

NINETEENTH-CENTURY METHODISTS AND COEDUCATION: THE CASE OF HAMLINE UNIVERSITY

KRISTIN MAPEL BLOOMBERG

An important aspect of John Wesley's ministry was his emphasis on education and its use as a tool for social reform. For example, eighteenth-century Methodists established the Sunday School movement and expanded their educational mission by creating common schools when the need for children's general education became an English social concern. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the American Methodist Episcopal Church believed equal higher education for women was foundational to its evangelical mission and progressive social philosophy. As a result, American Methodists answered the need for collegiate and college preparatory education by establishing educational institutions designed to create a literate body of rational, evangelical Christian men and women who would provide moral and spiritual leadership in American society. Like many things Methodist, the mission was enthusiastic; one historian notes more than 200 Methodist schools named in denominational publications between 1835 and 1860, including more than thirty colleges, universities and theological seminaries (including a half dozen female colleges) granting students a four-year's collegiate course.¹

With notable exceptions in New England and the South, the Methodist project of higher education focused on settlements along the emerging western frontier, where the need for colleges was greater and class mobility more rapid. This was done self-consciously in light of an evangelical project that focused on bringing religion, morality, and literacy to the disorder of the frontier and a population ripe for evangelizing. Reflecting on the denomination's presence on the frontier, noted Methodist author Edward Eggleston observed that "Methodism was to the West all that Puritanism was to New England."² Methodist Episcopal Bishop Leonidas L. Hamline, the man responsible for providing the initiative and initial funding for Hamline University, agreed that the frontier was an appropriate place for establishing a new church-sponsored institution of higher learning: "Female education is exciting unprecedented interest in the west, and conventions and colleges of

¹ Sylvanus Milne Duvall, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Education Up to 1869* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1928), 65.

² Edward Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider* (New York: J. B. Ford, 1874), 159. Notably, Eggleston spent many years in Minnesota and was a close friend of Hamline University's second president Benjamin Crary.

teachers are discussing it with extreme earnestness and zeal,” he remarked in 1840.³ A few years later in 1854, Hamline University—which carried the name of its benefactor—was established at Red Wing near the Mississippi River on the eastern edge of Minnesota Territory under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

By establishing coeducational colleges like Hamline University, Methodists created a transitional social space in nineteenth century American culture that allowed for the identification of women as a political class, opening up the gender-based dichotomies of public and private, secular and religious. By leveraging the social institution of education to bring women into the public sphere, Methodists were responsible for creating a new group of sophisticated, Protestant Christian evangelical women who used education as a way to channel their ambition and skill to become active participants in a variety of social reform movements. From the halls of the university, Methodist women could move more easily into areas of social reform once closed to them. Claiming their education under theological authority, they could in turn claim a similar authority to use that education to pursue religious and secular reform that ultimately served to stimulate religiously-based social change in the secular world.

Nineteenth-Century Methodist Attitudes Towards Women’s Education

Historians of the Methodist tradition should not be surprised to find in its social theology a specific emphasis on women’s education, for one only has to look to the example of Susanna Wesley, who was a strong proponent of education and ensured her daughters were as literate as her sons. As a result of Susanna Wesley’s literal and mythological place in denominational history, Methodists may have been more amenable to the notion of women’s higher education as young women embraced her example as a model for their own influence over their children’s education. Susanna Wesley’s *beau ideal* is implied in many of the arguments for women’s education invoked by Methodists who made a claim for it in the pages of the *The Ladies Repository* (pub. 1841-1878). Indeed, its support is found the inaugural issue of 1841, well before this issue appeared in secular print venues.

Affirming a supportive readership of progressive Methodist family women, *Repository* authors such as J. G. Haswell declared that “The mothers of America should be qualified to teach their children useful lessons in almost every department of knowledge,”⁴ while Jesse T. Peck’s article on “The True Woman,” illustrated the powerful connection between educated mothers and their sons, one that resonated with Susannah Wesley’s influence on her progeny:

[I]t is not for herself alone that the mother feeds and nourishes, molds and inspires, the child of her affections. In the soul of her son she may reproduce the purity, the

³ *Journal of General Conference, 1840*, 54. Qtd. in Marian Adell, “Caroline Matilda Pilcher: *The Ladies’ Repository’s* Ideal Christian Woman,” *Methodist History* 35.4 (July 1997): 247.

⁴ J. G. Haswell, “Female Education,” *The Ladies Repository* 13.8 (Aug. 1853): 368.

self denial, the heroism of her own. . . . She makes, not sons chiefly, but brothers, husbands, fathers; not the child, but the man, the scholar, the author, the laborer, the merchant, the statesman, the divine. . . . It is the fire of her genius that flashes in their eyes, burns in their eloquence, rolls from their pens, and lives in their acts.⁵

In this Methodist rationale for women's education, it is possible to identify a figurative connection between the eighteenth-century experience of Susanna Wesley's Epworth home classroom to early nineteenth-century progressive ideas about the educated mother's role in generating qualified Christian citizens.

