly applicable to their work in the domestic sphere as managers of the home and family.<sup>124</sup> As such, vocational education provided training for fields that were dominated by women and understood to be women's work, such as domestic science.

In such a context a college woman's search for a vocation may not have been seen as a socially threatening endeavor. For culturally, learning a vocation suggested that she was learning skills that would benefit her in future life as wife and mother and that her intentions would be to work at this vocation only until marriage. Considered to be simply a hiatus from a woman's domestic role, vocations were places where college women could spend their time after school but prior to marriage. Once married, it was understood that these women would return to their domestic duties. However, the college women, alumnae and professionals in this study demonstrate that the lines defining what work was considered a vocation were blurred. Vassar College had a "Committee on Vocational Guidance." The alumnae organization called the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations, became the Bureau of Vocational Information. And of the major publications written by and for college women and alumnae to provide guidance there was, *Vocations for the Trained Woman: Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women* and *Vocations for the Trained Woman: Opportunities Other than Teaching* both of which presented the same array of occupations from social services to scientific work to business and agriculture. To these women, it seems that the distinction between vocation, occupation and profession was weak. Although built upon an original

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<sup>124</sup> Rothman, *Women's Proper Place*.

idea of vocational training as training for skills women would eventually put to use in the home, at the height of these women's searches for suitable work, the language of vocation, occupation and profession meant little more than suitable, fulfilling and paid work. In the writings of college women it can be seen that they were looking to vocations to provide avenues through which they could affect social change, earn wages that would in turn allow for personal independence and a use for the unique skills and abilities they gained while in college.

### Individual Essays

In order to bring light to vocations less frequently considered by graduating college woman, alumnae and some current students submitted essays describing the positions they had chosen or researched, the work they had done in these respective fields and encouraging students to consider similar lines of work. They made cases for what was particularly appealing in their professions and how they were especially well suited for a female college graduate. Essays delineated that ways that such professions offered college women opportunities to participate in social reform, continue to engage in intellectually challenging pursuits and earn a sufficient wage. Through these writings alumnae were working individually to bring information and resources to current college students in order to help them discover occupational paths that otherwise may not have been considered. With these texts they were also creating representations of themselves as professionals in ways they wanted to be seen by their peers. With little outside

guidance of how to make their ways into occupational roles, these essays served as vital sources of information.

Student and alumnae essays brought light to a large array of occupations from laboratory science to business to secretarial work for social services, and others including professional nursing. For example an alumna from the class of 1904 wrote in the *Wellesley College News* introducing the “relatively new profession of assistant chemist.” She described it as a fitting career for students interested in science and offered several reasons why it should be considered. “...Salaries are good...the chemists with whom one works are experienced men and it is a pleasure to work with them.”<sup>125</sup> Although in this role a college woman would be serving as an assistant to a most likely male chemist the position offered a way for women to be involved with the quickly advancing scientific world and earn an adequate wage.

In 1906 Katharine Bement Davis, Vassar graduate of 1892 and superintendent of the New York State Reformatory for Women, wrote in the *Vassar Miscellany* a detailed eight-page essay describing work for college women in female reformatories. In such positions educated women would work at the individual level with female criminals providing education in hopes that they could improve their life circumstance and avoid future criminal activity. Davis appealed to college women’s desire for a profession that allowed for social service. “If we are, as some think, always to have criminals and degenerates with us, we shall always need institutions for their cure or custodial care. But if we can study out causes with a view to eliminating them, we shall perform one of

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<sup>125</sup> M.L.W., “Free Press,” *Wellesley College News* 28, no. 5 (1906): 6.

the greatest possible human services.”<sup>126</sup> But if the desire for service were not enough to interest college women in reformatory work, Davis also emphasized the opportunity for college women to put to use their education and interest in continued intellectual engagement. “If the missionary motive is not strong, surely the opportunity for original investigation and contribution to criminal psychology and resulting criminal pedagogy ought to, and sometime will, appeal to our college women.”<sup>127</sup>

Ellen Emerson, Smith graduate from 1901, contributed to the July 1911 edition of the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* with an essay presenting “Another Possible Vocation” – that of the medical social worker. The newly developed and quickly expanding role within the medical community provided women with the opportunity to help those suffering from medical problems by “smooth(ing) away difficulties, financial or social, which hinder or prevent his following the doctor’s advice and regaining his health.”<sup>128</sup> A medical social worker, Emerson argued, provided a way for college women, who had not gained the additional training needed to work as a trained nurse, to be involved in the healthcare field. In summary she presented the occupation as a satisfying option for women who needed to earn a living as well as those who desired work to stay intellectually engaged. “It offers chances for those of us who must earn and also for those of us who must work whether we are paid or not, and I can cheerfully recommend it as

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<sup>126</sup> Katharine Bement Davis, “Work for the Trained Woman in Reformatories for Women,” *Vassar Miscellany* 35, no. 8 (1906): 448.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*

<sup>128</sup> Ellen T. Emerson, “Another Possible Vocation,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 2 no. 4 (1911): 195.

a(n)...interesting consumer of time and thought.”<sup>129</sup>

Eleanor Laird from the Wellesley class of 1899 described the new field of educational work in department stores. Her essay appeared as the cover story for the April 1913 edition of the *Wellesley College News*. She suggested that in the position of educator of a department store, a college woman had the opportunity for a certain level of control over other workers. Although she would serve under the direction of an executive who was most likely a man, her duties were that of the supervisor and educator of the saleswomen in the department store. Laird emphasized that although this was a novel occupation it had “passed beyond the experimental stage.”<sup>130</sup> This is an important distinction for it suggested that her readers could trust that Laird’s experience would most likely be the same as theirs if they were to choose such a path.

A. E. Maynard, a current student who was looking forward to graduating in 1905, wrote in the *Wellesley College News* encouraging her classmates to consider nursing as a career after college. She based her ideas on observations she had made while working in a hospital over the summer. Maynard’s advice was not that of an expert in the field. Instead, as a current student her perspective served a somewhat different purpose. Her opinion was meaningful as it came from an insider. She was writing for her peers and therefore had knowledge about what their biggest concerns would be regarding nursing as a possible career. She argued that a college education would not be wasted on nursing. Instead nursing required a strong theoretical and practical training. From Maynard’s

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid*

<sup>130</sup> Eleanor M. Laird, “A New Vocation for College Women,” *Wellesley College News*, 21, no. 25 (1913): 1-3.

perspective, professional nursing was aptly suited for college women for it required, “women of exceptional character and intellect as more schools open and there is an increase need for women of broad culture for the teaching and supervisory positions in nursing.”<sup>131</sup> She explained that the demand for these positions was increasing due to the rapid expansion of the nursing profession and nurses’ training schools. “A woman occupying such a position must be cultured and possess a well-disciplined mind, clear in sight, knowledgeable in human nature, executive ability, judgment, the power to govern, direct and discipline others, and a thorough knowledge of the qualities and requirements demanded of a nurse by the public.”<sup>132</sup>

As examples of the many individual essays that appeared in women’s college students newspapers and alumnae magazines these demonstrate the attributes that college women thought were most important in a suitable profession. In their descriptions of their chosen work, each author emphasized the ways that such a profession provided college women with an opportunity to be involved in social service and reform either on an individual or community level, continue to be engaged in intellectually challenging endeavors and finally to earn a satisfactory wage.

#### Outside Publications

In addition to the information being collected and dispersed for college women on their own campuses, female college graduates who were now successful professionals

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<sup>131</sup> A. E. Maynard, “Free Press,” *Wellesley College News* 2, no. 26 (1903): 4.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid*

were joining efforts in developing texts that would provide guidance on an array of suitable occupations for college women. Published in 1910, *Vocations for the Trained Woman: Opportunities Other than Teaching*, promoted myriad opportunities for college women in areas of civic service, social service, scientific work, domestic science, agriculture and business.<sup>133</sup> Funded by the Women's Education and Industrial Union (WEIU), its contributors included some of the most influential female workers in professional and charitable reform movements. The WEIU was established in 1877 as an educational union for working class women. It offered classes in domestic service, waitressing, sewing and other working class women's jobs. It aimed to improve the life and work conditions of these women by making them more attractive to prospective employers. However the WEIU had little success at first, for it could not provide what these women really sought – access to more desirable and better paying jobs. Beginning in 1900, the WEIU moved its attention towards college-educated women in hopes to reinvent itself in a more sustainable way. It was with this change that the WEIU finally found success. For it provided ongoing series of lectures and conferences for college graduates which, “spoke directly to the vocational aspirations of the women then being sought in the labor market.”<sup>134</sup> It was with college women in particular that the WEIU found success. For it capitalized on an existing demand for these women within the expanding labor market combined with a demand by college women to find better connections to suitable occupations.<sup>135</sup> Mary Vida Clark, Vassar College graduate from

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<sup>133</sup> In this period, the term ‘trained’ was used when referring to college women.

<sup>134</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 95.

<sup>135</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

1893 and influential reformer who was currently serving as the secretary of the State Charities Aid Association, and Mary Grace Worthington, a Bryn Mawr College graduate of 1887 and sister of the famous president of Bryn Mawr College, Minnie Carey Thomas, offered their expertise on charity work. Garnet Isabel Pelton who was a graduate of Wellesley College and a trained nurse wrote about the professional opportunities in medical social service, a profession which she is credited with having developed. Amy Homans the director of physical education at Wellesley College shared her experience in her field. And Gertrude Marvin, Wellesley graduate of 1908, wrote of her suggestions in the line journalism. Agnes Perkins, the books editor and a professor of rhetoric and composition at Wellesley College, introduced the publication and described its purpose.

This book is an outgrowth of a conviction that many women who are unfitted for teaching drift into it because it is the vocation with which they are most familiar...To suggest to such women, and to others about to choose an occupation, some lines of work now open to them and the equipment which they should have to justify a hope of success in any given line, is the purpose of the following papers.<sup>136</sup>

Over 50 occupations were explored in the collection ranging from dairy farming to advertising to chemistry.

A chapter on Nursing was included under the category of professions in the social services. Lillian Wald, an influential nursing leader and founder of the Henry Street Settlement, presented the profession to these women. She offered descriptions of nursing roles that would appeal to college women, omitting positions that nurse historian, Susan Reverby, has argued were filled mostly by less educated “worker nurses,” such as private

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<sup>136</sup> Agnes Perkins, *Vocations for the Trained Woman: Opportunities Other than Teaching* (Boston: Women’s Education and Industrial Union, 1910), v.



duty nursing and staffing hospital wards.<sup>137</sup> Instead, Wald highlighted positions that required highly educated women and were seen to carry more independent responsibility and supervision or teaching of other nurses. With each position she appealed to the college woman's desire for autonomy and an occupation that provided opportunities to engage with and have influence over social reform. In the role of training school superintendent, she explained the independence and respect such a position could provide. "...Positions are capable of being made influential and distinguished in proportion to the capacity of one in charge to command respect and deference for herself and her position."<sup>138</sup> In preventative Social Welfare Work the college woman had the opportunity to fully engage in social reform. "The nurse engaged in this work has always had great social opportunities, and she has expressed herself more or less in the moral movements of the time."<sup>139</sup> Finally nursing positions in state and municipal service offered women work that had the appeal, "of humanitarianism, of being essentially prophylactic, educational and socially constructive."<sup>140</sup>

Consisting of writings by college women about their work for an audience of college women still looking for work, "Occupations for the Trained Woman" accomplished the same goal as many of the individual essays written by college women in their alumnae magazines and student newspapers. It was a way for women to share what occupational information they were lucky enough to learn about with women like

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<sup>137</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*.

<sup>138</sup> Lillian Wald, "Nursing" in *Vocations for the Trained Woman Other than Teaching*, ed. Agnes Perkins (Boston: Women's Education and Industrial Union, 1910), 72.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 72

<sup>140</sup> *ibid*, 73.

themselves; women who otherwise were at risk of falling into an unsuitable profession simply because they did not know of any better option. In the 1915 edition of the *Vassar Miscellany* the release of a series of essays to be published in *The Bookman*, an American literary journal, was announced.<sup>141</sup> The series was titled, “The New World and the College Woman” and presented essays written by, “women college graduates who have adventured in the modern work-a-day world and found their places there.”<sup>142</sup> It was published over 4 months in the journal and was edited by, Helen Ferris, a 1912 graduate of Vassar College who was currently engaged in welfare work in the John Wanamaker’s New York Store. Her work consisted of providing education to the young women who worked in the store for their “intellectual improvement, physical development and recreation.”<sup>143</sup> Like “Opportunities for Trained Women,” the series included essays from women working within the occupations of which they wrote. However, each contributor was not only a successful professional, but also a college graduate. Contributors included Ella McCaleb, the current Dean of Vassar College and Vassar graduate from 1879, M. Louise Green, leader of a movement in school and community gardens and Vassar graduate from 1891, Mary A. White a Smith College graduate who started a laundry business with her sister and Ruth O. Pierson a bacteriologist at the State Board of Health and Wellesley College graduate from 1905. Ferris introduced the series,

An ever-increasing number of college women find themselves at

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<sup>141</sup> Unknown Author, “Articles on Vocations by Successful College Women,” *Vassar Miscellany* 1, no.9 (1915).

<sup>142</sup> Helen Ferris, “The New World and the College Woman,” *The Bookman*, February 1916, 63.

<sup>143</sup> Helen Ferris, “The New world and the College Woman: The College Graduate in Welfare Work,” *The Bookman*, May, 1916), 289.

Commencement equipped with an elaborate education and an abundant vitality together with a sense of social duty. The problem of an outlet for their activities is becoming of vital importance to educators and the world at large.<sup>144</sup>

Overall the series offered eleven essays, each describing a college woman's narrative of how she came to the professional position she was in and what elements of her chosen profession were most attractive. Such occupations described ranged from librarian and secretarial positions to small business owners, to editorial work to welfare work with immigrant populations. Consistent throughout the essays was the suggestion that an attractive position was one that allowed for the opportunity to affect social change, either on the individual or social level. Other emphasized qualities were the opportunity for engagement with new scientific advances, the ability to put to use the skills a woman learned while in college and a position that offered an adequate wage.

In her essay on work as a bacteriologist, Ruth O. Pierson described in great detail the exciting scientific nature of her work in laboratory science. But her work as a bacteriologist also provided a venue through which she could contribute to social reform. She helped to provide the much needed, "cleaning up (of) our cities and towns and discovering and preventing the spread of disease."<sup>145</sup> In a similar manner Lucinda Price wrote of her experience in training workers for efficiency in department stores as a way in which she brought 'scientific education' to working women in a way that would

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<sup>144</sup> *ibid*

<sup>145</sup> Ruth Pierson, "The New World and the College Woman: A Bacteriologist at Work," *The Bookman*, March, 1916, 74.

increase their enjoyment of their work and their ‘intellectual betterment.’<sup>146</sup> She asserted, “For the college girl who has the vision of Service, no greater field could be found. The store girl who is discouraged over home troubles can be cheered and helped.”<sup>147</sup> In her description of her work as a garden planner for schools and communities, M. Louise Greene, who in addition to her education at Vassar College also received a PhD from Yale, emphasized that her chosen occupation required of her the breadth of education she received as a college and graduate student. “I have found that literature and history have their distinct contributions to my present occupation; that college mineralogy and geology, old-time class room botany, and a most excellent course in chemistry, were biding their time to become the foundations of my school garden work.”<sup>148</sup> Finally most essays detailed the expected wages in each respective profession. These serve as only a few examples of the opportunities for service, scientific engagement and the utilization of a college education that were presented by these women. Similar entries can be found in descriptions of library work, architecture, community organizing, immigrant work, and business.

These publications can be seen as an extension of the attempts to provide information regarding occupations through college women’s personal essays in their student newspapers and alumnae magazines. Arguably, one of the most effective ways to lead more college women into these occupational roles was to utilize the experiences of

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<sup>146</sup> Lucinda Prince, “The New World and the College Woman: Training for Efficiency in the Department Store,” *The Bookman*, April 1916, 190-193.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, 191.

<sup>148</sup> M. Louise Greene, “The New World and the College Woman: The School Garden,” *The Bookman*, April, 1916, 184.

other college women; providing them a forum through which to share their professional experiences with current college students and recent alumnae. Coming from working female college graduates, these sorts of publications were especially impactful to students. The ability to speak to college women as a member of their community gave their opinions validity and weight. These authors could speak to the issues that they knew from experience were most important to the college woman when describing particular aspects of their work.

### Organizations and Formal Networks

Beginning in 1911, a year that marked the establishment of the first intercollegiate organization aimed at connecting college women with suitable occupations, articles in student newspapers and alumnae magazines regarding occupations began to change in nature. In addition to essays written by individual students or alumnae about their professional experiences, announcements and information about organized conferences, information sessions, committees and organizations began appearing in the pages of these papers. Some were school-based efforts such as regular newspaper columns on vocations or vocational conferences that brought experts to campus to speak about the opportunities in their respective fields. Other larger networks were formed in collaboration between alumnae of various colleges, such as the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations.

