COEDUCATION AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

The education of females was a concern of at least a portion of the American people from the outset of a settled social order on the Atlantic seaboard plain. As early as 1642 the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law requiring that all children in the new Puritan Commonwealth be taught to read. No distinction was made between boys and girls. To be sure, an organized system of public education did not speedily follow, but in the kitchens of good housewives with some claims to literacy, a thread of "dame schools" spread through the Bay Colony.

Five years later, the ruling magistrates ordered that every community having at least fifty householders should appoint and sustain a teacher of reading and writing, while towns inhabited by a hundred families must establish a secondary school. Here again, no reference was made to the sex of the pupils concerned, though it was understood that the grammar schools, intended to prepare students for college, were exclusively for boys; no young woman would dream of preparing herself for entrance to Harvard College.

The example of Massachusetts was imitated in other parts of New England, and if colonial governments beyond this section did not similarly bestir themselves in the interest of public instruction, boys and girls could acquire a basic education in the private schools of all the colonial settlements. It was not until the second quarter of the nineteenth century that the great struggle for a thoroughly democratic school system placed the rights and benefits of

an elementary education for both boys and girls on a basis of public support and control.

Secondary education followed somewhat the same pattern. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the more liberal academy replaced the formal Latin grammar school and the way was opened, at least theoretically, for all youths to obtain a secondary education in these private schools. Some of the academies were solely for young females; in time some coeducational academies were established. But this development marked the limit of women's advance toward higher education in the eighteenth century; in 1800 no institution of collegiate rank in the United States was open to them.

Nor did the barriers against woman's formal intellectual progress yield readily before the nineteenth century had run half its course. The establishment of a female seminary at Troy, New York, in 1821, and Mt. Holyoke at South Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1837, was considered an astonishing and dubious departure from sound social precedents, since the curricula of these seminaries extended beyond the conventional intermediate limitations prescribed for women. In spite of many doubts, these breaches in the walls of educational prejudice and inertia added speed to the new movement. By the eve of the Civil War over sixty educational institutions for women had been created. Most of these were secondary schools, often with courses in French, music, painting, and other subjects considered suitable for the young women of culture, but many of these later developed into full-fledged colleges.

Growth of coeducation on the collegiate level was equally slow. To Oberlin College is due the credit in the United States of first permitting women students to enter its portals. But although the Ohio institution committed itself to this commendable practice from the time of its establish-

ment in 1833 there were limitations to the privilege; it was only to the preparatory department that females were permitted to pass. Not until 1837 were they granted the full right of enrolling in collegiate courses. By 1853 Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, had adopted the same liberal policy, and the leaders of this social and intellectual crusade were encouraged to hope that soon the obstacles barring the approach of women to the universities might be removed.

To the University of Iowa belongs the distinction of being first among State institutions of higher learning to provide for the admission of women on equal terms with men. The only challenge to Iowa's leadership in this matter comes from Utah. In 1850 the Legislative Assembly of the Provisional Government passed an act incorporating "The University of Deseret". It is claimed that this university was opened in 1850 but it closed after a very brief period until 1867.[1] Some sources assert from these facts that Utah's institution was the first among the State universities to receive women. However, since Iowa made legal provision for the admission of women when the University was incorporated in 1847, and began to give them instruction in 1855, Iowa's claim to chronological primacy in continuous coeducation at the top level has long been generally accepted among historians.

When the General Assembly authorized the creation of the State University of Iowa in 1847, no reference was made to any distinction between men and women students. The same was true when the doors were actually opened eight years later. Apparently there was no discrimination either in the preparatory or other departments as they were then organized.[2]

[1] *Bulletin of the University of Utah*, Vol. VII, No. 1, p. 17.

[2] *First Circular of the State University of Iowa*, 1855.

It was soon discovered, however, that not only in respect to women, but to men also, academic desire was not equal to the force of realistic fact. The hopeful opening of the University proved to be premature. Finding themselves harassed from lack of adequate funds, buildings, and equipment, the trustees of the University, on April 27, 1858, voted to close the institution at the end of the current session until these disabilities had been at least partially removed. The next day the board resolved to exclude women students from the campus when the institution was reopened. An attempt to drop women from the rolls had been made at the final meeting of the first Board of Trustees in January of this same year, but the motion had been lost by a single vote.[3] The successful proposal to exclude women from the University when it reopened was a reassertion of the principle embodied in the unsuccessful motion offered in January, but it modified the application of the rule. According to the concluding words of the resolution: "It is inconsistent with the design of the University and inexpedient that females should be admitted . . . for instruction therein, except to hear lectures of the professors."[4] Thus, indulgence might proceed to the point of permitting the feminine presence in the classroom on the chance that some intellectual absorption might occur, but henceforth there was to be no more nonsense about formal instruction and no aspirations toward degrees for women.

The several features of the resolutions of April 27th and 28th provoked public resentment. The closing of the University was, of course, the point most sharply criticized. According to one angry correspondent, the action of the governing board met with "the most unqualified disappro-

[3] "Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the State University of Iowa", April 27, 1858, in Book A, 1847–1876, pp. 88, 95.

[4] "Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the State University of Iowa", April 27, 1858, in Book A, 1847–1876, p. 93.

bation and condemnation from the great mass of our citizens.'' To another objector, ''the bitter fruits of this policy'' would be seen in the curtailment of the number of public school teachers and the consequent enlargement of ''ignorance, vice, and crime.''[5]

Sensitive to the criticism and objections both within and without their membership caused by the resolutions adopted in April, 1858, closing the University and providing for the several important academic and administrative changes, including the exclusion of the ladies, the trustees were in a conciliatory mood as they assembled in August and they decided to reopen the Normal Department at an early date and admit women students thereto. This problem of academic differentiation between the sexes was finally disposed of in December of the same year when the State Board of Education created by the Constitution of 1857 reversed the action taken by the trustees at the April meeting and ruled that both men and women be admitted to all departments of the University ''upon equal terms.''[6]

The attempt to exclude women from the advantages of higher education does not appear to have disturbed the public seriously. One of those who contributed to the general discussion was an Iowa City editor who found the ruling agreeable. He held that if females must attempt the higher learning it should be in separate institutions and with due allowance for the fact that they were women. Harvard and Yale, Troy and Mt. Holyoke, had set the pattern for dealing with this problem. The objections to attempting advanced education together, urged this writer, were simply insuperable. ''The sexes are unlike in the conformation of their intellects; their habits of study and

[5] *Iowa Weekly Republican* (Iowa City), May 19, July 14, 1858.