Nineteenth-century American Methodists underscored rationality and social functionality in learning, and this underpinned the *raison d'être* for women's education, distinguishing it from women's fashionable ornamental education designed to prepare late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century women for marriage. This type of education was, in the Methodist view, simply a waste of women's intellectual and spiritual powers, condemning her to a sinful life of disuse and rendering her incapable of understanding the dynamic complexities of God's world and the place of humans in it. For example, Caleb Atwater's article in the *Repository* argued that decorative female education teaching women only "to play on the harp, the guitar, and the piano forte; to draw figures on paper or cloth, with a painter's brush or a needle; t]o dance a waltz; walk gracefully on their toes; make a handsome courtesy; keep an album; sing a fashionable song; wear corsets, false curls, and artificial flowers; hold a silly conversation on nothing; leer and look languishing; and—act the fool!" should itself and the women it produces be "driven out of our land" as "a disgrace to this enlightened age."⁶ In justification for his opinion, he firmly noted the fact that "females are as capable of attaining all sorts of knowledge as the other sex," and as a result, "the main objects of educating females are precisely the same with those of educating the other sex—to develop all their powers and faculties, and, to prepare them for happiness and usefulness."⁷ Atwater believed women's decorative education could "at best, only render happy its possessor for a few short years," after which it "vanishes and disappears for ever." In contrast, he suggested a classical collegiate education "endures for ever."⁸ And P. S. Donelson, also writing on this topic in the pages of the *Repository*, noted, "it is well to free beings with brains from the drudgery which belongs to brainless wheels."⁹

Methodists writing in *The Ladies Repository* believed women's coeducation would serve a two-fold Christian purpose: to give women an opportunity to develop the intellect stimulated by the self-confidence gained by the conversion experience, and, in doing so, ennoble both sexes. W. H. Withrow argued these points in an essay titled "The Higher Education of Our Girls":

⁵ Jesse T. Peck, "The True Woman," *The Ladies Repository* 13.8 (Aug. 1853): 339.

⁶ Caleb Atwater, "Female Education," *The Ladies Repository* 1.1 (Jan. 1841): 10.

⁷ Atwater, 10.

⁸ Atwater, 11.

⁹ P. S. Donelson, "Education of Woman—Its Obstacles and Necessities," *The Ladies Repository* 17.3 (Mar. 1857): 146.

Any mental stimulus and intellectual employment would be hailed as a boon by many a noble girl, who feels that she is wasting her life and neglecting the culture of her God-given powers. The throwing open of all the colleges of the country to women as well as men, would be the best and simplest solution of the difficulty. . . . [T]he co-education of the sexes would tend, in a higher degree, to ennoble and dignify the character of both. If the sexes are to live together in all the relationships of life, why separate them during the four years of college discipline, when their influence upon each other is even more necessary than at any other time? The presence of the ladies in the dining-hall, in the class-rooms, and in the parlors, would impart a tone of refinement to the manners and of purity to morals; it would give a stimulus to industry, and inspire a chivalry of character not likely to be otherwise obtained.¹⁰

Withrow's analysis of woman's influence and her ability to ennoble not only herself, but also the men around her, illustrates the core virtue of influential religious morality found in the character of the "True Woman" identified by historian Barbara Welter, as well as her role in the "cult of domesticity" noted by historians Aileen S. Kraditor and Nancy F. Cott.¹¹ As these scholars have shown, nineteenth-century culture believed that women were naturally inclined toward religion and piety, and as a result, their very presence could inspire moral behavior in men. Methodists capitalized on the connection between femaleness and morality and, amplified by Methodist theology, justified women's self-development under cover of traditional roles already acceptable to society.

Thus women's role in the family was enlarged to serve a larger social purpose. This idea, identified by historian Linda Kerber as "Republican Motherhood," located the power of educated family women in their ability to serve as a model mothers to sons and wives to men.¹² According to Kerber, educated women "would shape the characters of their sons and husbands in the direction of benevolence, self-restraint, and responsible independence."¹³ By structuring the environment of coeducational collegiate education on the institution of the family, Methodists extended the gendered domain of the home and family into the college, purposefully expanding and legitimizing woman's sphere; moreover, as a result of expanding women's role as the moral and spiritual center of the family into a similar location in the college environment, writers like Withrow identified the important role of women as civilizers in an institution specifically designed to civilize the secular communities on the western frontier.

A woman's power was far-reaching; as a result, it was incumbent upon

¹⁰ W. H. Withrow, "The Higher Education of Our Girls," *The Ladies Repository* 10.4 (Oct. 1872): 276.

¹¹ See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (Summer 1966): 151-174; Aileen S. Kraditor *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writing in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968); and Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

¹² See Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28.2 (Summer 1976): 202.