*The Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations*

In 1911 the New York Branches of the alumnae associations of the best women's colleges - Smith, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe and Barnard Colleges as well as Cornell University - came together to respond to the need for greater information regarding occupations for college women. In collaboration they formed the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations. Financed and manned by these alumnae associations its purpose was, "to study the opportunities for educated women in occupations other than teaching, and, at the same time, conduct an employment agency for college women."<sup>149</sup> The Bureau went beyond simply supplying information regarding various occupations to college women. It was an organized network focused on connecting college women with openings in specific occupations. Its design was aimed at meeting the needs specific to female college graduates and it intended to help these women "secure places for which they feel they are adapted and will bring out any special talent that they may possess and place at their disposal a mass of classified information in regards to the lines of employment open to women."<sup>150</sup> To this end the Bureau worked to both continue this movement of dispersing information as well as take a step further to help women find entrance points into a myriad of occupations. Further describing the Bureau's purpose, an unknown author wrote in the *Wellesley College News* that the Bureau aimed "to see to it that no woman shall be deprived of a free choice of occupation either through lack of information or through ill-advised preparation. And to focus on all

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<sup>149</sup> Unknown Author, "The Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations," *Wellesley College News*, 20, no. 10 (1911): 23-24.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid*

these purposes in the immediate practical task for fitting the right worker into the right place.’<sup>151</sup>

The Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations worked towards this purpose through various actions. It organized and held conferences for audiences of college women at which information regarding various occupations was presented. Such conferences were hosted on the campuses of women’s colleges to address current students, while others were held outside of campuses with the goal of attracting college women from an array of schools. Its main function was as an employment agency; matching college women with employers looking for educated women to fill open positions. There had already existed a number of other such agencies, but these focused on individual professions, such as registries for teachers and trained nurses. The Bureau was the first to encompass a diverse array of occupations for women and it was unique for it was developed specifically by and for female college graduates. In college newspapers and alumnae magazines beginning in 1915 and progressing through 1920 there were frequent entries describing opportunities in specific positions which the Bureau was advertising on behalf of employers who had come to them looking for college educated women. By 1917 job postings appeared in every issue of the *Vassar Miscellany*. Employers were looking for college women to fill positions in social service agencies, bookshops, libraries, advertising, laboratories, mathematics, stenography and numerous other fields.<sup>152</sup> In a 1912 cover article in the Wellesley College News, Inez Gardner a graduate from the class

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid*

<sup>152</sup> For example see *Vassar Miscellany* 24, no. 16 (1917): 7, *Vassar Miscellany* 24, no. 19 (1917): 6 and *Vassar Miscellany* 24, no. 33 (1917): 2.

of 1904 suggested that the assistance offered by the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations was significant as it provided guidance for graduates on a path that had previously been nearly impossible to navigate. Gardner wrote that the Bureau wanted, “just as the single graduate for her own self would like to see the college woman doing work of some significance, getting sufficiently paid for it or at least heading towards the kind of work her inclinations lead her to do.”<sup>153</sup>

Although the Intercollegiate Bureau did not provide registry services for professional nurses, it did provide information to college graduates about the profession and served to recruit a number of college women. In a 1914 invited address to the American Nurses’ Association (ANA), Frances Cummings, Smith College graduate from 1900 and the current manager of the Intercollegiate Bureau spoke to the question of how the work of the Bureau had affected the recruitment of college women into the nursing profession. She explained the majority of the work of the Bureau in regards to nursing was in placing well trained women in positions that required education beyond simply the practical. These were positions in hospital administration, superintendents of training schools, physicians’ offices and social service. As the Bureau was providing services strictly to college women, employers who came to them were looking for educated women in particular. As such, Cummings explained, the majority of positions that they filled were in school nursing, visiting and public health nursing, hospital social service and administrative positions. She offered examples of the backgrounds of the women whom the Bureau most frequently placed in nursing positions – a woman who had spent

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<sup>153</sup> Inez Gardner, “After College What Can I Find to do?” *Wellesley College News* 20, no. 32 (1912): 1.



ten years teaching after college before entering nurse training school, a woman who had worked as a nurse, left the field and then wanted to return, and a woman that had completed nurses' training and with experience in occupations outside the field had exceptional qualifications for administrative nursing work.<sup>154</sup>

She concluded her address by making a case to the ANA members that there was a specific need in the field of nursing for these college women. First, she argued, there was a demand for well-educated and qualified nurses beyond what was already available.

I point out that, judging from our experience, the demand for really qualified nurses far exceeds the supply. This is evidenced by the primary fact that a general agency (the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations) is appealed to at all, and it would seem to indicate that the nurses' registries and the institutions offering special training for the advanced positions in this profession cannot themselves meet this demand.<sup>155</sup>

Beyond a demand for well trained nurses to fill these higher level positions, Cummings suggested to her audience of nurses, that college women in particular were sought after because of their breadth of education, leadership skills and maturity and that these qualities distinguished them from nurses educated within a training school alone.

Another significant fact should be noted. It is to a Bureau distinctly labeled Intercollegiate that these appeals have come. I said a moment ago that the supply of 'really well-qualified' women seems inadequate. I did not have in mind training in the technique of the profession, but rather the breadth of vision, the mental grasp, the power to think straight, the ability to ignore personal and petty considerations which we all hope are the by-products at least, of a liberal education.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Frances Cummings, "Work of the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations," *American Journal of Nursing* 14, no. 10 (1914): 823-829.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid*, 826.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid*, 827.

Speaking to the members of the American Nursing Association meant that her audience was made up of mostly nursing supervisors, superintendents and educators from the more prestigious training schools and hospitals.<sup>157</sup> Some of the women would have themselves been college graduates, but most were not. Cummings' words may have been controversial for she was suggesting that the profession required nurses who were better educated than most of those in her audience. She asserted that the nursing field needed more than increased standards of education for nurses in training. Instead, it needed greater numbers of college-educated women.

### *Smaller Networks*

Other student and alumnae driven networks were formed with similar purposes. Most were designed and run by and for students to serve the needs on their own particular campuses. By 1913 Wellesley College had created a "Committee on Vocational Guidance." The committee was, as described in the *College News*, created with unanimous support in recognition of the need of more specific vocational guidance in college. It was formed by current students partnered with a single faculty member whose purpose was to help facilitate the efforts of the committee on campus. Their first order of business was to develop the position of "vocational advisor." The advisor would become a part of the college community, working and living on campus and financially supported by the college. With the creation of this position, the vocational guidance committee

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<sup>157</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*.

obtained a professional whose work was solely dedicated to providing more professional information to students. At this point, college women were no longer focused on simply sharing their experiences with each other. Instead they had developed a position and enlisted a professional to fill it whose sole job was to help prepare them for suitable occupations. The vocational advisor worked with students while they were still in school to do more than simply help them learn about possible vocations. She advised students on how to best use their time while in college; choosing a course of study that would help prepare them to be better suited for their chosen profession after graduation.<sup>158</sup>

For the first vocational advisor on campus, the Wellesley College committee hired Florence Jackson who had been serving as director of the Women's Education and Industrial Union. She was an especially well suited candidate for she was also a former Wellesley College professor. An article in the *Wellesley College News* describing her arrival on campus suggested that she was suited for the position for she had a wealth of knowledge of a wide array of occupations, the training required to fill them and the characteristics such employers were looking for. This paired with her knowledge of the college environment and college experience, made her a particularly appealing candidate. The choice of Jackson as a former college woman and Wellesley professor again demonstrates the importance of college women guiding each other on the path to wage earning work after graduation.

Additionally the Vocational Committee, run by five students with one faculty member, worked on "collecting and distributing circulars of information as to various

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<sup>158</sup> Unknown Author, "Committee on Vocational Guidance," *Wellesley College News* 21, no. 34 (1913): 13-14.

vocational opportunities other than teaching open to women.”<sup>159</sup> They also routinely invited individual speakers to the college as well as holding regular small conferences where three to four speakers would provide lectures on their chosen professions. One such speaker was Sara Parsons, the current superintendent at the prestigious Massachusetts General Hospital Training School for Nurses. She was brought to Wellesley by the vocational committee to give a presentation explaining the benefits of nursing as a vocation for college women. An article in the student newspaper described her lecture, “Nursing as a Vocation for Women.” Parsons focused on the types of positions available such as private duty nursing, public health nursing and positions as superintendents or heads of training schools and the associated salaries. She acknowledged that there was additional training required for the college women in order to become a trained nurse but she stipulated that training was of “small expense.”<sup>160</sup> The summary of her talk emphasized that although somewhat lengthy extra training was required, the overall benefit of opportunity and compensation offered by the profession would outweigh this negative aspect of required additional training.<sup>161</sup>

These vocational conferences covered a wide array of occupations. Examples included agriculture, advertising, teaching, newspaper writing, interior decorating, social work, church work, medical missionaries, and nursing. At a conference held in 1915 various presenters addressed the economic state of professional women. It is of note that this particular conference was purposefully scheduled over the spring vacation of most

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid*

<sup>160</sup> *ibid*, 14.

<sup>161</sup> Unknown Author, “Vocational Guidance Committee,” *Wellesley College News* 24, no. 16 (1917): 10.

schools so that a larger number of women from various colleges would be able to travel in order to attend, suggesting that the topic of compensation expected from various occupations was of particular importance to working female college graduates. The general conclusion made by attendees at the conference was described by a writer in the *Vassar Miscellany*. “The clinching point gleaned from all this is that the girl just graduated who is going into any business or semi occupational profession must be willing to start with a salary of apprenticeship and work up.”<sup>162</sup> College women were not only looking for satisfying work that would allow them to contribute to social movements of the time, but they were also seeking a profession that would provide an adequate wage allowing for increased opportunities for autonomy and independence. At a vocational conference held in 1917 at Vassar College multiple presentations were made by professional women who were, “qualified to speak about their own work and their experiences in their respective fields.”<sup>163</sup> Included in the program was a series of lectures focused on nursing as a profession for educated women. Speakers included Sara Parsons, Mary Beard the director of the Instructive District nursing Association and D. W. Cross, director of the Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children. Additional conferences that year frequently included presentations on the potential of nursing as an occupation for college women. Speakers were at times prominent leaders in the field; others were simply trained nurses who were also college graduates from these prestigious schools.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Unknown Author, “Vocational Conference,” *Vassar Miscellany* 64, no. 11 (1915): 1.

<sup>163</sup> Unknown Author, “Vocational Conference,” *Vassar Miscellany* 64, no. 11 (1915): 1.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid*

In 1915 members of the *Vassar Miscellany* staff established a column to be printed in every news issue called “Vocational Hints.” According to its developers the column was “design(ed) to throw light ahead in the more or less dim vocational roads to be traveled after graduation.”<sup>165</sup> Again this column was an attempt at addressing the shared sentiment among college women that upon graduation they were alone in a search for suitable work. For, “it is somewhat difficult to learn what lines of work are open to women and what the actual work and requirements of the different occupations may be.”<sup>166</sup> The column provided information, descriptions and suggestions of fields open to women. Such information would then be supplemented with letters from alumnae who had success finding work in these fields. They would share with current students their personal experience in their respective lines of work. The establishment of the Vocational Hints column replicates the efforts being made by the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations, the Vocational Committee at Wellesley College and others.

Beginning in 1910 the efforts to provide information regarding occupations by and for college women transitioned to include the formation of small campus based plans and organizations and larger intercollegiate networks. As the trend towards increasing amounts of information presented to college women continued, in almost every issue of the student newspapers and alumnae magazines there was some mention of new occupational opportunities. They occurred in the form of job postings, essays about particular professions, information describing vocational conferences and summaries of

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<sup>165</sup> Unknown Author, “Vocational Hints Column,” *Vassar Miscellany* 1, no. 9 (1915):

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<sup>166</sup> *ibid*

speeches made on campus by invited experts. The use of female college alumnae to disperse this information was a prominent feature of all of the efforts and it demonstrates the desire of these women to hear from individuals like themselves.

### *Specialized Training*

As part of the information presented to college women about possible vocational paths, there were frequent discussions regarding the amount of specialized training after college that was required to enter a particular field. College women had identified that their education provided them with the much respected broad educational background and leadership skills that was associated with the college woman. However it was becoming clear that this was not enough to enter many of the desirable fields available to women. It was understood that for almost any profession, other than teaching, at least one year of specialized training was required.<sup>167</sup> However college women were hoping to find ways to decrease these requirements. Some called for students to be more aware while choosing their college courses in order to best choose classes that would aid in their future training. Others urged college women and the public to see that the extracurriculum offered college women experiences that were directly applicable to practical vocations. And finally some students hoped to see reform in their school that would bring more professionally useful courses to the curriculum.

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<sup>167</sup> For example see Adeline Ross, "After College, What?" *Smith College Monthly*, 14, no. 8 (1907): 531, Lucy Salmon, "The Opportunities for Vassar Graduates in History," *Vassar Miscellany*, 52, no. 5 (1913): 375-377 and Unknown Author, "Editorial," *Wellesley College News*, 10, no. 6 (1910): 2.

In a 1907 article, Adeline Ross, a Smith College alumna from the class of 1899, wrote for her alumnae magazine an essay she titled with the commonly used phrase, “After College, What?” Her article focused on theology as a possible career for women citing one of the main reasons why it made a desirable career was that it did not require any additional training beyond one’s college education. She began her article with a discussion regarding the common sentiment that a college education had given women a benefit by providing them with serious engagement academically, but they were not prepared to step out of the college gates and directly into professional work. In the growing professional world of new reform minded occupations for women, students and alumnae understood that at least some amount of post college professional training was going to be necessary to enter into a career. As such Ross began her article with this point. “At this time of the year many of the seniors are asking the question for what am I specially prepared? College has given a broad culture but has not fitted essentially for anything and today is an age of specialties each of which demands a particular training.”<sup>168</sup>

An article detailing a lecture given by Laura Gill, a physician working with the Boston Women’s Industrial and Educational Union, appeared in the *Wellesley College News* in April of 1910.<sup>169</sup> The author emphasized Gill’s discussion of specialized training, which focused on what was becoming the very common topic of vocations available to women other than teaching. Gill expressed the belief that many college

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<sup>168</sup> Ross, “After College, What?” 531.

<sup>169</sup> Unknown Author, “Dr. Gill’s Address,” *Wellesley College News* 9, no.25 (1910): 1-3.



women entered teaching because, “they did not know at that time of any other openings.”<sup>170</sup> She went on to discuss post college training. She suggested that a college woman likely needed at least one year of practical training after earning her bachelor’s degree in order to be qualified for the work that she may be seeking. According to Gill, this was due to the fact that the ordinary college did not give specific professional training of any sort. Through one of these courses a female college graduate could attain the necessary preparation for any number of desired professions. Her list of such suitable professions included social service, agriculture, library work, and secretarial work. The author of the column highlighted Gill’s recommendation that while still students, these women should begin thinking about future occupation so as to take any course that may be helpful in preparation for their chosen profession. This, she argued, would help them to reduce the amount of practical training that would be required of them post-graduation.

In a similar article published in November of the same year in the *Wellesley College News*, an unknown author wrote about her discontent with the usual two years of practical training that was necessary for most occupations. Arguing that the experiences women had while in college should be more fully recognized as preparation for occupations, she wrote “the college woman is told that she is no longer ready to earn her living when she graduates. Specialized training from one to two years is required to bring her from her vague and lofty theories down to the facts of the business world.”<sup>171</sup> Somewhat offended by the suggestion that college women were only filled with ‘lofty theories’ she went on to state, “Here at college all sorts of useful experiences

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<sup>170</sup> *ibid*, 1.

<sup>171</sup> Unknown Author, “Editorial,” *Wellesley College News* 10, no. 6 (1910): 2.

may be had along with the academic training. The financial management of any campus organization, the various kinds of committee work all bring one into a definite connection with outside industrial fields with proof of practical value.”<sup>172</sup> Her article expressed the sentiment held by some that their experiences while college students both in the classroom and beyond had helped them develop skills of particular use in the professional world.

A 1912 editorial appearing in the *Wellesley College News* described a survey conducted of the current student body. The survey had asked students, “what reform program would you instigate at Wellesley College had you the power.”<sup>173</sup> Many reforms were suggested but, “the greatest number of students desired the institution of more utilitarian courses.”<sup>174</sup> Such utilitarian courses would provide more specific and practical training to help students prepare for future occupations. Similar to the article described previously, this editor urged students and the public to have a greater appreciation of the theoretical training that the college course offered. But nonetheless there was a clear message sent by Wellesley College students that they desired more opportunities to prepare for future occupations prior to graduation. Such courses may have included similar practical courses that were offered for women at coeducational universities such as domestic science, preparation for physical educators and pedagogy. Including these more utilitarian classes in the college course would allow college women to both obtain their college degrees while at the same time receive at least part of the necessary

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<sup>172</sup> *ibid*

<sup>173</sup> Unknown Author, “Editorial,” *Wellesley College News* 21, no. 3 (1912): 3.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid*, 4.

specialized training they would need to enter a profession after graduation thereby decreasing the time required for practical training.

In accordance with the calls for less occupational training for college women, in 1917 came the first mention in these student newspapers and magazines of the potential for a shortened course of nurse training for college graduates. Annie Goodrich, arguably the most influential reformer of nursing education was working within The Teacher's College of New York to develop new educational opportunities that elevated the standards of nursing education. These included postgraduate courses in hospital economics and public health nursing.<sup>175</sup> She had convinced "a number of representative schools of nursing" to offer a shortened course of training for college graduates. "Credit for one academic year will be given to such candidates who bring satisfactory scientific and other preparation to meet the usual requirements of these schools of nursing. For women so prepared the course of training will be brought into a period of two years exclusive of the brief term of preparatory work."<sup>176</sup> Such a shortened course brought a new and exciting opportunity for college women as trained nurses. Such an opportunity would have worked to break down one of the barriers that presented some college women from entering into the field of professional nursing.

College women were finding power in their collaborations with each other in order to create the resources they needed to find professional opportunities other than teaching. At a time of change on the campuses of the most elite women's colleges when

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<sup>175</sup> Helen E. Marshall, *Mary Adelaide Nutting: Pioneer of Modern Nursing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1972.

