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**WOMEN ON THE BLUFF:
CO-EDUCATION AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND**

by

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The University of Portland opened its doors to women as undergraduate students in the fall of 1934, the first of the colleges and universities conducted by the men of Holy Cross to do so. But women were not welcome to take classes on campus until January 1951. Therein lies a tale.

When Columbia University was founded by Archbishop Alexander Christie of Oregon City in 1901, it was intended to be a school for boys, to complement St. Mary's Academy, the school for girls conducted by the Sisters of the Holy Names in Portland. As in most Catholic schools in that era, co-education was considered pedagogically unsound and morally risky. Although the institution changed its name in February 1935 to The University of Portland, it did not alter its policy with regard to co-education. But by then there were several dozen young women enrolled in classes offered by the University.

The College of Nursing

In the summer of 1934, the tenure of Father Louis Kelley, C.S.C., as president and local superior, limited to six years by canon law, had come to an end, and a new president, Rev. Joseph Boyle, C.S.C., took over the task of guiding the school and the local Holy Cross community. It was the depths of the Great Depression and the University was struggling under its debt. With tuition the major source of income, the school was keenly interested in increasing the size of the student body. When the Sisters of Providence from St. Vincent's Hospital in northwest Portland approached Boyle in September 1934 and invited him to send members of his faculty to teach "the pre-medics course" at the

hospital's nursing school, he readily agreed.¹ This arrangement continued for three years, until 1937.

The collaboration between St. Vincent's Nursing School and the University of Portland proved satisfactory enough that in 1937 a contract with the Sisters of Providence committed the University to conduct a College of Nursing at St. Vincent's Hospital in northwest Portland with the University providing instructors and determining qualifications for admission, scholastic requirements and regulations, while the Superintendent of Nurses at the hospital would judge whether the applicant possessed "the qualities of one who is to engage in nursing." By the fall of 1939, the 226 women in the Nursing School accounted for 29% of the University's student body.²

Although by the fall of 1937 the University had a nursing school as part of its structure, the young women who were undergraduates in this school resided and took classes at St. Vincent's Hospital in Northwest Portland, on the west bank of the Willamette River. They set foot on the The Bluff, the University's main campus in North Portland on the east bank of the Willamette, only for social events, such as dances, and for commencement ceremonies. In short, "(seldom) the twain did meet."

During World War II, when most college-age men were in military service, the University barely survived. By graduation in June 1944, there were only fifty-five male college students left on campus, down from more than six hundred in the autumn of 1942.

¹ James T. Covert, *Point of Pride* (Portland: University of Portland, 1976), 102; Joseph Boyle to James Burns, 23 June 1935, Papers of the Provincial Administration of Rev. James A. Burns, C.S.C., Indiana Province Archives Center, Notre Dame, Indiana.

² James Culligan to Thomas Steiner, 5 December 1940, Papers of the Provincial Administration of Rev. Thomas A. Steiner, C.S.C., Indiana Province Archives Center, Notre Dame, Indiana [hereafter Steiner Papers]. Included with this letter is a copy of the original contract of July 12, 1937; Michael Early to Thomas Steiner, 11 November 1939, Steiner Papers.

Of the twenty-one men who received degrees at that commencement, thirteen were *in absentia*, already in military service.³ It was the nurses and the high school students at Columbia Preparatory School, still a division of the University, who sustained the institution in the last two years of World War II. Columbia Prep counted 176 on its rolls in the fall of 1943 and 200 the following spring. The Nursing School had 230 students in the fall of 1943 and 250 by the spring of 1944.⁴

Portland became a center for ship building during the war with the shipyards working around the clock and workers imported from other parts of the country. Adjustments were made to maintain enrollment. When high school boys found that they could earn the princely sum of fifty dollars a week in the shipyards, Columbia Prep allowed all who wished to work the swing shift so that they could register for six to nine hours of class. With high school girls being offered \$125 a month for typing and filing in the shipyards, the Nursing School found recruitment difficult, even with scholarships.⁵

Boom and Bust: The Postwar Years

With the end of the war in 1945 and the opportunities offered by the The Serviceman's Readjustment Act (the G.I. Bill), male college students flooded the campus of the University of Portland, as they did most colleges and universities in the United States. In September 1945, the University welcomed 206 men on campus in the college program. Another 415 men were admitted to the college program in January 1946.⁶ In

³ Charles Miltner to Thomas Steiner, 20 September 1943, 3 October 1943, and 16 June 1944, Steiner Papers.

⁴ Charles Miltner to Thomas Steiner, 3 October 1943, 30 May 1944, and 16 June 1944, Steiner Papers.