¹³ Linda Kerber, "Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic, 1787-1805," *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber*, (U. North Carolina P., 1997), 40.

her to help steer the family ship and council its captain. Indeed, Atwater argues in his essay on “Female Education” that “men of liberal minds and true politeness, prefer, enthusiastically prefer, a learned woman as their wife, companion and friend, and for the mother of their children.”¹⁴ Donelson agrees, contending that women’s education is “*necessary to man*. They who are united in life must assimilate in character.”¹⁵ Those writing in *The Ladies Repository* believed women must be matched not only to the task but also to the man, or the consequences would be disastrous—as in this vivid picture painted by William Johnson in an address delivered to teachers in 1839:

She wields a powerful influence over the other sex, and especially over her own husband; and very much of his success or disappointment in life depends upon her. Let a man of genius and enterprise be linked for life with an ignorant woman, whose thoughts aspire not with his thoughts—whose sentiments mingle not with his sentiments—whose heart beats not in unison with his heart; and all his energies, like a living victim chained to a body of death, will sicken, gangrene, and die. The man of genius requires both the sympathy and approbation of the other sex to aid him in his efforts, and without them his exertions, however great, will be misdirected.¹⁶

The nineteenth-century cult of domesticity understood the middle-class family as the institutional foundation of society and the locus for creating the actors who would transmit moral value into the social order. Methodists made the most of this belief, and purposefully expanded the structural idea of the family into the social space of the college, creating a powerful argument for coeducation by noting that the separation of the sexes in the classroom violated the natural order of family and society where men and women already worked together toward common goals. For example, E.O. Haven’s article for the *Repository* insisted it was a “great mistake” to separate the sexes, causing “division where there ought to be union.” Reflecting on the discord that can come from the illogical arrangement of the sexes he observes, “We see this in a tending to a separation of men and women into distinct if not rival bodies, in the establishment of female schools instead of entering the schools already existing, and in the establishment of female societies to accomplish the end already sought by existing societies. . . . What a misfortune it would be to have male Churches and female Churches!”¹⁷ Indeed, if women could learn from the word of God while sitting in the same pews as men, why couldn’t they also learn from history, science, and mathematics in a similar way?

Highlighting the gendered power women gained from their role in the family and its application to the institution of the college, Methodists deployed the Enlightenment philosophy of the intellectual equality of the sexes in concert with the adjunct ideals of companionate marriage and the social union of the sexes to further bolster arguments for women’s coeducation.

¹⁴ Atwater, 11.

¹⁵ Donelson, 145. Donelson’s emphasis.

¹⁶ William Johnson, “An Address Delivered Before the College of Teachers, at its Annual Meeting in October, 1839,” *The Ladies Repository* 1.5 (May 1851): 131-132.

¹⁷ E. O. Haven, “Women and Education,” *The Ladies Repository* 14.3 (Sept. 1874): 202-203.

“How great is the absurdity, and how pernicious the tendency of a belief in the intellectual inferiority of females,” wrote the Rev. J. Adams in the *Repository*. “Mind knows no sex,” he declared.¹⁸ And if women have equal capacity of mind, they should also have equal opportunity for study, argued Atwater: “As we admit of no difference, in the capacities of the two sexes for attaining knowledge, so we know of no difference in the modes of conveying it to their minds.”¹⁹ Withrow further maintained, “The fact is, our girls do not have the same chance to develop their intellect that boys have... Give them equal opportunities, and they will climb, step for step with their brothers, up the steeps [*sic*] of learning.”²⁰

However, women’s roles as educated wives and mothers in partnership with husbands and sons were not the only reasons Methodists championed women’s collegiate education. While a match of equals was certainly preferred, the realities of mid-nineteenth-century society meant that marriage was no longer the sole option for women; moreover, Methodist evangelicalism required women to engage the world and use their intellect to edify both themselves and others. The resulting impetus for women’s higher education was noted in the *Repository* by Withrow in 1872 when he acknowledged women’s changing status after the Civil War:

We repudiate the idea that female education is only a lure to the gilded bower of matrimony. It has nobler and sublimer ends than this. . . . But even if marriage were the sole end and golden goal of life, in our complex modern society, a large and, probably, with the growth of population, an increasingly large number of women must remain unmarried. A superior education would furnish a perpetual fund of rational enjoyment, increased opportunities for usefulness, and often [*sic*] a means of support to those condemned to a life of spinster solitude.