<sup>176</sup> Unknown Author, "Developments in Nursing," *Wellesley College News* 24, no. 33 (1917): 2.

efforts were being made to connect the academic curriculum with the social problems outside of the college gates, these women were contributing in powerful ways to social reform movements. Attempting to find ways to use their broad educational backgrounds, leadership skills and desire for service that they gained while students, they looked for work that provided opportunities to affect social change, provide wages that would allow for independence and not require of them too lengthy a course of specialized training.

Within these women's writings it can be seen that at this historical moment there was an opportunity for college women to be turned onto professions that they had not previously considered. Some students, alumnae and professionals argued for nursing as one of these professions; presenting it as a growing field with new opportunities that called for college women, specifically. In the next chapter I will explore how the leaders of professional nursing in turn saw college women as an untapped resource. Within the context of struggles to achieve professional esteem some nursing leaders looked to college women as a potential source of new workers who could demand professional status. However calls for the recruitment of college women were met with resistance from other elite nurses who believed that college women might not have what it took to be a successful nurse.

## Chapter 4: “We Find her in the Hospital Wards Content:” The Recruitment of College Women

In a 1914 article in the *American Journal of Nursing*, Ruth Brewster Sherman, graduate of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Training School for Nurses, argued for an increase in the standard wages for nurses in order to attract more college educated women into the field.

Yearly the hospital training becomes more elaborate, yearly more lines of work are open to graduate nurses, constantly more is demanded of them. Greater technical training calls for minds enlarged and developed by greater previous education. Without doubt a college graduate could take a nurse’s training much more easily and with vastly more pleasure and mental profit, than does a young woman of only high school education.<sup>177</sup>

Scholars of nursing history have argued that beginning in 1893 with the establishment of the first national organization of nurse educators, nursing leaders were deeply engaged in a professionalizing project.<sup>178</sup> The Progressive Era marked a time of expanding professionalism in an array of occupations including law, medicine, business, social work and nursing. Attainment and recognition of professional status provided a certain level of esteem and reflected an occupation’s autonomy, possession of expert knowledge and ability for self-definition.<sup>179</sup> In her analysis of professionalism in regards to feminism, Nancy Cott illuminates the gendered ways that professionalization played out within male and female dominated fields. Women who gained access to male

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<sup>177</sup> Ruth Brewster Sherman, “Education and Earning Power,” *American Journal of Nursing* 14, no. 6 (1914): 417.

<sup>178</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, Melosh, *The Physician’s Hand* and Armenty, *Resolute Enthusiasts*.

<sup>179</sup> Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*.

dominated fields such as medicine, law and academia, were met with resistance from their new male colleagues as they were denied positions of power, visibility and influence.

Male practitioner's deep-lying and perhaps unacknowledged convictions of female inferiority meant that they rarely accepted women as serious and deserving contenders for leadership, promotion or reward...male professionals fending off female interlopers suggested that they considered the presence of women colleagues above a certain point incompatible with their own vision of professional excellence, a threat to professional esteem.<sup>180</sup>

In this context, female dominated occupations struggling for professional status had to find other ways to assert their prestige and autonomy as a field. As scholars of women's professions have argued, these female dominated occupations took strides to create distinctions between themselves and unprofessional or amateur women in an effort to align their work with that of the male professionals with whom they had to collaborate and compete with for power.<sup>181</sup> In her investigation of the female dominated field of physiotherapy, which rose from the need for rehabilitation workers during the World War I, Beth Linker provides an example of how this gendered professionalization played out in a particular field. Within her discussion of the development of the code of ethics for physiotherapy, the first of an allied health and female dominated field, she highlights the ways in which this code identified physiotherapists with the values of the male dominated and professionally legitimized field of medicine. In turn it created distance from the values inherent in the more traditional and feminized fields which were closely tied to the Victorian ideals of womanhood. It focused on professionals' behavior in regards to other

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<sup>180</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*.

<sup>181</sup> See Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism* and Linker, *The Business of Ethics*.

health professionals with whom they collaborated and steered clear of discussions regarding the physiotherapist's responsibility to the individual patient. This distinction, she argues, removed female physiotherapists from the caring qualities inherent in womanhood – those that so heavily characterized the nursing profession. “The physiotherapists avoided the rhetoric of care to prevent further subordination, to avert a position where they would be forced to give up their private practices, and more significantly, to relinquish their identity as professionals.”<sup>182</sup> To assert and maintain their status as professionals, Linker suggests, they emphasized their connection with what she refers to as the “hard sides” of their work, specifically science and strength.<sup>183</sup>

But for nurses, their profession, having grown out of the late nineteenth century, was deeply embedded in the traditional ideals of women as naturally caring and nurturing individuals. Such qualities were seen as far from those of objectivity, scientific method and logical thought, which were becoming increasingly valued and associated with

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<sup>182</sup> Linker, *The Business of Ethics*, 352. For more on the intersection of gender and professionalization within particular occupations see Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender and Power in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) in which Lunbeck explicates the complicated ways that gender influenced a transition in diagnoses from the abnormal to those of everyday life to assure a necessary field for psychiatric professionals. In addition she investigates the dynamic between male psychiatrists, female psychiatrists and the female dominated world of psychiatric social work. In Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Morantz-Sanchez investigates the stories of American women physicians. She argues that these professionals made a claim for their value to the profession based on the Victorian ideals of women as naturally caring. To establish their professional position they asserted that they brought the unique ability to combine sympathy with science to provide a needed service within the medical profession. Unlike Linker's physiotherapists yet similar to nurses at the turn of the century these female physicians capitalized on the belief that women were inherently superior in their roles as caretakers.

<sup>183</sup> Linker, *Strength and Science*, 7.

superior masculinity in the Progressive Era.<sup>184</sup> Unlike Linker's physiotherapists, nurses could not separate themselves from such ideals in an effort to achieve increased professional esteem. Instead, those of the nursing elite attempted to distinguish themselves from nonprofessional women not only by emphasizing the difference between trained and untrained nurses, but by excluding members of their own profession. It was those nurses who came from working class backgrounds and lesser training in smaller nurse training schools that leaders saw as the nonprofessionals from which they needed to create distance.

In Nancy Tomes' analysis of the Pennsylvania Hospital Training School for Nurses from 1895-1907, she provides an example of how these professionalizing tendencies played out in a particular school of nursing. Superintendent, Lucy Walker, evaluated students based on their background, personal qualities and work in the hospital wards. She categorized two types of nursing students. Students who were seen as refined – possessing a good education, a quiet manner and neat appearance – were preferred by Walker and treated as such. These more elite nurses were groomed to eventually enter positions of influence as educators, hospital superintendents and administrators. The other trainees were prepared for and shunted into positions as private

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<sup>184</sup> For a good discussion of the values of objectivity and scientific thought which were associated with masculine ways of knowing and sympathetic or empathic qualities which were characterized as feminine and their impact on the professionalization of medicine see Ellen Singer More, "Empathy Enters the Profession of Medicine," in *The Empathic Practitioner*, ed. Ellen Singer More and Maureen A. Milligan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994) and Regina Morantz-Sanchez, "The Gendering of Empathic Expertise: How Women Physicians Became More Empathic than Men," in *The Empathic Practitioner*, ed. Ellen Singer More and Maureen A. Milligan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).



duty nurses, where it was thought that a nurse who was simply a “good practical worker” would succeed.<sup>185</sup> The more elite nurses were held to high rigorous standards by Walker because she saw them as the next leaders in the profession. As Tomes explains, “their training school experience made them conscious of a special professional identity and shaped their dedication to the upgrading of the public image of nursing. They worked to raise the standard and establish an atmosphere that encouraged the public to consider the real trained nurse.”<sup>186</sup>

This chapter builds on the previous research into the intersection of gender and professionalization and the professionalizing movement of nurses. Utilizing Cott’s argument that in efforts to achieve professional status, female dominated fields worked to separate themselves from untrained nonprofessional women, I look to professional nurses as a case in which the elite leaders of the field implemented efforts to create distance between those who could demand professional status, in particular middle class, educated women, and those who could not due to their class and lack of connection with an academic education. This argument is not completely new within the scholarship of the history of nursing. Scholars have long identified nursing leaders’ efforts to exclude who they thought to be lesser-trained and lower class women from the field.<sup>187</sup> However the story of nursing leaders’ attempts to specifically recruit college women into the field has not been given its due investigation. For nursing leaders worked to create a distinction for themselves from the poorly trained or amateur nurse not simply through exclusionary

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<sup>185</sup> Tomes “Little World of Our Own,” 527.

<sup>186</sup> Tomes, “Little World of our Own,” 530.

<sup>187</sup> See Melosh, *The Physician’s Hand*, Reverby *Ordered to Care* and Armeny, “Resolute Enthusiasts.”

practices. They also engaged in an effort to bring more middle class and better-educated college women into positions as educators, administrators and superintendents. College educated women were targeted to fill positions of power and visibility in order to demand professional status for the whole of the field.

Yet arguments for the recruitment of college women were controversial even among elite nurses. The suggestion that these women were best qualified to fill positions of leadership as educators, superintendents and administrators challenged many of the nurses currently in such positions, for the majority were not, themselves, college educated. Additionally some argued that the most important qualities of a superior nurse were not education or background, but dedication, character and a sense of duty.<sup>188</sup> This argument often suggested that college women in fact would make less qualified nurses for they were thought to lack the discipline, common sense and dedication that was required of the trained nurse. This chapter utilizes the minutes of the National League of Nursing Education's annual conferences in conjunction with various articles found in prominent nursing journals to trace the conversation over the college educated woman's place within professional nursing.

#### The National League of Nursing Education Attempts to Recruit College Women

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<sup>188</sup> Susan Reverby in *Ordered to Care* also makes this distinction between nursing leaders who argued that education made the most ideal nurses and those who instead valued character and duty. However her investigation into the professionalizing efforts of nursing leaders during the Progressive Era does not discuss how the debate over college educated women played out in this context.

Scholars of nursing history have identified the development of national organizations for nursing, the most powerful being the National League of Nursing Education (NLNE), as key to the professionalizing project of nursing leaders.<sup>189</sup> This first national organization for nurses grew out of a meeting of nurses as part of the 1893 World's Fair Columbian Expedition in Chicago, organized by Isabel Hampton Robb, Superintendent at the Johns Hopkins Training School for Nurses.<sup>190</sup> Rob had invited fourteen nurses to speak on the status of nurse's training. All but one of these speakers were either superintendents of training schools or hospitals or held other administrative positions.<sup>191</sup> It was the women present at this conference who established the American Society for Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, the first national organization of American Nurses. The demographics of the fourteen speakers selected by Robb reflected the demographics of the women given membership in the organization

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<sup>189</sup> See Melosh, *The Physician's Hand, Reverby Ordered to Care* and Armeny, "Resolute Enthusiasts." The National League of Nursing Education began as the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses. In 1912 it renamed itself as the NLNE and it is this name by which it is now known most widely and for the purposes of this dissertation will be referred to as such.

<sup>190</sup> Isabel Hampton Robb had recently left the Illinois Training School for Nurses where she was serving as superintendent to fill the position of superintendent at the newly developed Johns Hopkins Training School for Nurses. She instituted strong academic standards at Johns Hopkins and developed it to be one of the most academically prestigious nurse training schools. The educational structure she put into action at Johns Hopkins emphasized a three-month probationary course, classroom teaching and limited time on the hospital wards so that students could fully engage with their education. Throughout the professionalizing movement in nursing, the structure at Johns Hopkins served as an example of an ideal training course. Vern L. Bullough, Olga Maranjian Church and Alice P. Stein, *American Nursing: A Biographical Dictionary*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1988), 274-275.

<sup>191</sup> Armeny, "Resolute Enthusiasts."

– the majority were superintendents from larger and well-respected training schools.<sup>192</sup>

Hailing from positions of power at the best nurse training schools in the country, the nursing leaders within the Society (and later the National League for Nursing Education as it would become known) represented a distinct demographic of nurses. As Susan Reverby argues, the opinions and efforts of this organization need to be understood in context of their elite position within the field. Thus they did not necessarily represent the needs of nurses in more rank and file positions. Instead their efforts as part of the professionalizing movement were those that would suit an upper class of nurses.<sup>193</sup>

At a 1903 convention of the Society of Superintendents, Alice Griswold, Superintendent at the Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital, proposed a specific benefit of the college woman to the profession. She described that college women were potential recruits who had strong backgrounds academically, would be able to approach nursing work in a sophisticated manner, to relate to all worlds of patients, to work autonomously and independently and to have the strength to persevere through the demanding work of nursing.<sup>194</sup> In her address, “The Modern Nurse and the Modern Hospital,” Griswold spoke of the qualities that were necessary for a woman to become such a nurse. She stated that not all women, even if they were academically well educated, had the

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<sup>192</sup> For more on the story of the development and growth of the NLNE and see Armeny, “Resolute Enthusiasts,” ch 3.

<sup>193</sup> In *Ordered to Care*, Reverby makes a distinction between the “elite” nursing leadership and rank and file nurses, their priorities being much different. As these elite nurses worked towards professionalization, rank and file nurses argued for better working conditions such as the 8-hour day and compensation while in training school. See Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, ch. 7.

<sup>194</sup> Alice Griswold, “The Modern Nurse and the Modern Hospital,” *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses*, 1903.

necessary strength, discipline and endurance. She offered the first articulation within this organization of elite nurses of how some viewed college women and their potential benefit to the profession. Griswold asserted that in addition to the experiences needed to interact with patients of high class and education, the desire to do physically demanding work, the character and womanliness that a nurse must possess were all to be found in the college woman, those who chose nursing did so with a discerning nature. She stated, “all other things being equal, the college woman makes no mistake when she chooses this work.”<sup>195</sup>

Griswold continued with a description of how the college woman excelled as the professional nurse, explicating the benefits of her prior education and how they translated to superior nursing work.

We find her in the hospital wards content, doing for others and putting to a very practical use her education. Her knowledge of language has given her that mental discipline, which enables her to meet and grapple with the problems of life before her. Her mathematics has given her a yearning after truth; her literature has so enriched her mind that she is never truly lonely. And it has also made her most companionable to some afflicted scholar to whom she ministers. She puts her best thought into her work for she works with purpose and believes that evil is wrought for want of thought as well as want of heart.<sup>196</sup>

According to Griswold, a college woman’s liberal academic background provided her with the ability to understand and address problems facing the nurse beyond what one gained through scientific knowledge alone. Her statement that the college woman’s

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<sup>195</sup> *ibid*, 13.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid*

“knowledge of literature has so enriched her mind that she is never truly lonely,”<sup>197</sup> suggested that her background had instilled in her the human capabilities necessary to be a good nurse, not just as a companion to patients or in the tasks a nurse completes, but for the mental and emotional stresses that the profession required. In a profession where one often found herself as the only nurse caring for patients on the hospital ward overnight, or as a public health or private duty nurse independently caring for patients in their homes, such a woman had the internal resources to support herself emotionally. The college woman would be independent and autonomous both mentally and emotionally in spirit. She would be able to work alone and never suffer from the extreme demands of professional nursing. Griswold asserted that the college woman came to professional nursing prepared with the capacity to find intellectual stimulation and emotional satisfaction. Her full engagement on these levels would keep her from the “evil” that comes when one allows her work to become intellectually and emotionally mundane.<sup>198</sup>

*The Committee to Approach Women’s Colleges*

Originally established in 1902, the American Federation of Nurses (AFN) was created in order to provide an organization that could serve to send representatives of the nursing profession to the International Congress of Women whose first meeting was held in Washington, DC in February of 1902. The Congress consisted of representatives of various realms of international women’s organizations with the purpose of discussing and

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<sup>197</sup> *ibid*

<sup>198</sup> *ibid*

furthering, “the upward and onward movement among women.”<sup>199</sup> As representatives of the nursing profession in the United States the AFN was formed to encompass both of the national organizations at the time, the NLNE and the Nurses’ Associated Alumnae of the United States. The aim was to send representatives of this body in order to provide American nursing a voice at the international table. The AFN had little funding of its own, as it existed solely as a body to bring together members of both national nursing societies. Its meetings were held following the national meetings of the NLNE and were paid for with funds as such. Although it did not develop into a powerful organization that would stand as the single organization to represent all nurses in the United States, the AFN did come together to discuss and voice many of the concerns relevant to the nursing profession at the time with a special interest as to what efforts and projects should be displayed on the international stage. Its hopes would be to represent the upward and forward movement of the nursing profession, especially in regards to the status of women in the United States. Thus, their proceedings are particularly important for they demonstrate the interests of the leaders of the nursing profession, not simply for changes within the profession, but also how to demonstrate their progress to a greater group of women working for increased public roles, autonomy and power within their respective societies.<sup>200</sup>

A significant piece to this narrative occurred at a meeting of the AFN held directly after the conclusion of the 1909 NLNE convention. The benefit of college

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<sup>199</sup> Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Nurses’ Associated Alumnae of the United States, Chicago (1902).

<sup>200</sup> *ibid*

women as members of the nursing profession was one of the topics on the agenda. The Federation called for a specific committee within the NLNE to be tasked with bringing college women into the profession. Thus “The Committee to Approach Women’s Colleges” was created.<sup>201</sup> Throughout its existence it always included three to four members, some of whom were college graduates. Although there is little data on most of the work undertaken by the committee, their aims and approaches can be seen in the addresses given by members to the NLNE and the recruitment material they produced.