[6] Thomas H. Benton's *An Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement of the State University of Iowa, June 21, 1867*, pp. 52, 53; William J. Haddock's *A Retrospect; State University of Iowa*, p. 20.

thought are dissimilar, and these are dissimilarities that exist in the constitution of things; therefore the sexes cannot without violence be brought upon the same recitation bench.''

This objector was convinced, moreover, that when young men and women were associated in college or university there was a fixed tendency to emphasize the social over the mental. This was an improper function for educational institutions, for the ''interchanges of life'' in the ''great school of society'' could be depended upon to provide ample scope for the social factor. When this editor considered the later action of the Board of Education in readmitting to the University ''both sexes upon an equal basis'', he reiterated his belief that ''a State University will best answer the objects of its creation, and best attain rank and influence among the institutions of the State by becoming exclusively a school for the male sex.''[7]

Thomas Hart Benton, formerly Superintendent of Public Instruction and a member of the Board of Education which adopted the law making university education available to both sexes, was another who looked disapprovingly at the spectacle of men and women assembling in the same study halls. In his historic commencement address of 1867 he stated that although many persons claimed beneficial intellectual and social advantages for coeducation, the contention was not borne out by the experience of the governing body of the State University. At an earlier or later period of life, Benton agreed, objections to the mingling of the sexes in the classroom would be largely divested of their force, ''but at the age allotted for the completion of an education — so distinguished for the visionary and fanciful — it is incompatible with proficient study, and the cultivation of proper social relations between the sexes.''

[7] *Iowa Weekly Republican* (Iowa City), January 12, 1859.

Development of the mind in the rudimentary principles of knowledge was the great purpose of the University, asserted Benton, and anything which diverted the institution from accomplishing that end necessarily obstructed the progress of such discipline. He was sure that "daily social intercourse between the sexes" created such a diversion. However, under the circumstances prevailing, Benton conceded, it was advisable that predilections be set aside in this particular "until an institution designed exclusively for the education of females is established by the state. We must not close the doors of the University against any, simply because they have daughters, and not sons, to educate."[8]

Alarm at the possibility that colleges would place dangerous strains upon woman's physical and mental faculties was not confined to Iowa, of course. Concern on the matter was widely diffused, even as the nineteenth century was moving toward its close. "The delicate bloom, early but rapidly fading beauty, and singular pallor of American girls and women have almost passed into a proverb", wrote a doctor of medicine in 1873, and he added that to a large extent "our present system of educating girls is the cause of this pallor."[9]

The Reverend John Todd, writing in the *Congregationalist* during the early seventies, was deeply concerned about the fateful forces to which young women were now exposed. Shrinking from the use of the word "female" ("an indelicate word" that may mean "a feminine dog or horse — as well!"), he expressed doubt that woman's feebler constitution could bear the long strain of a college course. To attempt it she would have to sacrifice such accomplishments

[8] Benton's *An Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement of the State University of Iowa, June 21, 1867*, pp. 97, 98.

[9] Edward H. Clarke's *Sex in Education*, pp. 21, 22, quoted in J. D. Russell and C. H. Judd's *The American Educational System*, p. 321.

as the piano, singing, and attractive dress, because every ounce of her time and strength would be required in the attempt to compete with young men. In the effort to keep her alive, lest she "sink under the strain", the curriculum would perforce have to be reshaped, for it was axiomatic that "an army must grade its march to the feeblest battalion."

Then, the reverend writer wished to know, what about dormitories, and secret societies, and boat races? And what about the gymnasium — *"is she to perform there?"* And will she wish to smoke cigars in the street, as her male companion does? The climactic question could not be evaded: "when the days of flirtation have arrived — when the thoughts of the young naturally and strongly flow towards one point — when the passions are strong and the will weak, and the judgment inexperienced, is it wise to bring the two sexes together in the college?"[10]

A curious situation prevailed at the University of Wisconsin during this decade. Following a journey to the campus in 1877, the board of visitors reported that though young women were meeting examinations "at least as creditably as the young men", most of them presented an "appearance of ill health." The alarming manifestations were a "condition of bloodlessness . . . sallow features, the pearly whiteness of the eye, the lack of colour, the want of physical development in the majority, and an absolute expression of anaemia in very many of the women students." It all seemed to be indicative that "demands are being made upon them which they cannot meet." Granting that education was greatly to be desired, it was the firm opinion of the visitors that "it is better that the future matrons of

[10] From an article by the Reverend John Todd in *The Congregationalist*, August 31, 1871, quoted by James Orton in *The Liberal Education of Women*, pp. 178–182, and by J. D. Russell and C. H. Judd in *The American Educational System*, pp. 321–323.

the state should be without a university training than that it should be procured at the fearful expense of ruined health; better that the future mothers of the state should be robust, hearty, healthy women, than that by overstudy they should entail upon their descendants the germs of disease.''[11]

Such doleful murmurings and misgivings moved President James B. Angell of Michigan to the satiric reflection that ''the audacious young female who attempted to follow the same collegiate course as her brother generally insisted on the retention of oppressively good health; and she has done even worse things to discredit the general calling of prophet by discovering numbers of educated men who were willing and eager to attempt matrimony with her assistance. Worst of all, when she has married, she has had a normal number of vigorous children.''[12]

Similar satire was expressed in Iowa. The early action of the trustees excluding women from the classrooms provoked in later years an ironic outburst from William J. Haddock, long-time secretary of the University. The more available the State's institution of higher learning might be made to all aspirants, he reflected, ''the more nearly would the intention and purpose of the donors of the land be carried out.'' But, in Haddock's view, the trustees did not recognize this fact. Their ideas of equity and equality among the citizens of Iowa were weak and hazy. They did not consider even-handed justice between the young ladies and gentlemen as important. Girls were no longer welcome in the halls of learning. The arriving carloads of books were not for them. It was a sad ending to bright hopes. We can imagine, wrote the fanciful secretary, ''the young