However, he acknowledges, “even in the important matter of winning a husband, it is brains that win after all.”²¹

Progressive Methodists believed educated women were better prepared to serve society as moral citizen leaders and if needed, support themselves. Historian Nancy F. Cott explains that for nineteenth-century women, change rather than consistency was the rule: this “could include disruption of traditional domestic usefulness, uncertainty about means of financial support, separation from family, substitution of peer-group for family ties, unforeseen geographical relocation, ambiguous prospects for and attitudes toward marriage, and hence an insecure future.”²² Thus, collegiate education was a practical way for women to be prepared for a wide range of possibilities, while at the same time, it legitimized a pathway for women to participate in the Methodist evangelical plan that put them to work in the secular world. The new America being built along the edges of westward expansion needed

¹⁸ J. Adams, “Woman,” *The Ladies Repository* 1.4 (Apr. 1841): 121.

¹⁹ Atwater, 10.

²⁰ Withrow, 275.

²¹ Withrow, 278.

²² Nancy F. Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,” *Feminist Studies* 3.1/2 (Autumn 1975): 19.

men and women who could be prepared for any number of social, economic, and moral possibilities—and all hands were expected to contribute. As Kerber points out, “The republic did not need fashion plates; it needed citizens—women as well as men—of self-discipline and of strong mind.”²³

Methodist women’s Christian duty required responsible social action, and this in turn required collegiate education, for women of the emergent middle class were no longer solely creatures of either labor or leisure; they would be both in the home and in the world. As Donelson asked in the pages of *The Ladies Repository*, “is it not possible, in so busy a world as this, that woman should find something between drudgery and amusement—between the show of jewelry and toil-scented hands? We would have her understand and sympathize with the great questions of reform; let her be fitted for the labors and share the praises justly awarded the philanthropist and Christian.”²⁴ He continued his description of women’s new roles in a second piece, noting that their education was key to the social transformation that could be seen along the horizon:

she must have education to meet what is demanded of her—she must have it, if you please, in self-defense; for the chivalry of knighthood has passed away, and with it the castle and the shield. A new position has been assigned to woman, and, we are on the eve of greater changes—whether they will prove for the better remains to be tested; but she must be educated in order to give the shadow of fairness to the experiment. Remove from her the negative virtues of helplessness, and you invest her with new responsibilities, and call for the exercise of new powers.²⁵

Donelson’s argument ultimately invoked a gendered ideal of religion and patriotism, and was probably the strongest Methodist argument put forward for women’s education. In it he emphasized: “*Female education is a necessity of our nation*. . . . America is destined to be the continent of republics, and the demand is for universal education, whose essential features must be entirely American, thoroughly Christian. The Bible and the Constitution are the enduring pillars of our perpetuity and prosperity. Not the least among their benefactions, they are to bequeath upon *woman* a position of usefulness and power, without parallel upon the wide earth.”²⁶ Methodist evangelical identity, explicitly linked with the national ideals of democracy, liberty, and manifest destiny, understood all of America to be its parish and required each member—male and female—to play a key role in the formation and the continuation of a Christian nation.

Thus Methodist women were compelled to become not only educated, but also to use it in the process of furthering Christian society. “Let our female friends remember, that increased privileges heighten our responsibilities,” commanded Adams.²⁷ And, Haswell noted in his article on women’s

²³ Kerber, “Daughters of Columbia,” 25.

²⁴ P. S. Donelson, “Education of Woman—Its Obstacles and Necessities,” *The Ladies Repository* 17.2 (Feb. 1857): 92.

²⁵ Donelson, “Education of Woman,” (Mar. 1857): 145.

²⁶ Donelson, “Education of Woman,” (Mar. 1857): 146; Donelson’s emphasis.

²⁷ Adams, 122.

education, “Next to religion, well-educated, pure-minded, and independent females have the greatest power in the formation of good society, and in the happiness of the human family. If there is any sight most interesting and beautiful this side heaven, it is to see a pure-minded, modest, intelligent and independent female, who fears not the world, who passes her time in doing her duty, in performing acts of unobtrusive charity, and in showing to the world an anxious desire to bless the age in which she lives.”²⁸ As if this point could not be stressed more, he insisted several years later, “Women, as well as men, are accountable beings—accountable, too, for that measure of intellect which God has given them; the talent given must be improved.”²⁹

Called to be useful in their evangelism, an ever-growing body of middle class Methodist women took up this responsibility by claiming an education that in turn, allowed them to participate robustly in and even ascend to leadership positions in various social reform efforts. The self-confidence given to them by both Methodist religious practice and the mutability of nineteenth-century gender roles mixed with social progressivism, opening pathways for women to assist equally with the assignment of nation building and social reform. And young women, especially those residing along America’s western edge, affirmed collegiate education as a necessary step on their path of evangelism and reform—for they too, would be makers of the nation. As educational opportunities became available, women seized them. And one of those places that opened its doors to women on an equal basis with men was Hamline University.