Some committee members reached out to college women by submitting essays to their student newspapers. Committee member Edna E. Foley was a graduate of Smith College and the Hartford Hospital Training School for Nurses. She was an influential nurse and public health reformer, eventually becoming founder and president of the National Organization for Public Health Nurses.<sup>202</sup> She wrote in her alma mater, Smith College’s, student newspaper. Much like the essays that were being written by college women to provide information about suitable occupations, Foley’s essay spoke from her own expertise to offer advice to college women looking for new professions. However Foley was doing more than simply sharing her expertise with her peers, she was acting on behalf of the committee and in turn the NLNE, to actively recruit more college women into the profession. She wrote to her college peers that among the many new and interesting fields opening for women, professional nursing offered unique opportunities for meaningful work, positions of influence and ability to affect positive change. She

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<sup>201</sup> Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, (1909).

<sup>202</sup> Bullough, et al., *American Nursing: A Biographical Dictionary*.



started by acknowledging that nursing was often dismissed by college women who assumed it was not a suitable occupation for an educated woman. “Perhaps that is the reason why nursing as a profession for college women has been overlooked...as if the work of healing sick bodies and preventing more ill ones was ‘interesting, oh very,’ and endlessly self-sacrificing, but ‘hardly the work for a college woman.’”<sup>203</sup>

She rebutted such an assumption with an explication of the positions in the field of nursing that were well suited for college women, arguing that the demand for candidates for positions is far above the supply. Due to the expansion of the three years course of training, she argued, women who were both college educated and trained nurses were needed to fill positions in the training schools.

Instructors and lecturers for this course are needed, but they must be nurses, for it has been demonstrated very often that nurses much teach nurses. And if these instructors have, besides their general training, a college education, they will be all the better prepared to give this teaching the important place which, in the past, it has sometimes lacked.<sup>204</sup>

In a similar manner, she suggested that college women were needed in positions as superintendents in training school. For their educational background and sophistication was needed to mentor young nurse training students who had yet to gain such skills. And by using their unique abilities, college women had the opportunity to affect positive change through teaching. For her influence was seen in the quality of work produced by her students.

She (the superintendent) directs personally...the work of the nurses...They spend three busy years in an atmosphere created largely by

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<sup>203</sup> Edna L. Foley, “Nursing as a Profession for College Women,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* April, 1910, 106.

<sup>204</sup> Foley, “Nursing as a Profession for College Women,” 107.

her influence, and this means everything to a young nurse who enters her work filled with zeal and enthusiasm and high ideals. If the superintendent is a woman of sound education, broad culture and lofty purpose, nursing ethics is not overlooked, and these three years bear excellent fruit. But if she is a small minded woman with little previous training beyond her hospital experience, the ethics of nurses receives scant consideration from her. The college trained superintendent would not so easily overlook this important instruction, and here the public would gain for the superintendent's influence and teaching extend far beyond the hospital walls, and the work of her graduates is her best encomium.<sup>205</sup>

Adelaide Nutting also reached out to college women through their student and alumnae publications, appealing to their need for more information on potential professions in a 1915 article in the *Barnard College Bulletin*.<sup>206</sup> Titled, "The Modern Profession of Nursing," she began with her assessment that many college women had been kept away from the nursing profession because of the "long and arduous training required in preparation for nursing (which) had probably made other occupations more attractive."<sup>207</sup> However, she made the case that nursing was a particularly good option for college women for it was positioned at an important transitional moment. As nursing leaders were engaged in efforts to raise the standards of education for nurses, the field of public health nursing was developing and quickly expanding and the first connections between nurse training schools and universities were developing, such as the graduate course in hospital economics at teacher's College, space was opening for educated women within the field of nursing for positions of power and influence.

As a result of this new trend in nursing education, she asserted, there was an

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<sup>205</sup> Foley, "Nursing as a Profession for College Women," 107-108.

<sup>206</sup> Adelaide Nutting, "Nursing for College Women," Reprinted in the *Wellesley College News*, 23, no.28 (1915): 4.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid*

expected increase in demand for highly educated and trained nurses. The women for whom she was writing had the opportunity to fill positions that required of them the exact training they had received as college students. “Such improvements in these schools call for more highly educated and specially prepared nursing to fill adequately the positions of superintendents and principals, supervisors and instructors in such schools.”<sup>208</sup>

Additionally, Nutting suggested that nursing was an enticing occupation for college women for there existed, “attractive opportunities to have a hand in the reshaping one of the most important professions (that) awaited such women.”<sup>209</sup> She suggested that all women looking for an occupation should at least consider nursing. “Some study of them (nursing positions) is recommended to the thoughtful woman of today who is trying to find out what she can or ought to do in life.”<sup>210</sup> In this last phrase it can be seen that Nutting was aware of the college woman’s difficulty in navigating new paths into suitable occupations. Bringing the attention of college women to this exciting moment in the development of the nursing profession and nursing education, Nutting attempted to capitalize on the potential that existed to turn college women onto professional nursing.

To recruit them into more leadership positions, Isabel Stewart, who was a professor at Teacher’s College in charge of the course in hospital economics for graduate nurses, authored a pamphlet directed at college women. It was published and circulated by the NLNE with its intent to expose students to the opportunities available in professional nursing that may not have been found in other careers. Titled, “Opportunities

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<sup>208</sup> *ibid*

<sup>209</sup> *ibid*

<sup>210</sup> *ibid*

in the Field of Nursing,” it emphasized to the potential college recruit that nursing was a more independent and crucial profession than may have been understood by the public. Stewart emphasized the importance and character of nursing work and appealing to the college woman’s desire for service she claimed nurses were the “foster-mothers of the race.”<sup>211</sup> This aimed to give college women the perception that nursing was of a crucial importance to society and bestowed upon its members a high level of responsibility and reverence.

It will be seen from this that the nurse is not merely the assistant of the physician...The nursing art is just as distinct and as specialized as the art of the medical practitioner, and is more and more recognized as such. Sometimes it is the skill of the surgeon or physician that turns the scale in favor of recovery, and sometimes it is good nursing- one supplements the other, and both are usually necessary in any adequate care of sick people.<sup>212</sup>

She emphasized that independence and autonomy were a necessary part of nursing work; this being an important professional characteristic for college women as they had been growing their identities as independent women while in college. “The nurse works more or less independently, calling in the services of the medical expert only when necessary.”<sup>213</sup>

The pamphlet went on to lay out the training needed for a professional nurse, the environment within training schools, the expectations of class and academic work and the structure of work on hospital wards. Stewart ended her pamphlet with a long section titled, “Special Interests and Satisfactions.” Within this section she provided reason upon

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<sup>211</sup>Stewart, Isabel. *Opportunities in the Field of Nursing*, 1917, Training Camp for Nurses Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, Vassar College Archive, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

<sup>212</sup> *ibid*

<sup>213</sup> *ibid*, 9.

reason why a college woman may have been interested in nursing. Beyond the independent and interesting nature of the work, Stewart argued to college women that there were opportunities within the field of nursing that could not be found in other careers. The nurse, she argued, was a crucial part of the growing field of science and had the opportunity to be a part of groundbreaking progress in the field.

...the most inspiring part of the work is the privilege in assisting in the wonderful results which are being accomplished by the great surgeons and by other leaders in the field of research and medicine. The nurse's work is a most essential part of all these activities, and so she has a vital interest in every detail connected with them.<sup>214</sup>

She suggested that the satisfaction of personal involvement with patients was to be found in a greater extent than in medicine, stating, "the nurse sees far more of the personal and human side of hospital life than the physician does."<sup>215</sup> She concluded with the statement that only as a nurse could a professional woman find the most rewarding opportunities to experience life on a deep level. "Nowhere does one find more highlights and shadows, more dramatic situations and more fascinating glimpses of human nature. There is adventure too, and heroism, and lots of healthy humor to keep the balance true."<sup>216</sup>

In sum, Isabel Stewart made a special case to college women explaining to them that their growth during their college years would not be wasted if they chose careers as professional nurses. Instead nursing would build on their talents as independent women who possessed an intellectual curiosity and were dedicated to improving the social

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<sup>214</sup> *ibid*, 20.

<sup>215</sup> *ibid*, 20.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid*, 21.

welfare. Echoing the arguments of the NLNE that college women would make superior nurses, she worked to inform college women that they were specifically well suited for nursing and in turn nursing was well suited for them. Stewart's, "Opportunities in the Field of Nursing" stands as a succinct representation of the conversations and efforts of the NLNE concerning the need to recruit college women into the profession. It demonstrates the belief held by some members of the NLNE that college women had the broad educational background, independence and desire to fully engage in nursing work.

Soon thereafter The Committee on Approaching College Women disbanded. The committee explained to the league that its work was beginning to become redundant with the work being done in the independent state branches of the NLNE. Reports of the work done by the individual state organizations are not included in the annual reports of the national conventions and it can be assumed that the work differed from state to state. However the establishment and intentions of the committee demonstrate that as part of the professionalizing movement to increase the status of the women in higher positions within nursing, some members of the leadership honed their efforts in on the recruitment of college women. In addition to their educational background or social class, college women were sought after because they brought with them a certain level of culture, pedigree, and knowledge of the world. It was these qualities in college women that would make them especially well-suited to fill the most visible and executive positions within nursing. For these college women could demand professional status and would thereby work to increase the professional esteem of the field as a whole.

## The Debate over College Women

Further discussions regarding the recruitment of these women were playing out beyond the efforts of the Committee on Approaching College Women. Some expressed opposition to the idea that college women were an asset to the field and others continued to assert their benefit and offer ways in which they could be recruited in greater numbers. In publication since 1893, the journal *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* was geared towards the working nurse, with most of its content directly pertaining to nursing skills, techniques and advancements, serving as a source of continued education. Most of its readers were not nursing educators like the members of the NLNE but nurses working in hospitals and in private duty. Some regular contributors to the *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* argued directly against the efforts to demand greater academic requirements for admittance to nursing schools. Two of the most frequent contributors to the journal on this topic were Charlotte Aitkens and Annette Fiske. Both were college-educated women who held positions as superintendents of nursing schools. Although their demographic was similar to many of those arguing for the benefit of college women to the profession, they were champions of the rank and file nurses, arguing that it was character, not education that was the most important characteristic of a good nurse. As historian, Susan Reverby, has argued, there existed a split between the efforts of the elite nurse leaders and the rank and file nurses. The voices of the elite nurses, as suggested by

Reverby, can be found in the pages of the *American Journal of Nursing*, while the *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* was written for the rank and file.<sup>217</sup>

During an address to the NLNE in 1909 Helen Scott Hay described in detail the changes that were needed in order to bring college women into the profession. Hay had received a Bachelor's degree from Northwestern University in 1893, trained as a nurse at the Illinois Training School for Nurses finishing in 1900 and later did some graduate work at the University of Chicago. At the time of her address she was serving as the superintendent of the Illinois Training School.<sup>218</sup> Within these recommendations she acknowledged that her suggestions were controversial for how they characterized and what they required of current superintendents. She argued that those who were already superintendents, many of whom she was addressing, needed to acquire a higher level of education themselves. This could be achieved, she explained, by taking the post-graduate course offered at Teachers College in the economics of the nursing. Her introductory remarks addressed superintendents in the room and offered a hard critique of their abilities.

Perhaps some of my audience resent the expression of this self-evident truth, but we need to be told it that as a body, have a low standard of culture. Not only are we deficient in the breadth of outlook which the good teacher exhibits whatever her subject or sphere of action, but sadly and woefully deficient are we of the simplest points of equipment, and adequate knowledge of the King's English and of the simple rules of composition and spelling. Can we expect to attract to our profession the best women if we the leaders and teachers, ourselves, do not possess the

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<sup>217</sup> Susan Reverby, *Ordered to Care*. See chapter 7 for more on her discussion of the split between those who argued education was the most important quality for a nurse to have and those who that instead it was the appropriate character that made a superior nurse.

<sup>218</sup> Bullough, et al., *American Nursing: A Biographical Dictionary*, 174-176.



qualifications that are in every other walk of life recognized as essential to the best.<sup>219</sup>

She spoke regarding college women and what might prevent them from entering the profession. She suggested that if the leaders and teachers of nursing were not as educated as college women, then, of course, a college woman would feel that the work of a trained nurse was below her.

Can we hope to arouse in the college graduate now in her probation class, any large respect and appreciation if we in our speech are making the same mistake that she back in her high school days was taught to look upon as indicating illiteracy or an inexcusable ignorance or indifference. Can we as a profession gain recognition as an educated profession till individually we recognize the importance of the degree of culture that forever puts us beyond criticism in even these littlest points?<sup>220</sup>

Hay's somewhat controversial remarks to her peers highlighted the attempts of these nurses engaged in the professionalizing movement to bring better educated and higher status women into the field in order to finally, "gain recognition as an educated profession," as they saw it.<sup>221</sup> Leaders of this movement were willing to alienate their already established colleagues in order to achieve this goal. For, to leaders like Hay, only by having better educated women in the leadership positions of the field, could nursing demand the professional status it was after.

Appearing in a 1911 edition of the *American Journal of Nursing*, an editorial asked readers to take advantage of what they considered to be new opportunities for attracting college women to the nursing profession. They suggested that the Interstate

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<sup>219</sup> Helen Scott Hay "Preparation for Institutional Work" in Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the National League of Nursing Education (1909), 71.

<sup>220</sup> *ibid*, 71.

<sup>221</sup> *ibid*, 71.

Secretary of the American Nurses' Association (ANA) add to her responsibilities connecting with college women to provide information about the field. The position of the Interstate Secretary worked as a traveling spokesperson, who communicated the goals and work of the ANA to local groups. She spoke at conventions, local meetings and training school graduations on behalf of the Journal and these nursing organizations. The Interstate Secretary at this time was Isabel McIsaac, an influential nursing leader who had been instrumental in the establishment of the major national nursing organizations as well as the *American Journal of Nursing*. She was one of the original fourteen speakers as part of the nursing congress at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and for several years she served as the superintendent of the Illinois Training School for Nurses. In 1910 she came out of retirement to fill the position of Interstate Secretary for the *American Journal of Nursing* in combination with the NLNE and the Red Cross.<sup>222</sup> The editors cited the connection between the expansion of social service related nursing roles such as district nursing and public health nursing and college women's increasing desire for professions in public service as a new opportunity to bring these women into the field. "The varieties of district and social-service nursing are in line with their (college women) desires and aspirations, and speakers on such subjects are constantly in demand."<sup>223</sup> According to the authors, college women's new search for service-minded professions presented an opportunity for the field. "It seems to us that (an) advantage should be taken of the awakened interest in our own work, and that provision should be made for furnishing a

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<sup>222</sup> Bullough, et al., *American Nursing: A Biographical Dictionary*, 220-222.

<sup>223</sup> Editors of the *American Journal of Nursing* "Talks to College Women," *American Journal of Nursing* 11, no 7 (1911): 509.

speaker (to women's colleges) when one is desired, so that no opportunity need to be lost."<sup>224</sup>

However those who stood in opposition to the idea of the benefit of the college woman were expressing their dissent as well. Annette Fiske, a college educated trained nurse of upper middle class background, was raised in Cambridge Massachusetts, the daughter of a Harvard graduate. She was educated in private schools as a girl and eventually received Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Radcliffe College. Eventually she entered the field of nursing seeking a meaningful career. She was trained at Waltham Training School for Nurses and dedicated her career to private duty nursing.<sup>225</sup> The Waltham training school was unique for it was dedicated to the training of private duty nurses. Independent of a hospital, nurses in training were not educated by superintendents and head and senior nurses on the hospital wards but in patient's homes in the role of private duty nurses.<sup>226</sup> As well as dedicating her work to that of the private duty nurse, she also served as an instructor in the Waltham Training School from 1918 until it closed in 1932.<sup>227</sup> Writing in 1913, Fiske argued that educational background had no bearing on the fitness of a candidate for nurse training school. She responded to a speech previously given by Annie Goodrich, the professor of the graduate nursing course in hospital economics at Columbia University, in which Goodrich called for the 3 years course of study for all training schools except for a possible shortened course for college

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<sup>224</sup> *ibid*, 510.

<sup>225</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, 138.

<sup>226</sup> Minnie Goodnow, *Goodnow's History of Nursing* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1916), 207-211.

<sup>227</sup> Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, 139.

graduates. In response Fiske argued that although she, herself, was a college graduate, a strong educational background in no way made a woman better fit to become a nurse. In fact a woman who had only a grammar school education could easily make a more exceptional nurse than the college woman. For, as she argued, the characteristics needed to become a superior nurse could not be taught. To Fiske these qualities were ones with which a woman was either born or not.

I have the good fortune to be a college graduate as well as a trained nurse, and I am thankful for both kinds of trainings, but one of the best nurses I know – and I would back her against any in the profession – had very meager educational advantages, the grammar school course only. She is a born nurse however, a conscientious worker, and she is always in demand, deservedly so; nor is she an exceptional case by any means.<sup>228</sup>

She went on to specify what these characteristics were. To Fiske the woman best suited for nursing was a certain type of woman; a woman who was dedicated to service and the welfare of other individuals. These qualities by far outweighed a woman's possession of knowledge or breadth of academic training.

Fiske reflected back on her own experience in higher education explaining that college education may not only keep many women from wanting to pursue nursing, but may actually serve to make them unfit for the profession. She viewed the experiences a woman had while in college as promoting in her feelings that she would not be suited for the more menial and dirtier tasks of the profession. She suggested that college women, after being so educated, may feel unsuited for the “body work” of professional nursing.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Annette Fiske, “The Need for Fairness,” *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* 51, no 1 (1913): 6.