[11] Helen R. Olin's *The Women of a State University,* pp. 81–85, *passim.*

[12] Quoted by Anna Tolman Smith in ''Coeducation in the Schools and Colleges of the United States'' in the *Report of the United States Commissioner of Education,* 1903, Vol. I, p. 1060.

ladies at the end of that term when reached by this official edict filing slowly off the campus in grief, with their books in their hands and the weak trustees in their official robes calling after them in the words of mad Hamlet — *Get thee to a nunnery.*'' The indignant secretary declared that in the expulsion of the fair sex the trustees were under the spell of tradition. ''They were simply waddling along'' in the ruts of the Middle Ages and following the European notions of a university. Oxford did not admit women, so that settled it for Iowa's governing board. ''The girls must go.''[13]

It is as pleasant as it is creditable to note that, in its official capacity, the faculty was in early and hearty agreement with the policy of coeducation. At the December, 1856, meeting it was moved to record that ''our experience, thus far, in relation to this class of students enables us to say that their individual progress in study compares very favorably with that of any other class and also that their discreet and lady-like deportment has had a salutary influence upon the whole institution.''[14]

Apparently no record has survived of the number of students present during the University's first session in the spring of 1855. A contemporary writer gave it as ''about forty''; Benton stated that ''from 75 to 100'' attended during the term.[15] Of the 124 students in attendance during the academic year 1856-1857, 41 were girls.[16]

When the University resumed its operations on the morn-

[13] Haddock's *A Retrospect; State University of Iowa,* pp. 18-20.

[14] ''Report of the Faculty'', December 27, 1856, a manuscript in the Archives Department of the State University of Iowa.

[15] N. H. Parker's *Iowa As It Is In 1885,* p. 144; Benton's *An Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement of the State University of Iowa, June 21, 1867,* p. 38.

[16] *Catalogue of the State University of Iowa,* 1856-1857, p. 5. (Hereafter referred to as *University Catalogue.*)

ing of the nineteenth day of September, 1860, only three women joined the student body in the southeast room on the first floor of what is now known as Old Capitol to receive President Silas Totten's greeting, but no more than twice that number of young men were in the gathering, and only four professors were present. Of course, other students arrived on the campus that day and during the following weeks. The total number recorded for the academic year 1860-1861 was 172, 86 of whom were girls. During the next few years, speeded by the wartime demand for women teachers, the enrollment of young ladies steadily increased, there being 306 in 1865-1866.[17]

Throughout the two ensuing decades, however, the trend of University attendance was downward, particularly so for the women. Between the academic years 1873-1874 and 1874-1875 the number of women fell from 161 to 122.[18] The closing of the Normal Department in 1873 was one reason for the reduction in the number of women students at the University. In 1885-1886 only 79 women were to be found among the 502 students present.[19] The return of war veterans to civil life was not the only reason for the comparatively small proportion of women students; a lack of adequate housing facilities both on the campus and in the community was given as a serious cause. But an increase soon occurred. One hundred and seven women students were recorded in 1888-1889; slightly over 200 in 1894-1895, and nearly 300 in the last academic year of the century. In spite of these gratifying increases, the numerical disparity

[17] *University Catalogue,* 1860-1861, p. 8, 1865-1866, p. 24.

[18] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1873–1875, pp. 18, 19, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1876, Vol. I.

[19] A chart on student attendance was compiled from the University Catalogues and other sources by Esther Sadler as an appendix to her master's thesis: "History of the State University of Iowa: Coeducation". The present writer acknowledges indebtedness to Miss Sadler.

between male and female students was very wide. In the year that almost 300 women were present, close to 1,200 men thronged the classrooms. Not until the period of the First World War did the numbers approach parity, and even in 1917-1918 men accounted for 1,780 of the enrollment of 3,303.[20]

On the campus, the fitness and propriety of including women among the students was seldom questioned. In 1867 the Zetagathians, one of the men's literary societies, debated the resolution that "The State University of Iowa should admit only male students." The affirmative side was weakened when one of its members, Benjamin F. Harrington, declined to speak "against sentiment." Lady visitors were invited to express themselves, and Ada Rankin made "a pithy little speech" against the proposition. Victory went to the negative side.[21]

Some discussion was stirred up in the University town during the seventies when J. P. Sanxay, a former student, then in Yale College, wrote a letter to the *Iowa State Press* in which he questioned the wisdom of coeducation.[22] Of twenty-two members of the faculty pressed for an opinion in 1891, three entered objections, charging that the presence of females produced "too much flirting and distractions from lessons." One of the professors was inclined to believe that society would be better served if the money spent for collegiate education were diverted to a school in cookery.[23] Increasing approval of coeducation was, however,

[20] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1869–1871, p. 131, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1872, Vol. I; *University Catalogue,* 1888-1889, pp. 90–112, 1894-1895, pp. 150–189, 1899-1900, pp. 226–267, 1917-1918, p. 494.

[21] "Records of the Zetagathian Literary Society", November 22, 1867, p. 149.

[22] *Iowa State Press* (Iowa City), April 15, 1874.

[23] *The Vidette-Reporter,* May 16, 1891.

apparent among the chief administrators of the University. In President George H. Thacher's mind during the early seventies "the wisdom and success of the experiment of co-education . . . [was] no longer esteemed a matter of questionable expediency." The President wrote of the "beneficial and most manifest influence of the coeducation of the sexes on the quiet and orderly conduct of the whole body of students." It had been found that the "two sexes exert a reciprocal influence of the most salutary kind." He was pleased to note that "instances of matrimonial attachments" were fewer than some had anticipated, while "perhaps not one well attested case of lapse from purity" had occurred; indeed, "hardly ever a suspicion has tarnished, even for a day, the reputation of any young woman."[24]

President Christian W. Slagle asserted in 1877 that "the presence of both sexes in the institution is an altogether invaluable feature of our policy in respect of mutual restraint from indecorum, and of mutual incitement to every virtue".[25] President Josiah L. Pickard was sure that discipline was "far easier than under the separation system, and the moral tone more healthful." Every passing year reinforced his judgment of the value of the practice.[26] Confessing to an earlier prejudice on the point, President George E. MacLean became an advocate of men and women associating in the common adventure of acquiring academic education.[27]

Expressions of student approval appeared as the Univer-

[24] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1871–1873, p. 8, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1874, Vol. I; Clarence R. Aurner's *History of Education in Iowa,* Vol. IV, p. 53.