Hamline University and Coeducation

The early history of Hamline University provides an example of the practice of nineteenth-century coeducation preached in the pages of the *Repository*, and in many ways reflected the best practices of this progressive educational philosophy. Hamline’s preparatory school was established in 1854 under the auspices of the Wisconsin Annual Conference near the Mississippi River at Red Wing, Minnesota,³⁰ with a class of thirty-nine students—about half of whom were women.³¹ This location provided Methodists with a foothold in the New Northwest that promised great influence on the frontier population. As Hamline University historian Charles Nelson Pace explains those early days on the edge of the frontier: “Here was a thriving village that promised to be an important center of population and business activity. Here came the commerce of the river from the East and South. From this place went ox-drawn covered wagons in long trains winding their way out of the valley and onto the prairies and westward.” And, Pace explains, “There were those who saw in all this the coming commonwealth. There were those who knew the

²⁸ J. G. Haswell, “Female Education,” *The Ladies Repository* 9.2 (Feb. 1849): 53.

²⁹ J. G. Haswell, “Female Education,” *The Ladies Repository* 13.8 (Aug. 1853): 367.

³⁰ In 1880, Hamline University relocated to its present location in St. Paul, Minnesota.

³¹ The Red Wing Tuition Record, 1854-1857, lists 39 students, 21 men and 18 women (Hamline University Archives).

necessity for Christian education in order to make the future state an orderly place to live.”³²

By 1857, a full coeducational college course was organized and enrolled, the first in Minnesota and among the first dozen coeducational Methodist colleges and universities in the United States granting classical and scientific college degrees to both women and men enrolled the same program.³³ In 1859, Hamline graduated its first college class, made up of two sisters, Elizabeth and Emily Sorin, who were daughters of one of the trustees. One year later, Hamline’s second graduating class was also made up of two women: the third of the Sorin sisters Mary, and Sara Louise Williams.

During Hamline University’s first decade from 1859-1869, 68% of its graduates were women who earned the degree of A.B., or *Artium Baccalaureatus*, similar to today’s Bachelor of Arts; of those women, more than one quarter were eventually granted the degree of A.M., or *Artium Magister*, similar to today’s Master of Arts.³⁴ It is important to note that Hamline’s proportion of women students at this time far exceeded the national average. When the first official estimate of post-secondary women students was made available by the United States Commissioner of Education in 1870, national estimates of the female-to-male post-secondary population showed about one female student for each four male students (about 20%) was present among all students in higher education, and as historian Mabel Newcomer explains, “the proportion of A.B. degrees going to women was smaller—only one in sev-

³² “Hamline History Begins,” *Hamline University*, ed. Charles Nelson Pace, (St. Paul: Hamline University Alumni Association, 1939), 13 (Hamline University Archives).

³³ These institutions included: Willamette University, Salem, Ore. (1842); Iowa Wesleyan University, Mount Pleasant, Iowa (1842); Baldwin-Wallace University, Berea, Ohio (1845); Mount Union College, Mount Union, Ohio (1846); Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisc. (1847); Fort Wayne College, Fort Wayne, Ind. (1850/1846 as female college); Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio (1847); Genessee College, Lima, N.Y. (1850); Chaddock College, Quincy, Ill. (1853); Moores Hill College, Moores Hill, Ind. (1854); Upper Iowa University, Fayette, Iowa (1857); Baker University, Baldwin City, Kan. (1858); Galesville University, Galesville, Wisc. (1859); and Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa (1859). See *Methodist Almanac for 1862*; *The American Christian Record* (New York: W.R.C. Clark & Meeker, 1860); *Fox and Hoyt’s Quadrennial Register of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Universal Church Gazetteer* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany & Co, 1852); Anson Cummings, *Early Schools of Methodism* (New York: Phillips Hunt, 1886); Henry Barnard, ed. *The American Journal of Education* Vol. Two (Hartford: Office of American Journal of Education, 1869); and Sylvanus Milne Duvall, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Education Up to 1869*, (New York: Teacher’s College Columbia University, 1928);

³⁴ From 1859-1869, Hamline graduated 22 students, and 15 were women. Four of those women also received the A.M. from Hamline—Elizabeth and Emily Sorin, Rebecca Morrow, and Helen Sutherland. It is important to note that in the nineteenth century, the A.M. degree was not usually awarded as a result of further coursework. A graduate applied for the degree after demonstrating to the Trustees that they had put their education to good use and that they were a leading citizen. By 1884, the most popular degree at Hamline for both women and men was the Ph.B., or *Philosophiae Baccalaureus* (Bachelor of Philosophy), another type of liberal arts degree, and by 1893 Hamline had graduated a total of 90 students—54% of whom were women. Of the 90 students graduated between 1859 and 1892, 41 were men and 49 were women (*The Liner*, vol. 2 [1893], 25 [Hamline University Archives]).

en.”³⁵ It is truly impressive that in its first decades Hamline University granted about seven degrees to women students for each three men students.