<sup>229</sup> D’Antonio uses the term “body-work” to discuss the aspect of nursing that required direct contact with the messiness of working with human bodies. For instance she

She spoke from her personal experience when she wrote, “I believe college education tends not only to turn young women from nursing, though it is a pity it should be so, but to unfit them for it, especially for private nursing with its many homely duties.”<sup>230</sup>

In a 1914 article Charlotte Aikens argued that college graduates were specifically unfit for professional nursing solely because of their preparation as college women. Aikens was born in Ontario Canada and earned a Bachelor’s degree from Alma College before attending nurse training school at the Stratford Hospital School of Nursing in 1897. At the time of this article she was serving as the editor of *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* having previously held positions as the Superintendent of the Methodist Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa and Columbia Hospital in Pittsburgh.<sup>231</sup> In her article, “When is a probationer unfit?” she used a college graduate turned nurse as her single example of the unfit probationer. “She didn’t know how to comb her hair or get her clothing on so that there were no gaps between skirt and waist or where buttons should have been; and she ‘Just hated ‘emptying things’ and cleaning up after dirty dressings.”<sup>232</sup> Her example showed a college woman who lacked the common knowledge to present her appearance in a professional way and who thought herself above the somewhat more messy work of a trained nurse. Aikens argued that education within itself did not make one fit for nursing work, even if it appeared to provide a sound intellectual basis.

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refers to, “changing bloodied dressings, catheterizing male patients, cleaning vomit, urine and feces,” as examples. D’Antonio, *American Nursing*, 30.

<sup>230</sup> Annette Fiske, “The Need for Fairness” *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* 51, no 1 (1913): 7.

<sup>231</sup> Bullough, et al., *American Nursing a Biographical Dictionary*, 1-2.

<sup>232</sup> Charlotte Aikens, “When is a Probationer Unfit?” *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* 52 no 1 (1914): 103.

“Theoretically she was ‘fit’; practically she was most decidedly unfit.”<sup>233</sup> In essence, to Aikens, the college woman may have considered herself above the demands made on the professional nurse. She may be unwilling to do some of the lesser tasks of the nurse, she may lack the common sense necessary to serve as a professional and she may be unwilling to yield to the authority of those above her in the hierarchy of professional nursing. “A nurse who seems unwilling to submit to discipline or to take orders from those who have been appointed her superiors in office; the nurse who habitually grumbles or criticizes the management may, probably, be declared at once unfit no matter how clever she may be.”<sup>234</sup>

Finally the editorial board of *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* published a response to the elite nursing leadership’s call for increasing the recruitment of college women as a means to raise the social status of the profession. In a 1915 editorial, “Wanted: Sensible Women,” the journal staff wrote,

We have been told so often that if we had higher educational qualifications for hospitals we would have no difficulty in securing in large numbers the type of workers wanted...The college education is often brought forth as a desirable requirement, but no college seems to be able to give a woman common sense, good judgment and the ability to work harmoniously with different varieties of people if she does not have a well-balanced character and disposition to start.<sup>235</sup>

The articles that appeared in the *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* offer a glimpse into the controversial nature of the arguments for recruitment of increased numbers of college graduates. Aikens Fiske and Charlotte Aikens, both themselves elite and influential

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<sup>233</sup> *ibid*

<sup>234</sup> *ibid*

<sup>235</sup> Unknown Author, “Editorial,” *Trained Nurse Hospital Review* 54, no 3 (1915): 162.

nurses, argued that it was character, not education that made a woman qualified to become a professional nurse. In fact, a college education meant, to some, a lack of discipline, loyalty, common sense and willingness to engage in the body work required of a trained nurse.

As a continued part of the conversation on college women in the nursing field, Lillian Clayton and Anna C. Jamme contributed an essay to the “Department of Nursing Education” section in the *American Journal of Nursing*. Lillian Clayton had served as superintendent of various training schools of nursing, president of the NLNE and the American Nurses Association. At the time of this article she was serving as the superintendent of the prestigious Philadelphia General Hospital School of Nursing. Anna C. Jamme was just as an accomplished nursing leader as Clayton, having held various administrative positions in hospitals and schools of nursing. In 1906 she had founded the school of nursing at St. Mary’s Hospital in Rochester Maryland and by the time of this article she had been appointed as the Bureau of the Registration of Nurse’s in the public health department of the state of California.<sup>236</sup> Writing in 1917, prior to the inception of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses, they were speaking to a need for more qualified trained nurses in the profession to continue to increase the educational standard of probationer nurses as well as address the nursing shortage created by the World War I. In the midst of this national crisis nursing leaders were attempting to find untapped resources of women who could become nursing recruits. They argued that the best group of possible nursing recruits to meet their needs was college women.

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<sup>236</sup> Bullough et al., *American Nursing a Biographical Dictionary*, 64-65 and 188-189.

There are several sources of good material for nursing schools which we have not fully tapped, but the best is undoubtedly the increasingly large group of college women who had the advantage of well-trained minds, and a substantial body of knowledge but who also have their eyes opened to social needs and who are eager and ready to take part in constructive social work.<sup>237</sup>

Similar to the arguments of some other nursing leaders, Clayton and Jamme believed that college women would make ideal nurses based on their educational background as well as their commitment to social service. However Clayton and Jamme went on to address the opposition expressed by some nurses that college women would make no better qualified nurses than other women who underwent nurses' training; that although they possess a trained mind, their skills in the practical aspects of nursing are no more advanced than other women. "The claim, which is often advanced, that college women are no more skillful in their technical duties, or more responsible or efficient in their ward work in the hospital than bright high school girls, may be perfectly justified." Once acknowledging such an argument they addressed it with the suggestion that in the long run, college women would make better nurses than less educated women because of their ability to quickly adapt to changing conditions, independently try new skills and roles and engage intellectually with their work.

Other things being equal all the evidence goes to prove that apart from the prestige and confidence which a college course gives, the college woman of good ability with a broader point of view and a habit of thinking and digging into things, will go much further, will strike out in newer lines more readily and will accommodate herself more quickly and surely to changing conditions.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Lillian Clayton and Anna C. Jamme, "The Training Schools and the Present Crisis," *American Journal of Nursing* 17 no. 11 (1917): 1084.

<sup>238</sup> *ibid*, 1085.



In conclusion, Clayton and Jamme made a final push for the recruitment of college women, suggesting that this population of women was whom the field was most in need of at the time. Specifically, they argued, the intelligence and ability to think independently, which the college woman was known for, would be most beneficial to the profession. “It is precisely for such recruits as these, bringing initiative, originality, intelligence, trained thinking powers, and a good background of sound knowledge, that we are in the greatest need in nursing today.”<sup>239</sup>

### Conclusion

As documented in the minutes of the NLNE annual conventions as well as articles written by influential nurses some leaders involved in the professionalizing movement argues that college women should be recruited into the field in greater numbers. They suggested that these women had a broad educational background, the leadership skills and the ability to work independently; all qualities that would demand professional status. These qualities, they argued, allowed college women to be exceptional nurses. However the idea of college women as exceptional nurses was sometimes met with resistance even among elite nurses. A split existed between these nursing leaders who fought to bring more college women into leadership positions and those who argued it was character not

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<sup>239</sup> *ibid*

education that made the superior nurse. However, college women, with or without specific recruitment efforts chose to enter nurse training schools from the early days of professional nurse training in the 1890's and did so in increasing numbers through the first two decades of the twentieth centuries. In the following chapter I will explore the ways that these women represented their work as professional nurses to their former college classmates. They offered impressions of professional nursing as offered a role in which they were able to exercise control over their own strength and endurance, control over their work and space and ability to fill influential positions within a growing professional field.

## Chapter 5: “I Had it All My Own Way:” College Women, Control and Nursing

1903's still moving up from the end of the row,  
 Making room for others to find a place below.  
 Thus let each keep going, 'till we get to the top,  
 Until my 'patients' disappear, I don't intend to stop.<sup>240</sup>

In a 1902 letter to her Smith College classmates, Fannie Clement class of 1897, wrote this poem referencing both the success of her classmates and her work as a trained nurse. These types of poems or songs were common among college women while in school and when writing to each other after graduation. Clement expressed the success of her classmates and suggested that as they were climbing higher professional ranks, they were allowing space for their younger college sisters to follow similar paths. But in regards to her own profession of nursing, Clement gave the impression that she was on a path to the “top” of her field and that she planned to continue as long as she was needed. Five years later, she wrote in her class’ ten year reunion letter that for her, nursing had been the “finest profession ever.”<sup>241</sup> Whether her feelings about her profession were really this simple and adamant, it is impossible to know. However she presented to her classmates a representation of herself as a professional nurse, who was content, excited by and satisfied with her profession.

This majority of this chapter deals with letters written from individual college women to their classmates. As a tradition, graduates of these schools wrote letters addressed to members of their graduating class every few years post college. These

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<sup>240</sup> Fannie Clement, Five Year Reunion Letter, Smith College class of 1897,45. Reunion Letters, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>241</sup> *ibid*

letters were then compiled into one document and sent to each member of the class. They provide both narratives of and women's reflections on their life paths post college. In them graduates described activities, their professional and personal lives and their love and longing for their classmates. These class letters exist as a trove of data regarding what these college women thought of their work and lives after graduation. Although they allow us to bring the voices of these women to the forefront, they need to be understood in terms of representations. Class letters were not diary entries written to record personal memories, or even private letters written to individual close friends. They were narratives written to be read by a woman's entire graduating class. As such they must be understood as representing what impressions college women wanted to give their classmates about their lives and work.

In her work on American nursing at the turn of the century, Patricia D'Antonio argues that the strict discipline, loyalty and obedience, which characterized much of the nurses' training school experience, served to create a unique identity of the American nurse. These experiences developed in nurses' behaviors and a claim to scientific expertise that worked to construct representations of the nurse as a professional who exercised, "competence, coolness, courage and control of clinical spaces."<sup>242</sup> At the same time that this nursing identity centered on control was being consciously constructed, women on college campuses were learning that their identity as New Women was deeply connected to their physical strength and ability to endure and wield control over their bodies and mind. In addition, their experiences participating in the extracurriculum on

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<sup>242</sup> D'Antonio, *American Nursing*.

campus taught them the value of harnessing control over their own clubs, groups and spaces of activity. In essence, similar to professional nurses, college women were constructing an identity based on physical strength, endurance and control. In this chapter I argue that through their writings to each other, college women represented the nursing profession as an occupation in which they were able to experience power and control on several levels. In regards to their own personal work, college women turned nurses had the opportunity and challenge to harness control over their own bodies. Drawing on the value of physical strength and fitness, which was inculcated in them as female college students, they felt achievement in the physical and emotional demands made upon the professional nurse. In letters to their peers they offered representations of themselves as professionals who were strong in body and endurance, exercised emotional restraint and harnessed control over their own work, work environment and sometimes the work of others.

### Women's Letter Writing

Students at these women's colleges became very close with each other as they saw their friends and classmates through four formative years. Additionally women felt a certain identity and connection to their classmates knowing that as college women they had unique experiences that only their peers would understand. Women's historian, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, investigated the intimate relationships between women in the late nineteenth century through letters women had written to each other. She has argued

that letter writing existed as a unique way in which women stayed emotionally connected to each other at times when their lives did not allow them to be physically close due to the expectations of women's domestic lives. Through their letters, Smith-Rosenberg uncovered the intimacy that existed among female friends. She argued that, "these female friendships served a number of emotional functions. Within this secure and empathetic world women could share sorrows, anxieties and joys, confident that other women had experienced similar emotions."<sup>243</sup> Within the context provided by Smith-Rosenberg, the writings in these class notes can be understood as a way that college women shared their experiences with their intimate friends who they believed would understand their most inner emotions as they were women who had lives built on similar experiences. In accordance with the intimacy between women described by Smith-Rosenberg, Mary Lane Rogers, a member of the Mount Holyoke College class of 1900, wrote in an introduction to her class letter one year after graduation. She described her feelings of a shared identity with her classmates and a loving interest she believed they all had for the lives of their peers.

Dear Classmates:

The old spirit of MDCCCC (The class of 1900) is in my heart as I address this to all who claim this dear bond of union. I have ever been glad – and since last June I have often thrilled with pride that I may be called a Mount Holyoke daughter... We of 1900 are not only collegemates, but classmates, and when we grasp each other's hands and look into the faces of those who shared our trials, our victories, our defeats, our mental growth and our heart life for the same four short busy years, there cannot ever but be among us a closer feeling of interest and unity.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>244</sup> Mary Rogers Lane, Class of 1900, 1901 Class Notes, 63, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

Lane's sentiments were common among the class letters of these women. They demonstrate the importance that these writings held for female college graduates. Class letters were a way for these women to stay emotionally connected with each other as well as see what women like themselves were doing in their lives after graduation. The stories of those women who became professional nurses as told through these letters suggest common experiences of college women turned professional nurses and how they wanted to portray their lives to their classmates.

### Physical Strength and Endurance

In her histories of the female dominated field of physiotherapy, historian Beth Linker argues that these professionals were unique in creating a female dominated healthcare field where as professionals they were seen as “strong women who possessed specialized knowledge.” Characterizing nurses as professionals whose work rested on the Victorian ideal of women as nurturers and caretakers, she draws a distinction between the professions.

To secure the medical profession's support, physiotherapists created a post-Victorian gender identity, making them distinct from traditionally female healthcare workers. Unlike educated women of the nineteenth century who accepted their lot as the weaker yet more nurturing sex, physiotherapists thought of themselves as strong women who possessed specialized knowledge...Physiotherapists believed that their unique combination of brains and brawn gave them authority over the disabled body.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Linker, “Strength and Science,” 106.

Although the professional movements and successes of physiotherapists and nurses were respectively unique in their gendered approaches to power and authority - whereas nurses could not detach themselves from the ideals of women as nurturing and caring –nurses also believed power and strength was necessary for their practice. While physiotherapists demonstrated physical strength in their control over their male patients’ bodies, nurses had to rely on their strength in physical endurance and emotional control to execute power over their personal abilities and the clinical environment. For college women in particular this was an attractive part of nursing work for it gave them the opportunity to exercise the skills they learned as college women which they were taught was integral to their identities.

Physical strength and health was a signature part of early women’s higher education. As elite women’s colleges developed beginning in 1860 the propriety of such an education was hotly contested. Opponents of women’s higher education argued that exercising the intellect of women would result in injury to the female body. Specifically, educated women would become physically less womanly. Their reproductive organs would atrophy as blood was diverted to their brains.<sup>246</sup> Proponents of women’s higher education addressed such attacks in various ways. One of the most lasting was an educational emphasis on physical health and strength. This was demonstrated through curricular changes that required daily courses in calisthenics and gymnastics. Physical education and outdoor and sports activities became highly valued both in the academic

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<sup>246</sup> Edward H. Clarke, *Sex in Education: A Fair Chance for Girls* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884).



curriculum and in students' social lives.<sup>247</sup> Women's colleges worked to establish extensive resources for gymnastics and exercise, regular evaluations of the physical health of each student and individually prescribed exercise plans that would work to strengthen a student's body while at the same time not lead to overexertion. These components of the physical culture present at these schools worked to quiet the allegations that exercising a woman's intellect would lead to harming her physical health. While at the same time it instilled in female college students the understanding that they should strive to have fit and strong bodies. Harnessing control over their bodies was a way in which these women drew strength from their own abilities.<sup>248</sup>

Scholars have argued that this focus on physical health and strength for female college students did more than shape their bodies. It produced an ideal image of a new womanhood. Historian of women's physical education, Martha Verbrugge, has argued that health, hygiene and physical education courses in women's schools and colleges worked to create a new feminine ideal of "able-bodied womanhood." "In part, their model was a physical description of health and femininity. Desirable qualities included strong muscles and nerves, capacious lungs and symmetrical growth."<sup>249</sup> However this new ideal of a feminine body reached beyond simple physical characteristics. Training the body alone was not enough for adequate health. The equation also called for a disciplined mind. And it was the physical training of the body that allowed for such a

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<sup>247</sup> Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, Solomon, *Company of Educated Women*.

<sup>248</sup> Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*.

<sup>249</sup> Martha Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 144.

mind. As Verbrugge explains, “Even students at the college appreciated the relationship between mental control and physical fitness. As an undergraduate wrote in 1905, systematic exercise builds, ‘an all-around, healthy body which is in perfect subjection to the mind.’”<sup>250</sup> It was this idea of the interconnection between a strong body and a strong mind that bred in college women the belief that in order to fulfill their ideal identity they needed a way to continue to use their bodies as well as their minds in a challenging and disciplined manner.<sup>251</sup>

In a similar light Shelia Rothman, scholar of women’s history, argues that the effect of the physical education programs and value of strength and endurance found in women’s colleges promoted in these women an understanding of themselves as having a vigorous femininity.<sup>252</sup> This new femininity was in contrast to the Victorian ideal of women as weak and frail – women who needed to be protected from strenuous activity. Instead these vigorous women expressed their new femininity through command of their physical abilities and endurance. In turn these new skills would help to perfect a woman’s mind and allow her to be more useful not just to herself, but to the needs of the public. Rothman quotes Dr. Mary Taylor Bissell, proponent of women’s physical education, when she explains, “physical exercise provided women...with ‘endurance, activity, and energy, presence of mind, and dexterity...the girl or woman who has gained

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<sup>250</sup> *ibid*

<sup>251</sup> For more on this concept of able-bodied womanhood as well as the sexual bifurcation of physical education and its effects on the ideas and realities of the female body, see also Martha Verbrugge, “Recreating the Body: Women’s Physical Education and the Science of Sex Differences in America, 1900-1940,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 71, no. 2 (1997) 273-304.