[25] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1875–1877, pp. 35, 36, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1878, Vol. I.

[26] *The Vidette-Reporter,* November 3, 1883, p. 3.

[27] George E. MacLean's "Jottings: Fragmentary Notes on the MacLean Administration, 1898–1911", p. 10.

sity settled to its inclusive practice in respect to men and women. To the editor of the campus newspaper, coeducation was in no wise "a hindrance . . . to the highest forms of true culture." Such culture was more than book learning stowed away "in a brain otherwise untutored"; it included social and moral values that were nourished by the coeducational system. The influence of woman was "universally recognized in its instrumentality as a restraint to the coarser tendency of man, and no reason could be given why that same effect could not be attained within as well as without institutions for mental culture." So ardent had the editor become in his advocacy of men and women walking and working together in college halls and classrooms that he looked forward to the day "when institutions for the separate education of the sexes will be as thoroughly obliterated as were the monasteries of the middle ages".[28]

The Vidette-Reporter took a survey of the leading educational institutions of the land and relayed to its readers the mounting chorus of praise at the progress of the joint adventure of men and women in higher learning. Michigan reported that the admission of women was the "most important event in the educational history of the last fifteen years". "Since the admission of women the whole tone of the University has greatly improved", was the judgment from Cornell. Wisconsin's spokesman averred that after an experience of ten years he was "more than convinced" of the system's advantages. President Frederick A. P. Barnard of Columbia College urged upon all governing bodies "the expediency and the duty of opening their doors to all earnest seekers after knowledge without regard to sex." "Sixteen years of radical co-education without a whisper of scandal" was the joyful verdict of Kansas.

[28] *The Vidette-Reporter*, November 3, 1883, p. 1.

Small wonder, then, that Boston University found its chapel, classrooms, and lecture halls "brightened and humanized by the daily presence of the finer half of humanity."[29]

Even though the barriers against the admission of women students were down, and notwithstanding the anthem of approval and welcome that ascended from the Iowa campus, a certain slight awkwardness in effecting adjustment persisted for some time. In later years, Mrs. Ellen M. Rich recalled that when she attended the University while the Civil War was raging, girls were not permitted to do work in the chemical laboratory, even though they were enrolled for the study of chemistry. Whether or not the reason for the prohibition was lack of faith in the competence of the ladies to handle chemicals, and a consequent apprehension for the safety of both male and female, Mrs. Rich did not say.[30]

For some curious and elusive reason, classes in penmanship were segregated in the decade of the eighteen sixties, yet both men and women students were permitted to associate in gymnastic exercises! It was in October, 1863, that the faculty requested the President to make arrangements for physical training, "the two sexes receiving lessons together."[31] The month following the adoption of this resolution, the editor of an Iowa City newspaper reported that he had visited classes in gymnastics in the "Metropolitan Hall" where he observed "eighty young ladies and gentlemen arranged in the room at proper distances from each other", going through their calisthenic paces.[32] Later, the basement of Close Hall was used as a women's gymnasium

[29] *The Vidette-Reporter*, November 3, 1883, p. 3, January 26, 1884, p. 1.

[30] Ellen M. Rich's "The University During the War" in *The Hawkeye*, 1897, n. p.

[31] "Minutes of the Faculty", October 21, 1863, p. 76.

[32] *The State Press* (Iowa City), November 18, 1863.

and in 1915 a modern building was opened for the physical training of women students.

A slight measure of interest in segregation of the sexes appears to have persisted in the administrative mind during the opening years of the century. One of the venerable professors still in residence recalls that Dr. John G. Bowman, who became President in 1911, held the opinion that something was to be said for segregating the sexes for purposes of University education. Particularly, he thought, would the men accomplish more if permitted to work as a group. Without public announcement an attempt was made at the fall registration in 1911 to place the men and women of certain large courses in different classes. Separation was not complete, however, for late registrants were apparrently admitted to the units concerned without regard to sex. There was diminished emphasis on segregation during the second semester, and still less the following year. Attempts to continue the experiment were soon abandoned; no clear records of it were kept, and no conclusions were drawn. The only points now particularly remembered are that the system was designed for the benefit of the men rather than the women, and that the sharper protest against it came from the latter.[33]

While the admission and readmission of women to the charmed circle of university education was a subject of agitation for the public mind, and though some frankly doubted woman's capacity to endure the same physical and intellectual strains of scholarship required of men, the general assumption was that each would undertake the same type of work. That is to say, women expected no concessions or alterations of academic patterns or scholarly obligations simply because of their sex.

This equalitarian attitude in intellectual matters has re-

[33] Forest C. Ensign to Esther Sadler, May, 1942.

mained a fixed principle from the University's beginning until now. Beyond this fact, however, some special recognitions of women's needs and welfare might be said to be unavoidable. In 1869, for example, the trustees, in their report to the General Assembly, suggested the propriety of enlarging the list of elective studies for the benefit of the ladies. The standard subjects, it was conceded, should remain as hitherto, but "the taste and aptitude of the sex" should receive enlarged attention. "An increase of literary and artistic studies offered them would be greatly to their advantage." A proper and graceful stimulant to woman's academic and social refinement, it was urged, would be "a suite of rooms provided for those engaging in the studies, and arranged to receive the means of illustration necessary."[34] The report proceeded to declare that should the General Assembly respond to this suggestion, it would be well to have regard to feminine preference in the form, furnishing, lighting, and shading of the rooms and in the "cut and color" of the decorative material. "Let the specimens gathered therein", continued the writer, warming to his theme, "whether of painting or sculpture or their transcript, be representative of tendencies, schools and periods, and let music lend its charms to the whole". Taken together, these arrangements would present a lesson in what it was possible to do, even with limited means, for comfort and adornment. The whole would compose "a standing text-book, as it were, on taste." Lest intimations of such extravagance should alarm the Assembly, the hint was given that, with rooms provided, "private liberality might be depended upon for the furniture necessary at the outset."[35]

[34] *Report of the Board of Trustees of the State University of Iowa to the General Assembly,* 1867–1869, p. 27, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1870, Vol. I.