While comparable collegiate enrollment statistics are difficult if not impossible to come by, an examination of male and female enrollment in a variety of Methodist college preparatory institutions can help to contextualize Hamline University’s place in early Methodist coeducation. Drawing from the *Methodist Almanac* of 1862, one finds data for enrollment by sex listed for 45 preparatory institutions, which reveal 40% female enrollment in coeducational institutions; when women students from female colleges are added to the total number of reported students, the percentage of all women students rises to nearly 51%. While this data is likely not a complete picture of preparatory enrollment, it does help identify trends in the practice of Methodist coeducation.³⁶

At Hamline University, women did not simply consume a coeducational program established for them by well-meaning men. Women helped shape the curriculum, and the university’s commitment to educating women extended to hiring well-qualified women faculty. Hamline’s small size, coupled with its progressive attitude regarding women, provided opportunities—or the necessity—for advanced women students to head the classroom and help shape the curriculum; this included its first graduates. During the University’s early years at Red Wing, Hamline employed a total of 27 faculty, 12 of whom were women.³⁷ This was an extraordinary percentage of women faculty, for in the nineteenth century women college teachers were few in number and were usually appointed to the rank of Preceptress (Dean of women or principal teacher of women students). While Hamline hired its share of Preceptresses, it also hired women as teachers of English, music, mathematics, painting and drawing, and as professors of modern languages; these women held degrees such as A.B. or A.M. and taught both male and female college students.

Importantly, a Hamline education was seen by no one as participating in the much-condemned fashionable education designed to create ornamental society women. Hamline University’s fourth graduate Sarah Louise Williams (Noble) (b. 1841; A.B. 1860) is to be noted not only for her place in the commencement line but also for her eloquent defense of collegiate coeducation in the public speech she gave for her graduation exercises. Williams’s speech is notable for the fact that it precisely reflects what was written in so many pages of *The Ladies Repository*; but here it is written by the pen of a woman who had first-hand knowledge of the benefits of Methodist coeducation.

³⁵ Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* (New York: Harper, 1959), 19.

³⁶ *The Methodist Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1862* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1861), 17-21. Merrick lists enrollment data for 35 academies and 10 female colleges. Of the academies, a total of 5,720 male students and 4,692 female students are noted. Of the female colleges, 1,200 students are noted. Merrick lists an additional 71 schools for which only a Principal but no other data is listed and 11 schools for which no data is available at all.

³⁷ This data is from a survey of Hamline University publications between 1854 and 1859.

In an age where only a handful of truly coeducational colleges existed, Williams's essay titled "Education, Real and Unreal," and its vivid metaphor of "a young lady fresh from a fashionable boarding school" demonstrated with flair "how the word education has been sadly perverted." Artfully summing up prevailing Methodist ideas of women's collegiate education, Williams contrasted the negative image of the fashionably trained woman with the constructive example of the Christian coed. In her opinion, women's true education could not be found in learning that prepared them only for fashion and society. These miserable women were "obligated to submit to the iron rules of an ultra-fashionable 'instructress,' and thus brought up from infancy in the worse than Egyptian bondage of fashion."³⁸ Accordingly, they were destined to become vacuous and pretentious, hobbled by an inferior mind molded by false training. Irreparably harmed by a false education, their graduation was nothing to celebrate. Williams explains:

She has finished her education, but that education consisted only in passing hurriedly through a certain number of books—in being able to repeat a few phrases in French and Italian—as for Greek and Latin, she detested their very idea—and in reading every new novel. . . . From a child every lesson she has received seems to have had for the ultimate object external attraction. She has been excluded from the sun and air, those "chartered liberties," lest they should add a deeper shade to the roses and lilies of nature. Her hands have been kept imprisoned in gloves to preserve their snowy tints. She has not been permitted to read or study by candle-light, lest she should dim the starry brightness of her eyes; and thus her beauty has been preserved and her mind neglected.³⁹

For Sarah Williams and other proponents of Methodist coeducation, a woman's education should not function to preserve her as an ornamental lily of the field, cut, pressed, and dried in an effort to forever maintain her delicate youth and beauty. Instead, a woman's education should invigorate her to grow wildly and tenaciously like the mustard seed. Real female education—of the sort pursued at Hamline University—was noble and inspiring, and prized industry over beauty. In contrast to that managed by the ornamental woman, Williams declared, "The attainment of real education presents a far different picture—Those who rouse their slumbering energies with this generous purpose as their staff, will mount the hill of science on the wings of success, and be crowned heirs immortal at the temple of wisdom." Women's collegiate education would thus be difficult, but its challenge was proportionate to the reward. As she noted, "Solid, hard, persistent thinking on the most difficult, abstruse subject is essential to mental enjoyment in education. The joy is in proportion to the pain, the triumph is only appreciated when we gain it our selves."⁴⁰

For Williams and other Methodist advocates for coeducation, rigorous intellectual study was not simply an end in itself, but a means to a closer relationship with God through a better understanding of God's world. As

³⁸ *Goodhue County Republican* 3.44 (June 29, 1860): 1.