<sup>252</sup> Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place*, 34.

these by systematic training is of more use, more comfort and more value to herself and to her country than without them she ever would have been.”<sup>253</sup> Additionally, as argued by Rothman, this emphasis on physical health and strength did more than simply teach college women that control over their physical wellbeing and discipline of mind was an important part of their identities as women, it also provided them with an additional source from which to draw confidence and agency. She explains “...the colleges provided participants with an awareness of their own physical and mental health, and as more and more women shared this experience, the vigor and confidence that the colleges instilled affected... their lives.”<sup>254</sup>

Professional nursing provided just this opportunity to test and work at the limits of one’s physical abilities. Through nursing college women found a profession where they were not simply exercising their minds and their emotional strength, but also their bodies. Although some women described in their class letters that their nursing work was strenuous, they did not suggest that it was overwhelming. They never cited it as a reason to quit. Instead being pushed to one’s physical limits and learning how to control these abilities was expressed as a valued opportunity. Myra Haxton, a Smith College alumna of 1907, wrote to her classmates of the personal empowerment that came from being able to work at her ultimate physical and emotional capacity and be able to have control over these abilities.

If you want to know the full joy, and pleasure, and exquisite rest in getting a farm and being a hermit, do it after first spending three mortal years in a prison - oh! I mean a hospital. There your life is certainly wonderful – it

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<sup>253</sup> *ibid*

<sup>254</sup> *ibid*, 41.

is wonderful to find out just how much you can and cannot, how much you can, stand; how long you can keep going – it gives you a very good opinion of your own powers of endurance (you get rather conceited upon that point in fact, but they see to it that there is nothing else to get conceited about). There your life is a daily, hourly, continuous flight along all the possible degrees of feeling from dog to angel – mostly dog. I was known as “The anarchist,” by the way. Do you want to take a hospital course? If so, I’ll tell you how great it all is.<sup>255</sup>

In her class letter Haxton presented a representation of herself as a professional nurse who survived arduous physical and emotional challenges. The impression that Haxton offers is one of a professional who is pushed by continual challenges of emotional highs and lows. Nursing gave Haxton the opportunity to test her limits, to discover physically and emotionally what she could do. In a similar manner, Evelyn Kelley, Mount Holyoke Class of 1914 emphasized to her college classmates the physical difficulty involved in nursing and her ability to both endure and find satisfaction in it. “I have had my first night duty when I had to walk the floor to keep awake, and yet when morning came I hated to waste my days in bed.”<sup>256</sup> Kelley’s representation of the nurse was one who on her feet, was challenged to her limits of physical strength. She pushed herself to stay awake and alert against a weaker desire to rest. And through this work she was taught to be a more vigorous woman. For once her work was done and she had the opportunity to rest, she desired once again to be active and useful.

Charlotte Holden, also a Mount Holyoke Graduate of 1914 described the confidence she found in working to her limits in terms of bravery. She provided her

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<sup>255</sup> Myra Haxton, Class of 1907 Tenth Year Reunion Letter, 10, Reunion Letters, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>256</sup> Evelyn Kelley, Class of 1914, 1915 Class Notes, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

classmates with a description of her first day on the ward, describing the experience as terrifying but her ability to rise to the occasion, to push through, to work at her limits of fear and physical strength cultivated in her bravery and confidence.

The first morning was a discouraging one. After we had duly been examined as to our uniforms and to our hairdressing we were sent to the Brick Corridor to await orders. While waiting, we had the opportunity to observe some of the hospital ways. We saw patients, some with disfigurements; some apparently well, walking back and forth, some being carried on stretchers, others in wheel chairs. While I watched this, I began to lose my courage, if there had been an opportunity to skip out I fear I might have done so, but before I really did it, orders were given me to report on the Ward. How glad I am now that I stayed.<sup>257</sup>

Although Charlotte Holden's experience is not expressed in terms of the physical demands, she represented her experience as one in which she found bravery in her emotional strength. Having a disciplined mind and mental abilities, she was able to endure even some of the most terrifying encounters.

In other terms of endurance, Clara Griffin, Wellesley College class of 1917, wrote of her nurse's training in comparison to her prior academic career. She offered another representation of training as a most challenging experience - one in which mere survival required all of her dedication and power to endure. Griffin was a well educated women, one who had not only finished a college course at one of the best women's colleges, but who had also earned a Master's degree prior to entering nurse training school. But it was training school that challenged her the most. "Just to explain how I feel about this, I will say, that getting my B.A was like a sail on a blue sea; that getting my AM was like a ride

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<sup>257</sup> Charlotte Holden, Class of 1914, 1915 Class Notes, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

in a Dutch canal boat, while getting the RN was like rounding Cape of Good Hope in a wash tub with a hurricane blowing eighty knots an hour.”<sup>258</sup> Her representation of nurse’s training expressed pride in her ability to metaphorically survive the training. In accord with Griffin’s comments, Catharine Hope, a Wellesley College graduate from the class of 1918, represented her nurse’s training as requiring the utmost ability to endure. “Last September twelfth a three year’s Nurses Training ended. Dare I tell you of greater satisfaction since it required more of the not-giving-upness. Who ever wanted to give up at Wellesley!”<sup>259</sup> It was her dedication and personal strength to not quit training even when she wanted to that developed in her a sense of pride through her ability to harness control over her own desires to quit.

### Control Over Work and Space

Some college women wrote to their classmates referring to the ways in which they had control over their own work, workspace and even the work of others. This was a novel opportunity for women at the time. Although careers for women were growing exponentially in the increasingly industrialized American society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most jobs reserved for women did not offer opportunity for advancement or supervisory roles. Many college women entered what were considered to be female professions - teaching, secretaries, and librarianships. Although worked

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<sup>258</sup> Clara Griffin, Class of 1917 Class Letters of 1923, 16, Class Letters, Wellesley College Archives, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

<sup>259</sup> Catharine Hope, Class of 1918 Class Letters of 1922, 5, Class Letters, Wellesley College Archives, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.

mostly by women, men ultimately led these professions. Female teachers, secretaries, librarians, even physicians and lawyers, were still workers in male controlled professions. As argued by Nancy Cott, although there were positions open for women in these fields, the leadership positions were reserved only for men. Allowing women to fill such visible roles would threaten the professional esteem of the field. Rothman explains that in almost all professions the managing class was overwhelmingly male.

And no matter what the job, women remained at the lower end of the ladder. In the public schools they were the classroom teachers, not the principals or superintendents; in offices, they made up the ranks of typists and stenographers, not the executives; in the retail stores, they were the clerks and cashiers, not the floorwalkers or managers. In other words, the job that a woman first assumed was generally the one that she kept as long as she worked.<sup>260</sup>

However in the leadership of professional nursing, positions were almost exclusively held by women. Although female leaders of nursing had to negotiate for power with male physicians and hospital executives, nurse training school superintendents, professional organizations and eventually academic positions were all held by women.

In her investigation of the constructed identity of the trained nurse, D'Antonio argues that the new science of contagious disease and nurses' unique knowledge of medical procedures created a role where nurses asserted control over the medical environment. "If cool, detached and disciplined clinical performance enabled nurses to learn how to independently and assertively control clinical moments, such performances, in the face of infectious diseases, now allowed them to learn to control the clinical spaces

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<sup>260</sup> Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*, 47.

in which such moments occurred.”<sup>261</sup> In her investigation of the disciplined nature of nursing work, she illuminates the ways that disease and contagion required nurses to have strict control over clinical spaces and techniques to assure their own health and that of patients. In concert with the work described by D’Antonio, the college-educated nurses writing to their peers, offered representations of themselves as professionals who wielded control over the environment in which they worked. For as D’Antonio concludes,

These particular performances may have been learned at the hospital bedside when they were students, but they were enacted by graduate nurses in homes of both rich families (as private duty nurses) and poor families (as visiting or public health nurses) across the country. Moreover they were performed at crowded bedsides that included not only physicians, patients and nurses but also mothers, families and friends.<sup>262</sup>

In the writings of college women turned professional nurses to their peers, they were quick to highlight the ways in which they had control over their own space and work. By the time a nursing student was a senior in training, she had control over the work of the students below her. Some nurses, especially in the military had the ability to exercise control over the work of men. College women turned professional nurses were quick to highlight these aspects of control as they offered representations of their work as professional nurses in their class letters to their peers.

### *Hospitals*

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<sup>261</sup> D’Antonio, *American Nursing*, 48.

<sup>262</sup> D’Antonio, *American Nursing*, 49. For more on nurses’ control over clinical spaces see Cynthia Connolly, *Saving Sickly Children: The Tuberculosis Preventorium in American Life, 1909-1970*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008 ch 48.



Several college graduates told stories of their careers in terms that suggest the ultimate control they had over the work that was done in the hospital setting. By detailing the multitude of tasks for which they were responsible, they represented their nursing work as work that was done autonomously. When in supervisory positions they carried the responsibility to control the organization of the nursing work to assure that it was done properly. Clara Griffin, Wellesley graduate of 1907, wrote to her classmates in 1927 of her position as a superintendent of a hospital describing the important responsibilities that came with the position. Her patients depended on her work, expertise and expert knowledge.

Now that I am a real superintendent I should put more emphasis on it. And you would be surprised at the amount of superintending thirty babies need. The modern infant requires...a combination of the specially prepared refinements of a carefully edited cuisine and the daily grooming of a pet race horse, added to which are accessories in the way of treatments by ultra-violet Ray, X-ray examinations, and operations of varied kinds by the best specialists.<sup>263</sup>

Clara Griffin's depiction of her work demonstrated how she wanted to portray to her peers her work as a nurse. Her position of power in combination with her specialized medical knowledge meant that she was responsible for the care of a ward and the work done by the other nurses to care for the patients. She had the authority to supervise the detailed care delivered to the thirty newborns in her charge. In a similar manner, Mary Howard Nutting, Mount Holyoke Graduate from 1887, wrote of the detailed care she was responsible for administering to patients during an epidemic of scarlet fever.

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<sup>263</sup> Clara Griffin, Class of 1907 Class Letters of 1927, 7, Class Letters, Wellesley College Archives, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

We had in our number almost every possible complication with the scarlet fever... Temperature and pulse taken every four hours; medicines administered the same hours; throats painted on the outside with ichthyl or tincture iodine; the tonsils painted with tincture ferri-chloride and glycerine; ice applications to neck and head; alcohol sponge baths or cold packs for a temperature of 103 degrees, repeated in twenty minutes if the temperature was not sufficiently lowered.<sup>264</sup>

Offering this description to her once college classmates suggests that she chose to communicate to them the demanding nature of nursing and the amount of discipline and control over one's own work that nursing demanded. However to both of these women it was not just their professional positions that afforded them the power over the work environment and care of patients. They detailed the special and scientific techniques they used, details that would most likely not be understood by their classmates, but were necessary to carry out their work. It was their specialized knowledge of science and medical techniques that positioned them to have control over their work. Expressed to their classmates they also demonstrated a level of authority that most of their peers would not have – the authority and power that came with specialized medical knowledge.

In a somewhat similar manner graduates of Mount Holyoke College presented to their classmates representations of themselves as nurses who had complete control over the clinical environment and how their work was carried out. In a convalescent home, far from the busy hospital ward, Helen Wood, Mount Holyoke graduate from 1904 described that as the only expert present in the setting she determined how the medical care would be provided. “The last month I have had charge of the patients out at our convalescent

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<sup>264</sup> Mary Howard Nutting, Class of 1887 Class Notes from 1897, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

home, about ten miles from the city. There have been between twenty and thirty patients there, and I have been the only nurse, so I had things all my own way.”<sup>265</sup> Helen Everett, also a Mount Holyoke graduate, but of the class of 1914 wrote about the often-dreaded position of night duty nurse on a hospital ward. The challenging shift called for responsibility, physical endurance and independence. Night nurses would have charge of all the patients on the ward alone. With no help from their nursing peers all clinical decisions would fall to them. But in her letter to her college peers, Everett presented this position as an opportunity for autonomy and responsibility in her own work. “I have just finished a month of night duty. The best thing about that is, that you have more responsibility (you are your own boss) since you are the only nurse on the ward.”<sup>266</sup>

Beyond control of the care delivered to patients, college educated nurses described their experiences as supervisors of other workers. Katharine DeWitt wrote to her classmates in 1897, “I am just now head-nurse of the children’s ward in the County Hospital, and have twenty-five children, of all sorts of diseases and dispositions to care for. I have two nurses to help me, and I do enjoy it very much, for they are all such dear little things.”<sup>267</sup> In the busy environment of an army ward, army nurses found themselves

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<sup>265</sup> Helen Wood, Class of 1904 Class Notes of 1908, Class Notes, 21, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

<sup>266</sup> Helen Everett, Class of 1914 Class Notes of 1919, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

<sup>267</sup> Katharine DeWitt, Class of 1887 Class Notes of 1891, 16, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

with the unique opportunity to have control over the work of male colleagues.<sup>268</sup> Grace Bissel, Wellesley class of 1901, wrote about her nursing experiences during World War I. Working night duty she started with one patient and quickly expanded to one hundred. As she could not monitor and care for all one hundred patients alone she was assigned corps-boys as her assistants.<sup>269</sup> They were, “watching over them, who reported any emergency between my rounds.”<sup>270</sup> As an army nurse Bissel had control over more than female workers. She had the unique ability as a woman to have professional control over the work of men. Helen Wood, Mount Holyoke Graduate of 1904 wrote to her classmates of her experiences as a Navy nurse. To them she represented her work as offering the unique ability for excitement in her travels to far parts of the world in her description of her plans to travel to Battle Harbor off the coast of the Strait of Belle Isle.

As the ice begins to break up, and the ships can push up along the coast, thus making travelling again possible for the few short summer months, then the hospitals must have their doors open, and their stretching qualities ready to be tested; for the ‘male, the halt and the blind’ have been waiting all winter for the time when the first schooner should get through to take them down to the hospitals and the doctors...I only wish this letter were

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<sup>268</sup> The example of an army nurse must be considered only within the context of military nursing. Nursing in the military was a special case for, as nurses, these women were the first to gain rank in the military. I have not found any other evidence of female nurses wielding control over the work of male workers outside of the military. However there is evidence that in psychiatric nursing, the only area of nursing occupied by men, female nurses worked side by side with male nurses in what seems to be equal positions. For more on the context of military nursing see, Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008) ch 7.

<sup>269</sup> Corps-boys were members of the military who had been assigned to the health care of those injured in fighting. They were what we might refer to today as military medics.

<sup>270</sup> Grace Bissel, Class of 1901 Class Letters of 1921, Class Letters, Wellesley College Archives, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

coming a few months later, for surely there would be much of interest to write to you.<sup>271</sup>

In a 1913 article in the *American Journal of Nursing*, Wood described her reasons for continuing her career as a Navy nurse. In addition to the unprecedented opportunity for travel, she wrote of her relationship with the male ‘corps-boys.’

The Nurses must not only care for the critically ill in the Navy but also are required to teach and demonstrate nursing knowledge to the members of the Hospital Corps...All men enlisting in the Hospital Corps are sent at once to the Training Schools. They have classes daily from nine until four...I have never enjoyed anything as I do teaching my boys; they are a constant joy and inspiration.<sup>272</sup>

### *Private Duty*

Private duty nursing offered unique opportunities for control in one’s work and the private home turned clinical environment. As private duty nurses, women would enter the homes of usually wealthy patients to provide care. They worked in connection with physicians, who would make visits and prescriptions for medical interventions. However physicians did not stay long at each visit and once they left it was the nurse, with her specialized medical and scientific knowledge, who had control over the home environment and how care would be delivered to her patient. Although diagnosis and prescription was under the purvey of the physician, once the physician left, the private duty nurse was alone to autonomously carry out her work and assure that the home

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<sup>271</sup> Helen Wood, Class of 1908 Class Notes of 1904, 16, Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

<sup>272</sup> Helen Wood, “From a Navy Nurse,” *The American Journal of Nursing*, 23 no.7 (1923): 596.

environment was transitioned into the clinical environment. Additionally a career in private duty nursing meant that nurses had the rare opportunity for geographical freedom and adventure as they could pick up and move to new cities without a commitment to any particular institution. Additionally they often had opportunities to travel with their mostly wealthy patients.<sup>273</sup>

Case studies of three nurses separated by two decades provide insight into the work of college educated women as private duty nurses. Only snippets of their work are described in class letters, so data must be understood in slightly different forms of representations. In the diaries of Marinda Adams and Adaline Chase their writings serve as documentation not only of their daily activities, but also of what they considered to be the most important parts of their work. These descriptions suggest how they understood themselves and their work. To round out these stories, I have included passages from books and articles written by and about Katharine DeWitt in regards to her work as a private duty nurse in combination with her class letters. This data allows us to see not only how DeWitt represented her work as a private duty nurse to her college classmates, but also how she represented the role of the private duty nurse to other nursing and healthcare professionals.

Katharine DeWitt: Mount Holyoke College graduate of 1887

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<sup>273</sup> For more on the demographics and careers of private duty nurses at the turn of the century, see D'Antonio, *American Nursing*, ch 3.