[35] *Report of the Board of Trustees of the State University of Iowa to the*

Though this immediate effort failed, success was not long delayed, for in 1878 President Pickard in his report to the Board of Regents made the comment that "the rooms set apart for the special use of young ladies have long been needed and they are highly prized." Two years later, the Board in its report to the General Assembly acknowledged the "increased accommodations for the use of young ladies." In May, 1886, the Executive Committee ordered that "the room now occupied by Prof. Call when vacated be appropriated to the use of the young Ladies as a 'Study room' ". In August, 1886, the secretary was "directed to carpet Girls room and repair papering therein". This was the northwest room on the first floor of Old South Hall.[36]

The quintessence of early generosity and refinement in respect to woman's desires for a retreat was seen in the "drawing room" which was made available in the resplendent new Liberal Arts Building (Schaeffer Hall) in 1901. Its hard maple floor, softly tinted walls, rugs, lace curtains, comfortable chairs, and attractive tables united to make "everything . . . pleasant and beautiful."[37]

The provision of dormitory and boarding facilities was a problem of serious concern to the governing boards and administrators during the early decades of the University's existence. Some private accommodations were available in the community, of course, but room owners often preferred

General Assembly, 1867–1869, p. 27, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1870, Vol. I.

[36] "Report of President Pickard to the Board of Regents", 1878, University Archives; *Report of the Board of Regents of the State University of Iowa to the General Assembly,* 1877–1879, p. 16, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1880, Vol. III; "Minutes of the Executive Committee", 1878–1886, May 8, 1885, 1886–1893, August 5, 1886.

[37] "Minutes of the Board of Regents", September 25, 1901, in Book C, 1894–1902, p. 591; *The Daily Iowan,* October 1, 1901. This "drawing room" was referred to in the *University Catalogue* as late as 1931-1932. The space is now occupied by the Foreign Language Library.

men tenants. Men did not require parlor privileges nor, as a rule, did they want to wash or iron. Moreover, according to the values of the time, rent and food levels for women were frequently considered to be high. It was President Thacher's hope that a building might be erected to board and lodge fifty females and house, also, a superintendent and matron. The hope was that it could be operated without cost to the University. In 1871 he reported to the General Assembly that the inadequacy of housing accommodations was a serious cause of the diminishing number of women students.[38] The following year, Christian W. Slagle, a member of the Board of Regents and an advocate of coeducation, emphasized the appeal made by President Thacher and urged the board to provide a building "to be used as a boarding house for young ladies attending this institution." The regents responded favorably and the Executive Committee was thereupon given power to do this and to "prepare the same for use at the next school year." The sum of $1,000 was appropriated for the purpose. Other small appropriations were made later in the year.[39]

Unfortunately, hope and effort were not matched by achievement, and five years later Acting President Christian W. Slagle was still wrestling with this unsolved problem, and asserting that the valiant struggle of the young women to meet these basic needs and remain at the University was deserving of better recognition and opportunity. The struggle was intensified as the sense of need deepened, and the President's efforts were soon reinforced by others. By the turn of the century, the Dean of Women and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts were urging the point

[38] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1869–1871, p. 131, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1872, Vol. I.

[39] "Minutes of the Board of Regents", June 20, 1872, in Book A, 1847–1876, pp. 402, 420.

with vigor. Soon, the women's organizations of the State were adding their influence to the increasing demand.[40]

In 1906, the governing board petitioned the legislature to appropriate $15,000 for a site and $125,000 for a woman's dormitory. Reporting the presence of 539 women among the student body the regents declared that "we have reached a point in our development as a coeducational institution where we must provide adequate and proper accommodations for the young women of the State who are flocking to us in such numbers." The legislators were told that whereas parents in almost every county were sending their boys to the University, their girls were going to colleges outside the State "simply because these other schools have made those proper provisions for the supervision and care of young women which every parent has a right to expect and require, and which we are under our present conditions unable to make. The necessity of such provisions must be apparent to every father or mother who has a daughter seeking an education beyond the high school."[41]

Discouragement at the failure of the legislature to respond to this appeal in no way diminished the University's sense of urgency or the force of its effort to deal with this major problem. "I deem the matter of such essential importance," President George E. MacLean told the Board of Regents, "as to deserve to appear in every report from this office." The President also indicated that those responsible for meeting the issue were thinking not only of the incon-

[40] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1875–1877, pp. 35, 36, 1901–1903, p. 94, 1903–1905, p. 41, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1878, Vol. I, 1904, Vol. III, 1906, Vol. III; *Report of the President of the State University of Iowa to the Iowa State Board of Education,* June 15, 1910, in the *Biennial Report of the Iowa State Board of Education,* 1908–1910, p. 68.

[41] *Report of the Board of Regents to the Governor and General Assembly,* 1905-1906, pp. 20, 21, 25, 26, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1907, Vol. III.

venience and hardship endured by the women students but were moved by more romantic concepts of woman's position in society than prevail in our more realistic time. It was not "a fit thing", MacLean contended, "that young women should be virtually compelled to go for their meals to restaurants open to and patronized by the general public."[42]

Throughout all these years of mounting concern, both the University and the community were, of course, by no means inactive in the face of a problem so pressing. Rooms were available in private households, but they were insufficient to the need and because it lacked competitive facilities on the campus, MacLean complained, the University was unable "to dictate the conditions in all houses in which women were allowed to live". In this emergency the University encouraged both philanthropic purpose and private enterprise to relieve the shortage. A product of the former was Ranney Hall, a gift of Mrs. Mark Ranney to the University; the latter was represented by Svendi Hall.[43]

Finally, after the persistent efforts of the years and much disheartening frustration, the General Assembly relaxed its resistance. In its report submitted in 1910, the Board of Education pointed out that 800 women were in attendance the previous year, and that dormitory accommodations had now become imperative if the University was to discharge its full academic and social duty toward so large a number. The following year, the General Assembly appropriated the sum of $150,000 for the erection of a woman's building at Iowa City. The site chosen was North

[42] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1905-1906, p. 32, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1907, Vol. III.