³⁹ *Goodhue County Republican* 3.44 (June 29, 1860): 1. Williams's emphasis.

⁴⁰ *Goodhue County Republican* 3.44 (June 29, 1860): 1.

she turned toward the conclusion of her speech, she explained, “Aesthetic culture is essential to the adornment of the soul, but cannot give that vigor, strength, and practical skill to the mind which real education should require. The severer [sic] studies of the usual [college] course are really the most important—Mathematics and Mental Philosophy, while they take all the powers also strengthen them, and while they give greater breadth and power to the mind, they render the beautiful in nature and art more attractive.” Ultimately, she concluded, “A fashionably educated young lady, without the matchless adorning of the spirit by the beauties of salvation, is simply a well trained heathen, and enlightened but bewildered, a trained but enslaved soul.”⁴¹

Like the majority of Methodist colleges and universities, Hamline University practiced a nonsectarian admission policy⁴² and focused its curriculum on classical collegiate subjects in order to simultaneously evangelize unconverted scholars and prepare the converted for further work in the secular world. In this way, colleges such as Hamline University furthered the Methodist evangelical-educational project by creating both new converts and a cadre of intelligent, moral persons who would find a home in a variety of life’s vocations.

Student life at Hamline University was intellectually challenging for the young women who pursued an education beside their brothers. For example, the Red Wing *Sentinel* noted the diverse opportunities for study at the recently established University, which included “all the common English languages, Philosophy, Chemistry, Analysis, History, Rhetoric, Composition, Algebra, the languages, Latin, Greek, French, &c., the various branches of Mathematics and Music.”⁴³ The *Sentinel* also praised Hamline for the physical plan of the college noting, “The present accommodations are excellent for the proper teaching of both sexes. . . . It is designed that every pupil, male and female, shall have a thorough and complete education, affording the ladies the same facilities and advantages with gentlemen.”⁴⁴ Hamline prided itself on creating an educational atmosphere acceptable to the parents of the best young women and men of the New Northwest, and the *University Catalogue* for 1857-1858 underscored the family approach to coeducation: “It is believed that blending the sexes in the process of education is the natural and reasonable method. It conforms more to the family institution than any other plan.”⁴⁵

After leaving Hamline to go out into the world, its first graduates led lives of leadership and service, and the widely scattered evidence of their

⁴¹ *Goodhue County Republican* 3.44 (June 29, 1860): 1.

⁴² Section 3 of the Hamline University charter reads, “No religious tenet shall be required of any person to entitle him or her to all the privileges of the institution: and no student shall be required to attend the religious worship of any particular denomination except as specified by the students, his parents or guardian.” Hamline University Archives.

⁴³ Red Wing *Sentinel* 1.28 (Feb. 9, 1856): 2.

⁴⁴ Red Wing *Sentinel* 1.28 (Feb. 9, 1856): 2.

⁴⁵ *Annual Catalogue of the Hamline University for the Collegiate Year 1857-8*, 11 (Hamline University Archives).

lives provides a glimpse of the impact this first generation of coeducated Methodist women had on their world. Shaped by their religious values and their Hamline education, each in her own way contributed to the Methodist projects of religious evangelism, education, and social reform. Three—Emily Sorin Meredith (b. 1836, A.B. 1859, A.M. 1863), Mary Sorin Crary (b. 1838, A.B. 1860), and Sarah Louise Williams Noble—married and raised families, one—Elizabeth Sorin (b. 1832, A.B. 1859, A.M. 1863)—remained single; none chose to become missionaries, favoring instead to be of use in parlors, classrooms, and newsrooms as they pursued opportunities for social reform in education, politics, and religion.

Elizabeth Sorin was not only a life-long educator, but also helped to replicate the Hamline coeducational experiment. After graduation, she continued as a teacher; her appointments included Preceptress of Upper Iowa University in Fayette, Iowa, another coeducational Methodist college. Sorin worked with her father Rev. Matthew Sorin, one of the original trustees of Hamline University, to found another Methodist Episcopal school, the North Missouri Male and Female Institute of Louisiana, Missouri.⁴⁶

Emily Sorin Meredith's work took root in the social and political worlds. Married to Frederick A. Meredith, an early proprietor of the *Red Wing Republican*,⁴⁷ the Merediths believed in the power of educated, politically active evangelical citizenry to help shape the nation, and perhaps for this reason they left Red Wing for the West. They eventually settled in Denver where Emily contributed to the *Rocky Mountain News*, which was edited by her husband. Emily participated in a variety of reform organizations, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and with her daughter Ellis rose to prominence as a leader in the Western woman suffrage movement. Later, Emily and Ellis authored a chapter detailing events of the Colorado Suffrage movement for the *History of Woman Suffrage*.⁴⁸

The work of the members of Hamline University's second graduating class might not have been as public as the work of the first, but as examples of True Women and Republican Mothers, these Methodist women nonetheless impacted society. Following her graduation, Sarah Williams served as a teacher in St. Paul and in 1863 married businessman William R. Noble. Sarah engaged in clubwork and used her Hamline education to later lead women's literary study of Robert Browning.⁴⁹ Mary Sorin Crary also mar-

⁴⁶ According to the *History of Pike County, Missouri* (Des Moines: Mills & Co., 1883), the North Missouri Male and Female Institute was sold to the Presbyterians, who reorganized it in 1868 as Pardee College; in 1871, the college was sold to the Baptists, who established Baptist College, which was later (around 1881) renamed McCune College, a Baptist institution. It closed several years later. See 473+, 656+.