Katharine DeWitt was an influential leader in the field of private duty nursing. She was born in Troy, New York and was an 1887 graduate of Mount Holyoke College. After determining that she was not well suited for the occupation of teaching she entered the Illinois Training School for Nurses and began her career as a professional nurse. She dedicated the early years of her career to private duty and eventually specialized in the obstetrical care of mother and baby in the home. Eventually she became a prolific writer, contributing numerous articles to and serving as editor of the *American Journal of Nursing*. In 1913 she authored what was considered to be the definitive educational book on private duty, *Private Duty Nursing*, in which she discussed the qualifications, technical skills and unique challenges of the private duty nurse.<sup>274</sup> In the introduction to her book, she explained the vast responsibilities of the private duty nurse and focused on the nurse's role as the expert to impart knowledge to her patient and family and serve as the keeper of the home environment. "The nurse in hospital work is an educator and an administrator; so is the private duty nurse, for she is constantly teaching members of the families in which she finds herself how to care for the sick, and upon her often falls the entire guidance of a household."<sup>275</sup>

After deciding that a teaching career was not for her, because as one biographer put it, "ability to maintain classroom discipline loomed large in the education programs of those days, failing in this one requirement, Miss DeWitt entered the Illinois Training

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<sup>274</sup> Vern Bullough, Olga Maranjain Church and Alice P. Stein, *American Nursing: A Biographical Dictionary*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1988).

<sup>275</sup> Katharine De Witt, *Private Duty Nursing*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co.1913), 7.

School graduating in 1891.”<sup>276</sup> In 1889, two years after her graduation from Mount Holyoke College she wrote in her class letter to her peers describing her choice to become a trained nurse.

You remember how I loved my dispensary work at school and you will not be surprised that my longing turned hospital-ward rather than school-ward as I thought of this next winter. I do not expect or intend to study medicine, but I do like this work exceedingly. I shall be in this training school probably for two more years and then I shall be ready to take care of '87 if they need me.<sup>277</sup>

Eight years later, marking the tenth year of her college graduation she wrote to her classmates with pride describing the vast variety in people she had had the chance to meet. Her professional knowledge provided her entre into their homes where she witnessed the intricacies of how people lived. Additionally, as a private duty nurse she had the opportunity to travel to almost all parts of the country with her patients.

My work takes me to curious places and gives me ever new experiences. Sometimes I travel in a private car, sometimes in a wagon, tied with a rope. Sometimes I am in a luxurious home with an extra maid to help me; sometimes the people sleep four in a bed, and keep their hair-pins on the kitchen table (where we eat). Now my patient is a silly old man who calls me May; now an imbecile old woman who calls me Susie; now a man in delirium, who suddenly takes a fancy to knock me over (much to my surprise); now a little girl who can only be coaxed to take her medicine by the promise of my cap when I shall leave; now, and best of all, a gentle mother with a dear little cuddler of a baby. I have been from the Atlantic to the Pacific with patients, and North, but not south yet, nor across the ocean.”<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Unknown Author, “Katharine DeWitt,” *The American Journal of Nursing*, 32 no. 12 (1932): 1232.

<sup>277</sup> Katharine DeWitt, Class of 1887 Class Notes of 1889, 34. Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

<sup>278</sup> Katharine DeWitt, Class of 1887 Class Notes of 1897, 15. Class Notes, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.



However the most detailed accounts of the ways DeWitt represented private duty nursing as a role in which a woman had control over her own work and work space is seen in her writings about private duty nursing in *The American Journal of Nursing* as well as an account of her work by a physician colleague in the same publication. In a 1910 article entitled, “The Private Duty Nurse: Her Life, Her Ideal, Her Needs,” she highlighted the ways in which the private duty nurse was the keeper of the home environment in times of sickness. She was the only one present with the expert knowledge to control the space and make it suitable for healing. Additionally it was her knowledge that must be imparted to the family to assure the continued care and health of the patient. She described that entering the home; she was an ally of the physician. For the physician was not present in the home at all hours as the nurse was. As an extension of the medical field into the home she was empowered with expert knowledge, which she imparted to the patient and family. “ Then here are the evils of self-dosing with drugs and patent medicines...Here the good nurse is an invaluable ally of the good doctor, for she can show her patients how foolishly extravagant and harmful it is to try experiments which may result in postponing some trouble beyond the possibility of relief.”<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Katharine De Witt, “The Private Duty Nurse: her Life, Her Ideal and Her Needs,” *The American Journal of Nursing*, 10 no. 5, (1910), 310. For more on this idea of the nurse as an extension of the scientific medical professional within the home whose value to the physician was as a monitor of the home remedies and self-dosing often undertaken by amateur women and family members, see Patricia O’Brien D’Antonio, “The Legacy of Domesticity: Nursing in Early Nineteenth Century America,” *Nursing History Review: Official Journal of the American Association for the History of Nursing*, 1 (1993), 229-246 and D’Antonio, *American Nursing*, ch 2.

In addition to her expert knowledge of medical science giving her power within the home environment of sick patients, the work of Katharine DeWitt also suggests that the private duty nurse had particular knowledge that provided her with power in the nurse-physician relationship. For as the only professional present within the home of the patient throughout the entire day, she was the one who knew the intricacies of the patient's care, symptoms, needs and the way treatment was being delivered by her and collaborating family members. Without this knowledge, the physician could not adequately assess the patient's progress and prescribe interventions in response. In his article chronicling the work of DeWitt upon her twenty-five year anniversary with *The American Journal of Nursing*, Joseph B. DeLee, an influential obstetrician, described his experiences with her in the early days of his career when they had worked together on private duty cases.<sup>280</sup> He praised her work, considering her a colleague and mentor and teacher in many things. Of what she taught him about the unique offerings of the private duty nurse he wrote,

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<sup>280</sup> Joseph DeLee is a controversial figure in the history of medicine. He is seen as the father of modern obstetrics, having pushed for obstetrics to be recognized as a specialty within medicine. Due to his groundbreaking 1920 article on the use of forceps in delivery and his encouragement of the episiotomy, his career is often cited as the beginning of the over medicalization of pregnancy. Additionally in his later career he was vocal about what he saw as the harms of midwifery practice, suggesting that obstetricians should be the sole medical providers for pregnant women. His perspective on these matters make his comments about Katharine DeWitt complicated. For although he was not a proponent of midwives, in this piece he represented the work of the private duty nurse as almost as important as his, at times considering her a mentor and colleague. For a nuanced piece on DeLee's motivations and impact on the field of obstetrics see Judith Walzer Leavitt, "Joseph B. DeLee and the Practice of Preventative Obstetrics," *American Journal of Public Health*, 78 no.10 (1988): 1353-1360.

A nurse did more than take temperatures, empty bedpans, bathe, and change her patient. She entered into his life with educated insight, sympathy, and intelligent understanding and thus she often learned more of his sickness than did the doctor. Therefore she was a real assistant to the doctor and could be and often was consulted regarding diagnosis and even treatment.<sup>281</sup>

In summary DeLee detailed what he learned from DeWitt were the responsibilities of the private duty nurse, specifically in an obstetrical case. In a tongue in cheek manner, he offered a representation of the private duty nurse as a woman who had vast responsibilities and, in essence, control over the clinical moment, even when the physician was present for the delivery, as well as the clinical environment before and after delivery.

All the nurse had to do in private duty on a labor case was to prepare the patient, to care for her wants, supply nourishment, make her as comfortable as possible during the first stage, watch her general condition, listen frequently to the fetal heart (recording everything), keep the household in harmony, get the children fed and off to school, call the doctor at the very first sign of trouble threatening mother or baby, wait on him during examinations or the delivery with sterile supplies et cetera (which she had prepared weeks in advance), give the anesthetic, watch the uterus during the third stage, hold the patient's legs during repair, be general assistant during and cleaner-up after labor; be on duty almost twenty-four hours...and overseer of a large household.<sup>282</sup>

Although DeLee used language such as “assistant” and wrote that one of her duties was to “call the doctor at the first sign of trouble,” if we step away from the common comparison of the nurse to the physician when discussing who had power in the medical context we are able to see the ways that the nurse had control over the clinical environment and her own work. All of the nurse's responsibilities described in DeLee's

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<sup>281</sup> Joseph B. DeLee, “Katharine De Witt: Student Nurse, and Private Duty Nurse,” *American Journal of Nursing*, 32 no. 9 (1932): 965.

<sup>282</sup> *ibid*, 965.

passage were done almost solely when the physician was not present. Although specific medical interventions may have been decided by physician orders, she was the one who made the minute-to-minute decisions about caring for and monitoring the patient. And as DeLee, himself, stated, it was the private duty nurse who wielded control over the home/clinical environment. For she was “on-duty almost twenty-four hours...and overseer of a large household.”

Marinda Adams Locke: Mount Holyoke College graduate of 1893

The daughter of two well-educated missionaries, Marinda Adams Locke was born in Samokov, Bulgaria in 1872. Her father was a pastor and missionary, a graduate of the prestigious Amherst College in 1864. Her mother, a missionary as well, was particularly well educated for her time. She had graduated from Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1859 when it stood as one of the only elite schools for higher education for women. Marinda's older sister returned to the United States from Bulgaria to attend Mount Holyoke College in 1892 and Adams followed in her footsteps. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1893.<sup>283</sup> After spending a few years in various teaching positions she turned her professional trajectory towards nursing. Her nurses' training was completed at McClean Hospital, associated with the Massachusetts General Hospital Training School for Nurses; it was the first prestigious training school for nurses housed at an asylum for

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<sup>283</sup> J. Gardner Baulelt, *Gregory Stone Genealogy Ancestry and Descendants of Beacon Gregory Stone of Cambridge Massachusetts 1320-1917*. (Boston: Stone Family Association, 1918).

psychiatric patients. Following her nurse's training course she worked one year as a nurse at the Massachusetts General Hospital and then held various nursing positions throughout New England, including time as a private duty nurse as well as the superintendent of the new Eastern Maine Insane Hospital from October 1901 to June 1902. Locke never married and eventually moved in with her older sister, a professor of Biblical history at Wellesley College. She used her skills as a professional nurse to care for her ailing sister who died in 1924.<sup>284</sup>

For a short time between her work at Massachusetts General Hospital and her position as a superintendent at the new Eastern Maine Insane Asylum, she worked in Keane, New Hampshire in private duty. Her diaries from this period tell of a professional woman who lived and worked autonomously within the clinical setting of her patients' homes. Additionally as a private duty nurse she had the freedom to move to various locations in New England for each position she held. She lived alone, outside of the domestic environment of either her family of origin's home or the home of a new husband and family as most women did. And most importantly, in her role as a private duty nurse she wielded control over her own work, the care of her patient and the environment in which this occurred. Her diaries from this period provide a glimpse into her life as a private duty nurse.

Locke offered just short descriptions of her work. For each case she described mostly the status of the patient and the interventions that were done. In these descriptions she also mentioned the comings and goings of the doctors involved with the case. In

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<sup>284</sup> Patricia Ann Palieri *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

between her descriptions of the times when a doctor was present to assess the patient and sometimes provide care, we can see the long stretches of time that she was the only provider present in the situation. Although she rarely wrote with alarm she described instances when in the absence of the doctor she was responsible for the clinical care of her patients, often times in emergencies.

In January of 1901 she went on a childbirth case. “Called up at 3 a.m. Mr. Wetmore came for me. Mrs. W. in labor.” Here she was not “sent” on a case by a doctor, which she often was. Instead the patient’s husband, himself, came directly to her for her care. “Dr. Prouty in B. Hills. We called up Dr. Hill and he came down.” In the absence of the doctor, Locke served as the primary caretaker for the family. Eventually her patient delivered her baby in what seemed to be a complicated delivery. “Mrs. W etherized and forceps.” The following day Locke wrote of an emergency with her patient. “Anxious day. Mrs. W. had a hemorrhage after Dr. H. left. Came again in an hour and a half.”<sup>285</sup>

In a similar manner Locke wrote of a pneumonia case she cared for in March 1901.

Monday March 11: Dr. Prouty sent for me for a pneumonia case. His driver Bert went over with me at noon. 294 Roxbury St. Mrs. Marsh-mother of Mrs. Chapman. Pt (patient) pretty sick. Temp 104.

Tuesday March 12: Pt doing fairly well. Temp down a little. Sponge baths. Cough loose so no poultices used. Cotton wadding jacket instead.

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<sup>285</sup> Diary of Marinda Adams Locke, Locke Family Papers, 1856-1951, Mount Holyoke College Archives, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

Wednesday March 13: Patient very sick. Bad pulse. Not expected to live through day. A little better in eve.

Thursday March 14: Pt a little better. Is upstairs so plenty of going up and down stairs – exercise! Dr. came four times!

Friday March 15: Pt better. Dr. P. so tired out did not try to mount stairs.

Saturday March 16: Pt still better. Dr. did not go upstairs. Asthma troubles him.

Sunday March 17: Dr. came up in a.m. Said pt had passed danger.<sup>286</sup>

Upon her start of the case, she was the sole expert providing care. Although Dr. Prouty called her to the case, he was not even there when she arrived. Instead he sent his driver to take her over. This suggests that he trusted her in her assessment of the case and in determining for herself to begin caring for the patient. On March 12, she wrote of the clinical decisions she made and the care she provided for her patient based on her own decisions. She used sponge baths, determined no poultices were needed and instead a cotton wadding jacket. When Dr. Prouty did come to assess the patient, he did not even see her face to face. She was upstairs and Dr. Prouty, himself, had a medical condition that prevented him from climbing the stairs. Even when the doctor was present, Locke still served as the sole observer and caretaker for the patient.

In this transition time of her career, between working positions at different hospitals, Locke had freedom and autonomy as a private duty nurse. Her diaries include many descriptions such as these telling of the cases she attended. With each she mentioned once or twice the presence of the doctor who called her to the case. But each time the doctor would make short visits to assess the patient's condition and offer his

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<sup>286</sup> *ibid*

recommendation on their status. But a look at these cases from a perspective that focuses not on the relationship between the physician and nurse, but on the work of the nurse in the household demonstrates that as a private duty nurse, Locke served as the expert who was continually present. In this way she had control over her own work, clinical decisions, care of the patient and the environment in which the patient's care was taking place.

Adaline Chase: Mount Holyoke College graduate of 1919

As a student at Mount Holyoke College, Adaline Chase knew even before graduation that she wanted to become a nurse. During her senior year in 1919 she applied to the nurse training school at Massachusetts General Hospital. Her choice was not particularly new or unusual for a Mount Holyoke woman. In fact she was in good company in this decision. Of the sixty-three Mount Holyoke College graduates who became professional nurses between 1880 and 1920, Massachusetts General was the second most commonly attended nurse training school, just behind Johns Hopkins.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> However, among all graduates Massachusetts General had the most attendees. These statistics are from the data I have collected regarding the graduates of Smith, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley and Bryn Mawr Colleges who attended nurse training schools between 1880-1920. Graduates were identified through individual colleges' registries of alumnae. In total there were 172 graduates from these schools who became professional nurses after graduation: sixty-three from Mount Holyoke College, fifty-one from Smith College, forty from Wellesley College, eight from Vassar College and four from Bryn Mawr College. At this point in my research I can only speculate at the reasons for the disparities in numbers from Vassar and Bryn Mawr Colleges, however this is an important point for further research. Of all these women's college graduates, the popularity



Additionally there were two other fellow alumnae at Massachusetts General at the time and she was entering with another classmate from 1919. She had applied to the training school and been accepted even before her Mount Holyoke graduation day. She entered the training school in September of 1919. She finished her hospital training in October of 1922, passed her state boards and quickly began her career as a professional nurse.<sup>288</sup>

In the first five years of her career Adaline Chase worked three different kinds of positions. She started as the sole public health nurse in a small town in New Hampshire. She then worked at a General Hospital in Manchester, New Hampshire and finally she returned to Milford New Hampshire to work as a private duty nurse. Her descriptions paint a picture of a female professional who exercised autonomy and independence in her work as a professional nurse. Additionally her work as a nurse allowed her to travel between many different positions and to various towns and places in New England. In this way nursing provided her with both professional and geographical freedom. Her chronicles of private duty nursing begin in her journal starting on January 1, 1927. At this point she had moved to Manchester, New Hampshire and was working in Eliot Hospital, the first general hospital of New Hampshire. But she soon returned to her friends in Milford where she had previously worked in 1924, but this time to work in private duty.

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of nurse training schools is as follows: thirty attended Massachusetts General, twenty-one attended Johns Hopkins Training School, thirteen attended New York Presbyterian and another thirteen attended St Luke's of New York.

<sup>288</sup> Diary of Adaline Chase, Adaline Chase Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, University of Pennsylvania: Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Here she cared for a Mrs. B. Chase did not explain what Mrs. B's injury had been, but she was caring for her while her leg was in a cast. Her care for Mrs. B included both the care for her casted leg as well as spending time with her and taking her for outings. The second part of this care allowed Chase to participate in activities that were common of other women of her social class such as playing cards, attending plays and going on drives. In regards to caring for Mrs. B's injury she wrote short entries about how she was tending to the cast and the leg. In these entries, like in Locke's, there was only one mention of the doctor who was on the case. The other entries suggest that Chase was providing care alone, based on decisions that she had made independently as a professional nurse.

March 5, 1927: This morning I began on the cast and took off the upper part halfway up the leg.

March 11, 1927: 7 weeks in the cast. Took off the upper half to just above the knee. Now I can massage the knees and ankle.

March 15, 1927: Took the lower heel part of the cast off so she can use her foot in walking.

March 24, 1927: Dr. Jones came at 10 and cut the cast. She can have the upper part off when in bed but must have it strapped on to turn or walk.<sup>289</sup>

This last entry marks the first time that Chase wrote of the involvement of a doctor in Mrs. B's care. Dr. Jones was involved in Mrs. B's care and seems to have been required for procedures such as "cutting the cast." It also seems that his instructions were what determined that she could have the cast off in bed. But the previous and following

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<sup>289</sup> *ibid*

entries demonstrate that the majority of the decisions made in Mrs. B's care were made by Chase without the consultation with Dr. Jones and were made in order for her to provide the best care for Mrs. B in concert with her knowledge of good nursing care. For instance she removed part of the cast so that she could then apply massage, which was an important part of nursing care.