[43] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents,* 1905-1906, pp. 33, 34, 1906-1908, p. 38, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1907, Vol. III, 1909, Vol. III; *Biennial Report of the Iowa State Board of Education,* 1908–1910, p. 68; *University Catalogue,* 1909-1910, p. 39.

Clinton Street, and by September, 1913, Currier Hall was ready for occupancy. Its fireproof sleeping, dining, and recreation rooms, its parlors, kitchen, bakery, and laundry provided a "dream home" for girls long denied any such measure of luxury. The only feature to be deplored was its limited availability; scarcely more than 150 girls could be accommodated within its comfortable walls.[44]

But the dormitory movement was accelerated as the years multiplied. In 1941 it was reported that 66.3 per cent of the University's women students were living in an enlarged Currier Hall, other institutional dormitories, and commodious sorority houses, 17.5 per cent were in approved private residences, 11.5 per cent were living with relatives, 3.2 per cent were married and lived in their own homes, and 1.5 per cent were domiciled in adjacent communities.[45]

Acceptance of the fact of coeducation by the governing body and the administration indicated the wisdom of making provision for sympathetic and efficient supervision of feminine affairs by some designated responsible official. As early as 1859 the Board of Trustees authorized the appointment of a "competent female assistant in the Normal School, at a salary not to exceed $500 per year."[46] In the *University Catalogue* of 1863-1864, Miss Lavinia Davis was listed as "Preceptress and Teacher" in this division.

Several years later, the trustees created the position of "Preceptress". It was to be her duty to teach in the Preparatory Department and "have oversight over the young ladies in all departments." During the single year that

[44] *Biennial Report of the Iowa State Board of Education,* 1908-1910, p. 32, 1912-1914, pp. 11, 12; *Laws of Iowa,* 1911, Joint Resolution No. 7, p. 304; *University Catalogue,* 1912-1913, p. 41.

[45] *The Daily Iowan,* September 16, 1941.

[46] "Minutes of the Board of Trustees", February 3, 1859, in Book A, 1847–1876, p. 118.

Miss Susan E. Hale, the first appointee under this resolution, remained in office, effort was made to coördinate all those interests of women students that came within the scope of the University's authority.[47] With the departure of Miss Hale from the campus, many years elapsed before the University again enjoyed the services of a professional supervisor of women's affairs.

It must not, however, be concluded that women students were entirely without supervision. A number of women served as teachers in the preparatory and normal departments during the early years and they no doubt acted as counsellors of the women students, although without a specific title. In due time, the appointment of a woman on the University faculty was suggested — a bona fide member of the instructional staff — and in 1875 the regents adopted a resolution that in view of "the recognized policy of the University for the education of females on an equality with males . . . there should be a Lady Professor in the University with the full salary of a Professor". One of the sponsors of this resolution was Regent Christian W. Slagle who pointed out that previous to 1870 approximately 43 per cent of the University students were women, while between 1870 and 1875 they had constituted only about 34 per cent of the student body.

In 1878 Miss Phoebe W. Sudlow of Davenport was employed as "Professor of English Language and Literature, with a professorial salary of $1700." In their report for 1877–1879, the regents gave this explanation of the appointment: "A Lady Professor has been employed with special reference to the interests of lady students, who also does the full work of one professor."[48] Miss Sudlow resigned in

[47] *University Catalogue,* 1863-1864, p. 3, 1864-1865, p. 3, 1867-1868, p. 4; "Minutes of the Board of Trustees", June 23, 24, 1868, in Book A, 1847-1876, pp. 302, 305.

[48] "Minutes of the Board of Regents", June 30, 1875, in Book A, 1847-

1881. Miss Susan Fenimore Smith, who followed her, remained until 1887. Many other women were included on the University teaching staff, and to some extent the interests of feminine students received attention from them and, perhaps, from faculty wives who volunteered their services.[49]

It became obvious, however, that the supervision of young women and attention to their welfare should be centered in some person chosen for that purpose and when George E. MacLean assumed the office of President in 1899, he gave early attention to this long-neglected matter. He pressed upon the regents his conviction that nothing less than a special deanship to deal with the interests and necessities of women students would meet the needs of the time. In 1900 he again urged the creation of such an office, declaring that the counsel of a woman was often desired by the young ladies of the University. The regents, finally convinced of the soundness of the proposal, made an appropriation for a Dean of Women, and invited Miss Alice Young of the University of Minnesota to accept the position. She was also to give assistance in the Department of English.[50]

Miss Young retained her appointment at the University of Iowa for four years and her administration, in spite of its conservative temper, proved to be both agreeable and successful. Encountering some opposition from young women who had no desire to accept new discipline after so

1876, p. 515; *Biennial Report of the Board of Regents,* 1877–1879, p. 16, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1880, Vol. III.

[49] Minutes of the Board of Regents'', May 16, June 17, 18, 19, 1878, June 21, 22, 1881, in Book B, 1876–1894, pp. 77, 93, 101, 102, 103, 190, 192; *University Catalogue,* 1878-1879, p. 6, 1887-1888, p. 5.

[50] *Iowa State Press* (Iowa City), June 6, 1900; ''Minutes of the Board of Regents'', June 6, 7, 1900, Book C, 1894–1902, pp. 327, 330; ''Minutes of the Faculty'', September 21, 1900, p. 36.

many years of "freedom" from such restraints as were now imposed, she soon won loyalty and affection from her charges. In his first annual report to the regents following Miss Young's appointment, President MacLean declared that the innovation had passed the experimental stage. Already, "the presence and influence of the dean of women have been felt for good in a marked degree." References were generously made to the Dean's sympathy, discretion, and good judgment as she dealt with the personal, domestic, social, scholastic, and religious problems of Iowa's academic daughters.[51]

When writing his notable "Jottings" in later years, President MacLean said of Dean Alice Young: "she was prepared to sympathize with the ordinary woman student. She met the difficulties of the innovation affecting social relations of men and women and requiring regulations by the faculties. Uncontroversial in nature, she created a revolution in University manners and social conventions. She contributed to the realization of the ideal of the poet, Edmund Spenser, that the aim of education is to make a gentleman." If some were startled at the use of the masculine term, MacLean doubtless explained that it was meant inclusively, and that, as the word brethren was applied by the nervous rector to both sexes, the one embraced the other.[52]

Miss Young was followed in the deanship by Miss Mary Sleight Everts. Described by those who knew her as "an exceptionally gifted and lovely young person", Miss Everts appears to have made her office, which she held for only two years, a helpful force in the lives of the University

[51] *Report of the President of the State University to the Board of Regents*, 1899–1901, p. 37, in *Iowa Legislative Documents*, 1902, Vol. III; *The Hawkeye*, 1926, pp. 28, 29.