⁵ Charles Miltner to Thomas Steiner, 18 August 1942 and 4 September 1942, Steiner Papers.

⁶ Charles Miltner to Thomas Steiner, 13 October 1945, and Theodore Mehling to Thomas Steiner, 16 January 1946, Steiner Papers.

only five years, from the spring of 1945 to the spring of 1950, enrollment at the University, had gone from less than 100 men to almost 2,000.⁷

Then, suddenly and without warning, came the Korean War in June 1950. As veterans were recalled to service and the draft was reactivated, enrollment dropped as precipitously in 1950-51 as it had risen in the previous five years. When classes began in the fall of 1950, there were 461 fewer students for a total of 1,566, down from 2,027 the previous year. There were over a hundred fewer freshmen and non-veterans outnumbered veterans for the first time since 1947. In January 1951, enrollment declined even further to 1,437. Over the next four years, the student body levelled off at between 1,100 and 1,300 but the University was in a financial crisis of alarming proportions.⁸

By draconian measures of economy, the University was able to meet its operating expenses, but this involved borrowing against the next semester's tuition receipts and laying off faculty. A loan was negotiated to refinance the school's debt, but the University's most pressing need was for more students and Father Robert Sweeney, C.S.C., the president, believed that he knew where they might come from. With enrollment dropping precipitously in the fall of 1950, Sweeney requested permission from the superior general of the Congregation of Holy Cross to admit women students to all classes on the Bluff.⁹

⁷ Theodore Mehling to Thomas Steiner, 21 February 1950, Steiner Papers.

⁸ "University of Portland, Enrollment Statistics, 1st Semester 1950-51, September 1950; Robert Sweeney to Theodore Mehling, 29 September 1950, and 26 April 1951; Enrollment Statistics, 1st Semester 1951-52, November 1951; Papers of the Provincial Administration of Rev. Theodore J. Mehling, C.S.C., Indiana Province Archives Center, Notre Dame, Indiana [hereafter Mehling Papers].

⁹ Robert H. Sweeney to Christopher J. O'Toole, 12 August 1950, and 25 September 1950, Mehling Papers.

Women on The Bluff

Permission to admit women to all classes on The Bluff was reluctantly given and only as "an experiment." While the nursing students at Providence Hospital had been enrolled in University classes since 1934, these all-female classes were taught at the hospital and the nursing students lived there. This arrangement preserved the longstanding Catholic tradition of single sex education. However, the accrediting board for nursing schools was requiring that nursing students be in a program on a college or university campus, so the nurses would eventually have had to have been brought to The Bluff. The University's School of Music, moreover, already had sixty women in the music classes on the campus and there were another twenty-four women enrolled in evening classes.¹⁰

As of January 1951, all classes would be co-educational. The superior general required that "careful watch be kept" on this daring innovation, and a "complete report made of the effect on the student body - in studies, in discipline and in social life, - as well as of the reaction of the faculty, religious and lay." At least one priest thought that he could not teach a mixed class. One of the nuns from Marylhurst College, the Catholic women's college in Portland, told Sweeney that men would never be able to give an adequate education to genteel young women.¹¹

Whatever Sweeney's expectations were, the University opened in the fall of 1951 with 199 women undergraduates on campus, including the nurses, out of a total undergraduate population of 1,107. There were no residence facilities for women on The

¹⁰ Theodore Mehling to Robert Sweeney, 12 August 1950 and 18 October 1950, Mehling Papers.

¹¹ Howard Kenna to Theodore Mehling, 14 October 1950; Robert Sweeney to Theodore Mehling, 9 January 1951; Mehling Papers.

Bluff and those out-of-town students who could not get in to the nursing students' residence at St. Vincent's Hospital across the Willamette River in Northwest Portland had to rent rooms from homeowners in the neighborhood around the University. The student newspaper, *The Beacon*, predicted that women in the classroom would be "stimulating," a source of "new competition" but also of "distraction" to the "chivalrous and courteous" male student population.¹²

In 1955, Father Howard J. Kenna, C.S.C., began a seven-year stint as president of the University of Portland. By making use of low interest federal loans available to academic institutions, Kenna was able to launch an ambitious building program on The Bluff that would eventually result in a new library, a new dining hall and two new student residence halls. Of all the new buildings, the one with the most far reaching consequences for the University was the first women's residence, Villa Maria Hall, which opened in the fall of 1957. Women had been admitted to all classes on The Bluff in January 1951, but until the construction of Villa Maria they could not live on campus.¹³