⁴⁷ *Red Wing Sentinel* 3.45 (June 11 1859): 3; the Merediths' daughter Ellis later claimed the *Red Wing Republican* was one of the first Republican newspapers in the country. See Ellis Meredith, "Three Distinguished Figures of the Early Rocky Mountain News," *Colorado Magazine* 27.1 (Jan. 1950): 36. The Republican Party was officially organized in Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1854.

⁴⁸ See Anthony and Harper, vol. 4, chapter 29.

⁴⁹ *History of the Hamline University*, 77.

ried soon after graduation. One year after her commencement, Mary was united in marriage with Rev. Benjamin F. Crary, then President of Hamline University.⁵⁰ Like her sisters, Mary did not remain in Red Wing long after graduation. By turns, she supported her husband's religious work in St. Louis, Missouri, when Crary accepted an appointment as editor of the Methodist journal the *Central Christian Advocate*; in Colorado after Crary's appointment as Presiding Elder of the Colorado Conference; and finally in California upon his appointment as Editor of the *California Christian Advocate*. In 1894, Crary's poor health required Mary to take over the editorial duties of the *California Advocate*, after the "earnest solicitation" of the Conference ministers.⁵¹

These accounts of Hamline University's first graduates show that Hamline women were not content to stay solely in the confines of the home—their education was designed to make them useful and get them out into the world to make it a better place, for an education from Hamline University, according to its 1854 mission statement, was designed to "provide knowledge, values, and skills to those who wish to prepare for a life of leadership and service to their society and the world."⁵² Like Sorin, Meredith, Crary, and Noble, later women graduates used their education in a variety of ways: they became wives and mothers engaged in social and civic reform; they pursued careers as teachers in elementary and secondary schools; as principals and superintendents; professors and Preceptresses in Normal Schools, colleges, and universities; as librarians, businesswomen, missionaries, newspaper editors, and reporters. By the early twentieth century, Hamline's women graduates could be found in every occupation available to women.

Conclusion

In 1859 Hamline believed that graduates Elizabeth and Emily Sorin were only "the first of the thousands that would follow in their train"⁵³—an extraordinary belief bolstered by faith in purpose that for more than a century and a half survived wars, economic depressions, and significant social change to indeed see those thousands of graduates at work making the world a better place. Certainly, the strokes of the pen in 1854 that allowed for the creation of "an institution of learning for the education of youth of both sexes,"⁵⁴ profoundly affected not only generations of women and men who passed through Hamline's doors, but also succeeding generations affected by those intrepid graduates.

⁵⁰ Contrary to popular belief at Hamline University, Mary did not marry Benjamin Crary on the afternoon of her graduation in 1860—at that time, Crary's wife Alice was still very much alive. Alice Crary died on July 31, 1860, shortly after giving birth to an infant daughter who also died.

⁵¹ *History of the Hamline University*, 72. Hamline University Archives.

⁵² Hamline's 1854 mission statement, quoted in *Hamline University College of Liberal Arts 2002-2004 Bulletin*, iii. Hamline University Archives.

⁵³ *History of the Hamline University*, 14.

⁵⁴ Hamline University Charter, section 1 (Hamline University Archives).

Coeducation was one of the ways Methodism influenced the nineteenth-century educational and social landscape and created a group of educated women who used the fruits of coeducation to become actors in the world. They engaged the secular world in ways that reflected Methodism's goals for women's coeducation, and by doing so, helped to develop a new consciousness regarding women's place in society and social reform. Thus Methodists willfully complicated women's roles in nineteenth-century society, and women's coeducation became a vehicle for an expanded notion of public social relations between women and men. Enacted successfully on college campuses, women's new roles become institutionalized and absorbed into social practice.

The legacy granted to women today by the first graduates of one of the nation's early coeducational colleges is the social change that resulted from their work, as each confronted in her own way the challenges of building a modern America. These women were true pioneers: they spent much of their lives at work in the communities on America's emerging frontier and, as teachers, writers, editors, and social leaders, often served as the first woman in a particular public role. Well-schooled in the tradition of John Wesley's Methodist movement, these women went out to be of use in a world where work needed to be done, and in doing so, helped to usher in the twentieth century.