[52] George E. MacLean's "Jottings", manuscript in University Archives, p. 10.

women.[53] Mrs. Mable Montgomery Volland, a graduate of the University, succeeded Miss Everts in 1906. She worked tirelessly to promote the cause of a woman's dormitory. Inadequate living arrangements and poor food, she insisted, were much more responsible for nervous breakdowns among women than were overwork or social dissipation.[54]

Beginning in 1909, Miss Anna Marie Klingenhagen served as Dean of Women for a full decade. A graduate of Wellesley College, Dean Klingenhagen brought a strong academic stimulus to the women of the University. "Her fine scholarship and culture were correctly viewed as definite assets to the position and the standing of the University in general."[55] Dean Klingenhagen's administration was noted for its democratic procedures, and she labored for the best interest and reputation of coeducation. She was a strong force in organizing the social and economic life of the new and resplendent Currier Hall. One of Dean Klingenhagen's notable achievements was the establishment of Staff and Circle, a senior women's honor society which later gave way to a chapter of Mortar Board, a national organization.[56] As a mark of the esteem in which she was held, Dean Klingenhagen was invited to deliver the commencement address at the mid-year convocation in 1914, being, so far as records have been found, the first woman to receive this honor.[57]

The office of Dean of Women was occupied from 1919 to

[53] Cornelia Springer's "History of the Office of the Dean of Women at the State University of Iowa" (manuscript), pp. 4, 5.

[54] *Iowa Alumnus*, Vol. V, pp. 108, 109.

[55] *The Hawkeye*, 1912, p. 30; Springer's "History of the Office of the Dean of Women" (manuscript), pp. 6, 7.

[56] Springer's "History of the Office of the Dean of Women" (manuscript), p. 9.

[57] *The Daily Iowan*, February 10, 1914.

1921 by Mrs. Nellie Slayton Aurner, long one of the University's distinguished professors of English. Her successor was Mrs. Adelaide Burge, who, first as Acting Dean of Women, then as Dean, was the last occupant of this position. Her wise leadership and gracious personality made a rich and abiding contribution to the lives of a large number of University women. In 1942 the office of Dean of Women was merged with the newly-created Office of Student Affairs.[58]

One of the obvious variations from traditional instructional patterns that represented a direct concession to peculiarly feminine needs and desires was in respect to the study of homemaking on the collegiate level. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, opportunities to study domestic economy, domestic science, or home economics as this area was variously described, had been provided in land grant colleges of the Mid West, notably at the Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Ames, the Kansas State Agricultural College, and the University of Illinois. As early as 1876 the first of these established an experimental kitchen to serve as a laboratory for formal instruction in the domestic arts.[59]

It was not, however, until the opening of the new century that the University of Iowa evinced any serious interest in making studies of this sort available. In September, 1900, President George E. MacLean received an appeal from the School of Housekeeping in Boston, Massachusetts, that he call the attention of his students to the work of this institution, and encourage young women to study electives pertinent to its entrance requirements. President MacLean replied that he was both personally and officially interested,

[58] *University Catalogue,* 1921-1922, p. 7, 1922-1923, p. 6, 1923-1924, p. 5, 1924-1925, p. 6, and 1941-1942.

[59] Isabel Bevier's *Home Economics in Education,* pp. 119–127; Aurner's *History of Education in Iowa,* Vol. IV, p. 236.

and that he would refer the matter to the Dean of Women.[60]

It was several years, however, before any effective action was forthcoming, but during the administration of President John G. Bowman the Board of Education reported to the Governor and General Assembly that "There are at the University at the present time approximately eight hundred women who are clamoring for the establishment of a department of home economics." After wrestling with the problem of duplication in the areas of both engineering and "domestic technology" at Ames and Iowa City, the Board, on October 8, 1912, urged that engineering be concentrated at Ames and that home economics be developed exclusively at Iowa City. The proposal met with the sharpest sort of protest from the alumni of both institutions, with the result that the recommended transfers did not take place; the University of Iowa not only kept its engineering equipment and faculty, but received authorization from the General Assembly to make provision for imparting instruction in home economics.[61]

There was much rejoicing on the campus of the University at this turn of events. The editors of the *Daily Iowan* expressed satisfaction not only that the University was not to lose its engineering unit, but also because "the Story County metropolis" was not to lose its "much prized domestic science department." However, by the terms of the bill, it was announced, "Iowa is . . . to acquire a domestic science school also." Indeed, "all three schools [including the State Teachers College at Cedar Falls] are to have domestic science departments."[62]

[60] Letter from School of Housekeeping to George E. MacLean, dated September 18, 1900, in Presidential Correspondence, University Archives Department.

[61] *Biennial Report of the Iowa State Board of Education*, 1910–1912, pp. 11, 62; *Journal of the Senate*, 1913, pp. 1638, 1639.

[62] *The Daily Iowan*, April 6, 1913.

Responding to the drift of the times, and advancing more rapidly than the slower-moving machinery of University procedure, the Young Women's Christian Association, in January, 1913, organized classes in plain and fancy sewing, with wives of faculty members serving as voluntary instructors. In May, 1913, the University issued a bulletin, explaining its readiness to begin instruction in the broad area of domestic science with the fall opening. The work offered was to be available to women who were enrolled in any department of the College of Liberal Arts and "women registered in other colleges", it was pointed out, "will have the privileges of the courses." Cooking, sewing, and the decorative arts were among the subjects to be taught. Provision was also to be made for the training of teachers in home economics. The College of Medicine, it was explained, would coöperate in the enterprise by providing work in dietetics, public health, and sanitation. Contributions would be forthcoming, too, from the departments of botany, chemistry, economics, sociology, and political science.[63]

True to the promises made, the University's catalogue announced the establishment of the Department of Home Economics in September, 1913.[64] Housed in the Old Physics Building (Old North Hall), it was under the direction of Miss Ruth A. Wardell who was called to Iowa from the Department of Domestic Science at Ohio State University.[65]

The fears concerning woman's academic competence that had so disturbed the masculine mind during the early coeducational years were never justified; indeed they appear to have been increasingly invalidated with the passing of time. Largely confined to the Normal Department during

[63] *Bulletin of the State University of Iowa,* New Series, No. 60, May 17, 1913.