Villa Maria Hall was the first project to be realized in Kenna's building program. It accommodated one hundred students and was located on the northwest corner of the campus, "some distance from ... the boys' residence quarters," at the wish of the Holy Cross superior general who still considered coeducation in the Congregation's schools an "experiment."¹⁴ By the following year it was filled and an addition was added in 1961.¹⁵

¹² Enrollment Statistics, 1st Semester, 1951-52, November 1951, Mehling Papers; *The Beacon*, "A New Step....," 2 February 1951, 2. On the implementation of co-education at the University, see Christine E. Hauser, "From Economy to Equality: Twenty-Five Years of Coeducation at the University of Portland, 1951-1976," (Senior thesis, History Department, University of Portland, 1999).

¹³ Mary Margaret Dundore, interview by James T. Connelly, 1 July 1999, Centennial History Collection, University of Portland Archives [hereafter UPA].

¹⁴ James Anderson to Bernard Mullahy, 26 July 1955, Mehling Papers.

¹⁵ Howard Kenna to Theodore Mehling, 20 October 1958, Mehling Papers.

Once the women students were actually living on campus, the University administration felt constrained to protect their virtue by closely supervising the interaction between male and female students. The *Women's Residence Halls Handbook* reminded the women students that "The University of Portland is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the girls should try to develop the characteristics of this dedication."¹⁶ A dress code for women on campus was stipulated.

Women students are expected to be in street attire (skirts, sweaters, dresses, etc.-- no sports attire-- in the living room and front halls of the dormitories, in the dining room, as well as in class and around the campus. The only time for sports attire on campus is when participating in some form of athletics, or decorating for a dance, or for play rehearsals; then wear a coat in transit.

Robes, pajamas, etc. are not worn in the recreation room during men's visiting hours and never in the front halls; pedal pushers may be worn in the recreation room.

Jeans are never permitted.¹⁷

The women residing in Villa Maria were required to sign in and out for their "protection" and men could be received as guests only at designated times and in designated areas. The residents of Villa Maria were cautioned that

When it's dark enough to turn on your lights in the evening, it's then time to pull your shades. A dorm is a source of curiosity; it is good taste to insure your own privacy, and to discourage the curious.... Talking or shouting from windows is not a ladylike mode of behavior; don't forget yourselves.¹⁸

Women had separate lounges and recreation areas on campus and male and female students used the recreation facilities at Howard Hall, the University's athletic center, at

¹⁶ *Women's Residence Halls Handbook 1961-1962* (Portland: University of Portland, 1961), 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6; *Women's Residence Halls Handbook 1962-1963* (Portland: University of Portland, 1962), 6.

¹⁸ *Women's Residence Halls Handbook 1961-1962*, 9, 11-12.

separate times, never together.¹⁹ Freshman and sophomore women living on campus were required to remain in their residence halls for study after 7:15 pm, Sunday through Thursday. The sophomores could go out of the hall from 9:30 to 10:30 pm but the freshmen had to stay in except for an hour on Wednesday night when they could go to the library.²⁰

A Dean of Women, Mary Margaret Dundore, was appointed in 1953 and was instructed to organize a course in "social orientation" that was required of all freshman women in the fall semester of 1959. The course covered etiquette, how to spend leisure time, taste and clothes, posture, good grooming, how one should speak and the sort of things one should say as well as a large component on art appreciation. Many of the women complained about having to take the course and the faculty eventually voted to cancel it because it wasn't academic, but other schools picked it up and used it.²¹

As always, regulations challenged rather than restricted some students. A row of windows on the outside wall of the chapel on the ground floor of Villa Maria opened wide enough for a girl to squeeze through when leaving or returning to the hall after hours while lookouts knelt in prayerful silence. Barbara Chester '71 remembers that the "intolerable confinement" of freshman women helped to forge lifelong friendships among those who enjoyed beating the system.²²

¹⁹ "Coeds Occupy New Student Lounge Room," *The Beacon*, 12 October 1951, 3; "Girls' sports Activity Due For Early Speed-Up," *The Beacon*, 19 October 1951, 7.

²⁰ Barbara Chester, interview by James T. Connelly, 15 March 1999, Centennial History Collection, UPA; "Dorm Hours Change," *The Beacon*, 17 November 1967, 1; *Women's Residence Halls handbook 1961-1962*, 7-8.

²¹ Mary Margaret Dundore, interviewed by David Martin, April 1969, UPA; Mary Margaret Dundore, interview by James T. Connelly, 1 July 1999, Centennial History Collection, UPA.