The entries that follow about Mrs. B describe Chase helping her to do more things outside of the cast in short spurts. Chase moved Mrs. B slowly from sitting to moving to walking without her cast, until eventually she took her to Nashua to meet with Dr. Jones again at which time he determined that she could be without her cast. On June 15, 1927 Chase finished her private duty work with Mrs. B. "I officially finished my care today. Just 24 weeks." After leaving Milford she returned to her family's home for a few weeks. But she was quickly off to a new position and a new town. On June 22, 1927 she wrote of her next move, "Went in town this afternoon and interviewed a Mr. Allen about a job as a camp nurse at Chewonki in Wiscasset, ME. Have decided to try it for July."

The case studies of Katharine DeWitt, Marinda Adams Locke and Adaline Chase provide us with glimpses into the work of the college-educated nurses in the field of private duty. All three women have similar backgrounds; coming from well-educated families and graduating from Mount Holyoke College they had opportunities for myriad professional roles and work. However in their diaries and articles they offer representations of their work as places where they had control over the clinical environment. Armed with expert clinical knowledge they came into the homes of their patients and transformed the home environment into the clinical environment. Although

diagnosis and most medical interventions were under the purview of the physician with whom she collaborated, the private duty nurse was the expert within the home and was responsible for the minute to minute clinical decisions.

### Conclusion

The case studies of Katharine DeWitt, Marinda Adams Locke and Adaline Chase in collaboration with alumnae class letters written by college graduates to their fellow alumnae provide us with a unique opportunity to capture the voices of these women as they represented their work to their peers and those who might read their diaries in the future. DeWitt, Chase and Locke told narratives of their work as private duty nurses illuminating the ways in which they worked with independence and control over their own work in the homes of their patients. In their letters to their college friends, graduates of the most elite colleges for women who chose to enter professional nursing offered representations of their work as nurses as a professional role in which they had the opportunity to exercise control over their physical bodies, power of endurance, work space and the work of others.

In the concluding chapter I will turn back to the monumental Vassar Training Camp for Nurses and its impact on the struggle for reform in the nursing profession. The aftermath of the camp plays out as a conflict between those who represented college women and saw nursing as a potential profession for their graduates and

professionalizing nursing leaders who had a different vision for the future of nurses' training.

## Conclusion

### The Legacy of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses

Upon the completion of their summer course graduates of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses went out to various cities to start their two years course in a hospital training school. Only two students did not continue at this point due to illness. Immediately following their entry into clinical training they were faced with the turmoil that presented as the first wave of the 1918 flu epidemic spread throughout American hospitals. Many hospital superintendents wrote to C.E.A. Winslow, a leader in public health and a man who was instrumental to the camp, telling him of the importance of the Vassar students during the epidemic. In a letter written to a Vassar training camp alumna, Winslow reported, “The ten who came to New Haven are doing splendidly. I hear (that) the hospital could scarcely have met the influenza crisis without them.”<sup>290</sup> It was made clear from the comments of superintendents that Vassar graduates rose to the occasion. To specifically say that these nurses did not retreat from their duties and that they even did very well suggests that there may have been doubts that these privileged and highly educated women would not be truly committed to nursing service. Instead the Vassar students’ maturity and work ethic proved these assumptions wrong. Herbert Mills later commented on the impressive dedication that the Vassar women showed during those trying times. “To the credit of the Vassar camp group it should be added that not

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<sup>290</sup> C.E.A. Winslow letter to Miss Kendig, October 5, 1918. Charles-Edward Amory Winslow Papers, Box 34, folder 30, Yale University Archives, New Haven.

only did they not expect exemption, but in cases where it was offered them, it was refused without hesitation.”<sup>291</sup>

In some hospitals, the Vassar women did more than refuse exemption. They rose to the challenges before them and proved themselves more than able to handle the advanced work of professional nursing. Many superintendents placed Vassar students, new to clinical work, in positions that they would not otherwise have put probationer nurses and later praised them for their success.

I was obliged to put them on duty where I would not ordinarily put young nurses. They have taken hold of the work with vigor and enthusiasm and have been a world of help. Today, October 7<sup>th</sup>, they are doing work that ordinarily I would not exact of pupil nurses until they have been in the school for six months. No greater contribution has ever been made to the nursing service of this hospital than the advent of these women... There has been no panic among your students and they have worked on with just as much courage as if they had been veterans. No greater help could have been given us than has been furnished by these students.<sup>292</sup>

In November 1918 the armistice was signed bringing World War I to an end.

With the war over, many questioned whether these women would retreat from nursing work, and there were reasons to think they might. There had been struggles among the students during their clinical training. Mills reported on the reasons why some had chosen to leave before finishing their training, citing influenza and other personal or family illnesses, the ending of the war, and few cases of a sense of mistaken choice or rejection of the hospital as reasons why the number of Vassar students still in nurse training had decreased from 437 to an estimated 300. Yet, the largest problem facing the

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<sup>291</sup> Herbert E. Mills, Address to Graduates, 1918, Series 3, Folder 1.12, Vassar Training Camp for Nurses Records, Vassar College Archives, Vassar College.

<sup>292</sup> Correspondence from unknown superintendent to C.E.A. Winslow, Charles-Edward Amory Winslow Papers, Box 34, folder 30, Yale University Archives, New Haven.

Vassar students as reported, themselves, was the twelve-hour workday, which threatened their abilities to engage in activities that were crucial to their identities as college women. One Vassar camp alumna commented, “It means that much we gained in college is slipping away from us – interest in music, art, literature ---for we are too tired when we come off duty for anything but bed.”

Through reports from his former students, Herbert E. Mills Vassar College professor and the dean of the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses, came to the conclusion that the twelve-hour day was the greatest impediment to college women continuing in and considering the nursing profession. He began a personal campaign to reform this particular part of nurse training. His attempts laid in an effort to encourage C.E.A. Winslow who was closely connected to the nursing reform efforts and vision held by powerful nursing leader, Annie Goodrich, to take up his cause. As Dean of the Vassar camp, professor at Vassar College and summer colleague of Winslow Mills hoped that his position would be enough to encourage this reform. However a disagreement between the two ensued. Although they agreed that part of nurse training reform should include the dissolution of the twelve-hour day, they disagreed as to how this should be achieved. Their disagreement was based on more than simple logistics, but instead on their separate visions for the future of professional nursing.

A correspondence occurring between December 14 and December 21, 1919 exists as evidence of the disagreement between the two. Dean Mills began with a letter to Professor Winslow, reported the discontent of many of the Vassar women. He cited the long shifts as the reason for this discontent and argued that shortening the work day was



crucial to keeping college women interested in professional nursing. "...no endowments or scholarships or great educational opportunities for nurses will keep college women in the work when they must exhaust vitality and slip back mentally as they say they do under the present conditions."<sup>293</sup> Throughout their correspondence Mills pushed for the idea of state legislation that would require the eight-hour day in all nurse training schools. He believed that the current historical moment was the ideal time to move on such a change. "All experience in setting social standards seems to me to point to legislation as the only effective method and I think that it is the psychological moment for a movement to this end. People are appreciative of what nurses have done, are converted to the desirability of the eight hour day in industry to a remarkable extent, are interested in the condition of women in all lines of industry and professional work."<sup>294</sup>

However, Winslow who was deeply connected and supportive of the professionalizing efforts of the elite nursing leaders focused on securing endowments for training schools as the best route to transitioning to the eight-hour day. He informed Mills that efforts were fomenting about reforming the training system for professional nurses and that he had recently been at a meeting called by the International Health Board, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, where the topic of nurse education was discussed. "The waters are stirring everywhere, and the wholesome discontent of the Vassar graduates, while hard for them, is a very important and most valuable factor in the general problem." However, Winslow ultimately disagreed with Mills in his final letter.

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<sup>293</sup> Correspondence from Mills to Winslow Dec 14, 1919, Charles-Edward Amory Winslow Papers, Box 34, folder 30, Yale University Archives, New Haven.

<sup>294</sup> *ibid*

On December 21 he wrote expressing a strong opinion that attempting to legislate for the eight-hour-day was not the appropriate route. In consultation with nursing leaders it had been decided that such a plan would belittle the current efforts aimed at uplifting the nursing profession “...the only real remedy for the situation is to recognize that nursing education is education, regulating the hours of hospital nursing along labor union lines might in the long run tend to set back the other movement.”<sup>295</sup> Susan Reverby writes about this desire for nursing leaders to distance themselves from labor movements in her history of American nursing. She describes the differing values between the elite nursing professionalizers and the worker-nurses. The elite nursing leaders, in their attempts to gain professional esteem for nurses had to tread lightly. Although they worked to increase wages for nurses, they were careful to keep their motives from seeming commercialism. For they saw that part of raising the social status of the nursing profession was to maintain the idea that nurses worked for a sense of service, not for financial gain.

It is in this final letter that the underlying basis for the disagreement between Mills and Winslow is seen. And if understood as representatives of women’s colleges and professional nursing respectively, Mills and Winslow’s disagreement was symbolic of the tension that characterized the relationship between college women and professional nursing at the turn of the century. Mills was looking to nurse training as a career choice for college women after finishing their college education. To that end he was attempting

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<sup>295</sup> Correspondence from Winslow to Mills, December 21, 1919, Charles-Edward Amory Winslow Papers, Box 34, folder 30, Yale University Archives, New Haven.

to instigate the number one reform that would work to recruit more college women into the profession – the eight-hour day. Winslow and the nursing leaders, with which he worked, were attempting to argue to the public that nurses' training was education that belonged in colleges and not simply on the job training within hospitals. For them, this was the greatest possible outcome for reform for it would increase the standard of education for the profession and in turn demand professional esteem. But for Mills this change in perception of nurse education was useless, for he was looking to nursing as a possible profession for women, like the Vassar women themselves, who had already received their education.

On July 9<sup>th</sup> 1919 Priscilla Barrows, a graduate from the camp, wrote to C.E.A. Winslow informing him that although the publications of the *Thermometer* had been sporadic since graduation, the newspaper, was in fact, “not dead.” The *Thermometer* staff was planning to publish a new issue and was asking Winslow to contribute a column. He, of course, accepted, but also used the opportunity to tell Miss Barrows of an exciting effort at the forefront.

There is one thing going on now in which the readers of the *Thermometer* ought to be interested. The Rockefeller Foundation has appointed a Committee on Public Health Nursing Education... We have been lucky enough to secure Miss Josephine Goldmark as Executive Secretary... I hope we may be able to present a report that will help to attract into this field in peace times young women of just the type that gathered at Vassar for war service and that will help to ensure for such women the best type of professional training that the skill of educators can provide.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Correspondence, Winslow to Barrows, unknown date, 1919, Charles-Edward Amory Winslow Papers, Box 34, folder 30, Yale University Archives, New Haven.

## Summary

The Vassar Training Camp for Nurses stood as the culmination of the intersection of college women and professional nursing prior to the nursing education reforms that would take place in response to the Goldmark Report of 1923. In this dissertation I have traced the intersection of higher education for women and professional nursing from their early days in the 1890's until 1920. In the 1890's women's elite colleges and professional nursing were striving to construct for themselves the identities of their institutions as well as their individuals. My story began with the Vassar Training Camp for Nurses, which I see as the culmination of the history of the relationship between these two institutions. Serving as a World War I recruitment effort the Vassar Training Camp utilized the resources available through Vassar College and the already underway mobilization to increase the supply of trained nurses. Although the camp has long been understood by nursing scholars as a result of professional nursing's efforts to raise the educational standards of nurses, my research suggests that it was instead the idea of a Vassar College trustee and spearheaded by Vassar College administrators and alumnae who were interested in nursing as a profession for their college women.

Women's colleges were working to assure their relevance in a changing industrial and economic world while at the same time adhering to the ideals of a liberal education that equaled that available for men at the best colleges and universities. In the context of a growing emphasis on vocational education in secondary schools, universities and normal schools, women's colleges were slow to change their curriculum in ways that

would provide vocational training to their students. Instead students and alumnae from the most elite women's colleges joined their efforts to gain access to the resources they needed. As more professional roles and occupations were opening to women, college women shared their individual experiences in occupations with each other in hopes that their college peers could more easily find an occupation that personally suited them after graduation. In addition, alumnae formed formal networks and organizations as well as untied to produce books and essays in order to deliver this information to college women in a more comprehensive manner. Among the myriad of new occupations open to women, nursing was often discussed as a field where college women could put to use their unique skills gained while in school, find meaningful work and take an influential part in social and health reform movements.

At the same time influential nursing leaders and educators were engaged in a professionalizing movement to gain for the field the autonomy and esteem that came with the recognition of professional status. As discussed by historians of professionalization and women's work, female dominated fields often worked to create a distinction between themselves and nonprofessional or amateur women in order establish their professional status. Women who found their ways into male dominated professions, such as medicine and law, were by and large kept from the more visible managerial and executive positions. This is because, as scholars have argued, the cultural belief that women were inherently inferior to men meant that a woman in such a leadership role would threaten the professional status of the field. The push towards professionalization played out uniquely within this context. Historians of nursing history have tracked the

professionalization movement of nursing leaders emphasizing that one way they strove towards professionalization was by excluding women who came from lower class backgrounds or trained at small, less rigorous training schools. But nursing leaders did more to elevate the status of the profession than simply exclude women that they thought were less deserving of professional status. Instead they made efforts to specifically recruit more college women into the profession. And these college women, they argued, would be especially well-suited and beneficial in supervisory and executive positions. College women turned nurses, some nursing leaders argued, had the broad educational background, sophistication and class background that would demand professional esteem. As such, by recruiting them to fill positions as superintendents of training schools and hospitals, instructors, and public health nurses they would be positioned in the most visible roles within the field, thereby working to increase the status of the profession as a whole.

But with or without recruitment efforts, some college women chose to enter nurse training programs after their college graduation. Many had tried other professions first, most having dipped their toes in teaching before deciding they were not suited for such an occupation. However, in nursing these women found unique opportunities to exercise the very skills that they had acquired and come to value during their college years. The complicated realities of what nursing work was like for these women may never be known. However within their college class letters, a picture of how these women wanted to represent their professional nursing lives to their classmates emerges. They described their work and careers in ways that emphasized the discipline over their physical bodies,

emotions and powers of endurance that were required of a nurse. In turn, they suggested, being pushed to these limits allowed them to see just what they were capable of.

Additionally as nurses in hospital settings, in the homes of patients as private duty nurses and in the military, these college women turned professional nurses represented themselves as professionals who had control over their work, work environment and the work of others.

The story of college women who became professional nurses from 1890 – 1920 is one of intersection and tension. The needs of these two institutions intersected as both were attempting to address the challenges of self-defining their identities at the turn of the century. College women were looking for new ways to put to use the skills and abilities they had learned and developed while college students and for some, nursing provided a unique role that allowed for control and a way to meaningfully engage in social reform movements. Within the context of the expansion of the professions and competition for professional status, nursing leaders looked to college women as a way to raise the status of the profession. But these efforts were fraught with tension. Many college women were deterred from professional nursing because of the training that was required and the demanding work schedules. Many nursing leaders were turned off by the suggestion that college women would make superior nurses for they both assumed that college women would not have the discipline and loyalty needed for nursing work and felt threatened by the idea that such an education, one that they did not possess, was needed for positions as superintendents or administrators. As these institutions intersected, leaders of both formed visions of how the nursing profession could best be

reformed. College women and their representatives attempted to achieve the eight hour day and shortened courses of training to make the profession more appealing to women who had already completed four years of a college course. But the elite nursing leadership deliberately rejected these arguments, which were consistent with labor arguments, in order to support their professionalizing agenda. To them nurses – as professionals – did not need labor protection and aligning themselves with labor would contradict their claims for professional status.

Conversations surrounding college education and professional nursing did not end with the professionalizing project of the early twentieth century and the reforms put in place in response to the Goldmark Report of 1923. They continued after World War II when the profession saw the opening of associate degree programs in nursing and continue today as nurses are still debating standards for entry into practice. In recent years, a new path to practice has been developed with what has been called, “second-degree” or “direct-entry” programs. Such programs are accelerated nursing courses designed specifically for students who already hold bachelor’s degrees. These programs can be seen as the shortened courses of nurse training that college women were hoping for throughout the Progressive Era – the modern Vassar Training Camp for Nurses.

However in the words of historian, Christine Stansell, looking at a population such as college women turned nurses in our investigations of the history of feminism we have the opportunity to discover “another road to the future, or (point) to roads not taken?”<sup>297</sup> College women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were

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<sup>297</sup> *ibid*



central to the development of new societal expectations for women. As “New Women” they were developing roles as autonomous actors and serious intellectuals with leadership skills and an eye towards reform. Historians have lauded these women who entered predominantly male professions as having the strength and abilities to make the inroads that have been so important in women’s struggles for equality. However within the field of nursing there was a moment when these women could have been welcomed into the profession en masse and, as such, developed the nursing profession into one that we as scholars of women’s history recognize as a place where the early work of feminists thrived. With their newly developed abilities as empowered agents, college women could have brought a new ethos to the field. Instead of focusing on the struggle for professional esteem, college women, with their dedication to social reform and understanding of themselves as empowered women, could have changed the conversation to one in which professional women emphasized and protected the opportunities they found in nursing for strength, power and control. Such a change in conversations could have brought the field away from what continues to be a struggle for increased status and a long held tension between nursing and feminism. Instead professional nursing could have been seen as a profession with a different focus – a profession that emphasized the opportunities for women to find professional and personal autonomy and have an influential impact on the world’s most pressing social problems.

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