[64] *University Catalogue,* 1912-1913, "Special Announcement" on p. 4.

[65] *The Daily Iowan,* September 23, 1913.

the early years of the University's existence, women moved with quickening step into the collegiate departments.

In the professional colleges, also, women were soon enrolled, although not, with the exception of nursing, in the same proportion as in Liberal Arts. The first medical department of the State University of Iowa was the College of Physicians and Surgeons, located at Keokuk. The *Code of 1851* provided that it should have the power to grant diplomas "to such persons as they deem qualified", but there is no proof that "persons" meant men and women. There is no record of any woman graduate of this medical school. However, when the regular medical department of the University was established in 1870, it was specifically stated that a candidate for graduation should notify the dean of "his or her" wish for a diploma. It is perhaps significant that eight women were included in the first class of the medical department, five of whom were married. Two women graduated from the medical school in 1872 — Anna A. Shepard and Isabel G. Whitfield.

Nursing was, of course, always recognized as a field for women, so it is not surprising that the School of Nursing has been, for the most part, not only open to women, but almost monopolized by them. The College of Dentistry has also been open to women on the same terms as men, although the number of women taking advantage of this opening has always been small. It does not appear that women were ever excluded from the College of Law of the University, but until 1870 only male citizens could be admitted to the bar, so there was little incentive for women to take law. Mary B. Hickey who graduated in law in 1873 was the first woman enrolled in the law school of the University.[66]

[66] Ruth A. Gallaher's *History of the Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa*, pp. 41, 47–51.

In 1900 more than 260 women were enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts, and some women were found in all the professional colleges except engineering. By 1923, the number of women in arts and sciences was scarcely short of 2,250.[67] This was more than 100 beyond the figure for men students in the College of Liberal Arts. This numerical superiority had been noted in earlier years, also, and fears were expressed that the Liberal Arts College might be dominated by women, as men moved increasingly into technical, scientific, and professional areas.[68] However, events have proved that such apprehensions were groundless.

It became progressively clear, however, that women were both willing and able to advance along all intellectual avenues which the University made available to its students. They gave themselves to the classics, the modern languages, the sciences, and, in lesser numbers, the professions. They participated in oratory and debate, joined the literary societies, were admitted to scholastic organizations, and even went abroad as members of scientific parties. Not only were young women seen with scalpel, glass, and hammer on botanical and geological field trips, but they constituted about one-third of the personnel on the expedition to the Bahamas under Professor C. C. Nutting in 1893.[69]

The first academic awards by the University of Iowa to women were Normal Department certificates; three of these were granted in 1857-1858 to Elizabeth Humphrey, Cellina H. Aylworth, and Sylvia M. Thompson. In 1860, Nettie M. Hart was awarded the Bachelor of Didactics degree and, in 1863, the Bachelor of Arts degree, being the first one of her

[67] See Esther Sadler's "History of the State University of Iowa: Coeducation", manuscript thesis, Appendix A, for these statistics.

[68] *Report of the Board of Regents of the State University of Iowa,* 1905-1906, p. 32, in *Iowa Legislative Documents,* 1907, Vol. III.

[69] William C. Lang's "History of the State University of Iowa: The Collegiate Department from 1879 to 1900", manuscript thesis, pp. 281, 282.

sex to receive the latter at Iowa. Women were admitted to graduate work during the sixties, and one of them received the Master of Arts diploma in 1865. The first woman to achieve the Doctor of Philosophy degree was Mabel Clare Williams, in 1903.[70]

In her study of the comparative scholarship of men and women, Esther Sadler came to the following conclusion: "Over the years of coeducation at the State University of Iowa, women scholastically have compared favorably with men. The two sexes show an almost equal rating, though there are differences in various subjects. Different series of tests also show contrasting results. General intelligence tests given to freshmen usually show that women receive higher rating in English, language, and literature, while in mathematics and sciences the men have higher rating. Men also have a wider range in the rating, but the average group tends to be greater for women. The little difference there may be in average grade comparison seems to favor women.

"The general opinion seems to be that, by their nature, women work harder for the obvious reward of a grade, and they have the patience to apply themselves to tedious detailed work; while men, with more outside activities, care less for the grade, but are more concerned in investigation."[71]

In 1912, Dr. Forest C. Ensign, then the University's Registrar, made an analysis of the academic records of 479 men and 468 women students with this tabulated result based on credit hours:[72]

[70] *Circulars, Catalogues, Reports, Etc., of the State University of Iowa,* 1855–1860, p. 58; *University Catalogue,* 1861-1862, p. 11, 1862-1863, p. 11, 1863-1864, p. 9, 1864-1865, p. 17, 1903-1904, p. 490.

[71] Sadler's "History of the State University of Iowa: Coeducation", pp. 39, 40.

[72] *The Daily Iowan,* March 31, 1912.

	Men	*Women*
Grade A	337	440
Grade B	1,078	1,787
Grade C	2,031	2,478
Grade D	1,365	1,153
Grade E	378	280
Successfully passed	5,189	6,138
Failed, left, or unfinished	956	587
Total hours	6,145	6,725

Reduced to a percentage basis, the records of men and women students were rated as follows:

Good work	19.1%	29.3%
Fair to average	57.8	59.5
Lowest passing	6.2	3.2
Failed	16.8	7.8

If any further suggestion is needed that the University of Iowa has never had reason to repent its decision to admit women to its classrooms, or that the ladies have amply demonstrated their ability to survive the rigors of the intellectual life, it may be found in the fact that in the half century (1896–1947) the scholastic fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa, has existed on the campus, approximately 58 per cent of those who have won the coveted key, symbol of membership in its honored ranks, have been women.

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