²² Barbara Chester, "Student Life: How times have changed," *The compass* (University of Portland), August 1998, 2.

By 1966, forty-four percent of the students on campus were women. In 1968 the dress codes were removed from the University's student manual. Intervisitation hours in the residence halls were introduced in 1971. In other respects the University's Code of Conduct became more explicit over the years. The disciplinary regulations in 1956 summed up all violations in contact between male and female students, as "immorality." The 1970-71 Student Contract offered a more precise statement that singled out "excessive or inappropriate public display of affection...sexual intercourse between unmarried individuals or sexual aberrations on the campus...public or notorious off-campus conduct relating to sexual matters."²³

The presence of women on campus in ever larger numbers posed a challenge for the faculty as well as for the administrators. When women were admitted to all classes on The Bluff in 1951, the College of Business introduced a minor in "secretarial science" for women interested in a business education. The first woman to graduate in business, Jacqueline Du Sault Vitezniak, '53, insisted on studying accounting to become a certified public accountant, a field then dominated by men. In 1962, the College of Business dropped the minor in secretarial science.²⁴

Women slowly won recognition and leadership roles during the University's third quarter-century. *The Beacon*, the student newspaper, had its first female editor, Arlene Gowlinski, in 1955 and the Culligan Award, the University's highest faculty award, was given to a woman, Bernice Orwig, for the first time in 1958, but it would be eleven years before another woman professor, Anne Ferlic, was so honored. In 1968, Sister Flora

²³ Covert, 182; *University of Portland Student Handbook 1970-1971* (Portland: University of Portland, n.d.), 40.

²⁴ Susan Hemstreet, "The Past as Prologue," *Portland*, Spring 1992, 21-22.

Mary MacDonald, F.S.C.P., was the first woman to receive the Outstanding Alumni Award. Marla Salmon became the first woman to serve as student representative on the University's Board of Regents in 1970 and the following year Mary McCravey, a Portland businesswoman, was elected to a full term on the board. McCravey became chair of the Board of Regents in 1979. In 1968, Dr. Lillian Pereyra became the first woman to serve as editor of *The University of Portland Review* and in 1970 she was the first woman on the faculty promoted to full professor. Mary Curtis in 1974 was the first woman from the University's Air Force ROTC to be commissioned a second lieutenant. Dr. Margaret Vance was the first woman to chair the Academic Senate in 1976-1978 and Kevin Hamaker in 1979 was the first woman elected president of the Associated Students of the University of Portland, the student government.²⁵

Although there were women's athletic teams at the University in the 1950s and 1960s, they were not subsidized by the University. It was only with the passage by Congress of Title IX of the Education Amendments Acts in 1972 and subsequent federal regulations in 1975 that the University's first varsity athletic teams for women, in basketball and volleyball, were organized. In 1977 Kathy Parks was hired as the University's first women's coach and the women's athletic program joined the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA).²⁶ In the 1990s the women's soccer teams were the most successful in the University's history, advancing to the final four in the NCAA tournament five times between 1994 and 2000.²⁷

²⁵ David Martin, "Women's Firsts at U.P.," UPA.

²⁶ Anna Hurd, "The History of Title IX and Women's Athletics at the University of Portland," (Senior thesis, Department of History and Political Science, University of Portland, 1998), 11, 18, 20-21.

²⁷ "NCAA Playoff History," *University of Portland Soccer 2000* (Portland: University of Portland, 2000), 78.

A Difficult Cultural Change

Coeducation was one of the more difficult cultural changes for Catholic education in the United States. It was made more difficult at the University of Portland because it was undertaken without the opportunity for much planning and preparation. Portland's sister school, the University of Notre Dame, did not go coed on the undergraduate level until 1973, more than twenty years after its counterpart in the Northwest. It made the change after much discussion and preparation, including a protracted discussion about merger with St. Mary's College. At Portland the change was born of economic necessity and implemented abruptly and the University spent much of the next three decades trying to absorb its female students with some measure of equality.

The University of Portland also made the switch from single sex to coeducation at a time when there were not many Catholic schools in the country that might serve as models for this transition. Most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States that went coed did so in the 1960s, in or around the time of the Second Vatican Council. Portland was thus something of a pioneer with all the disadvantages of that role. All the difficulties notwithstanding, women have found their place at the University of Portland and constituted fifty-seven percent of the student body at the end of 2000.²⁸ As the school entered its second century, the "chivalrous and courteous" male students on The Bluff found themselves in the minority.

²⁸ University of Portland, Office of Institutional Research, "2000 Fall Enrollment Report," 8.