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ABSTRACT

In 1901 Mary Emma Woolley became president of Mount Holyoke College and established herself as a spokeswoman for women's education and the involvement of women in world affairs. Her experiences offer a lens to early American feminism, twenties' conservatism, women's peace activism, and the end of an era at Mount Holyoke College.

When Woolley arrived, she embraced the trend of improvement begun by her predecessor Elizabeth Mead and committed to upgrading the college. However, Woolley paired her improvements with a mission of developing strong, influential women leaders who would go on to change the world *because* they were women, committing her to a more sex-specific than equal rights defense of women's rights that linked her to older feminist traditions. To protect her mission which, in effect, suggested that women were individuals first and equal to men, qualified for and an asset to public life, and, above all, capable of changing the world, Woolley developed a recipe of unthreatening arguments about women's education that reconciled education and women's traditional role in the home, asserted women's "peculiar" attunement to change the world, revitalized a vision of Christian service, and portrayed the educated woman as a natural resource to be used practically to improve society. As a whole, the recipe declared women's obligation of social responsibility in the world.

Into the twenties and thirties, however, Woolley struggled to adjust to the rapidly changing post-war world and became frustrated with the corresponding new student behaviors which suggested to her that Mount Holyoke women were losing their zeal. To maintain her mission and protect the college's liberal arts tradition in the face of conservative critics' negative reactions to feminism and accusations that women's colleges developed spinsters, lesbians, and radicals, Woolley endorsed an increasingly restrictive policy on student life and employed her recipe to again reconcile women's education and femininity. Nevertheless, increasing disconnects between Woolley, the students, and the then contemporary version of feminism which stressed equal rights more than women's "peculiar disposition" for world service were emerging. However, as she entered into the last years of her presidency, Woolley looked more and more to the world beyond the gates of the college with a particular emphasis on peace activism. In 1932 she served as the only woman on the American delegation to the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments in Geneva. Lumped together with the failure of the futile conference but still speaking so optimistically about it and the prospects for peace led by women's efforts, Woolley seemed further and further behind the times. Finally, the fight over her successor which concluded bitterly with the selection of a man, Roswell Ham, confirmed such an accusation. Ending her presidency in 1937 never to return again to Mount Holyoke, Woolley faced the limits of her recipe, revealed the amount early American feminism had changed, and marked the end of an era at the college.

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

WOOLLEY'S WORLD:
NEGOTIATING AMERICAN FEMINISM, TWENTIES CONSERVATISM,
WOMEN'S PEACE ACTIVISM, AND THE END OF AN ERA AT
MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE, 1901 – 1937.

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BY

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SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

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Believe it or not, I have finally finished my unofficial residence in the Mount Holyoke College Archives! As I conclude my research on Woolley this year, the feeling is bittersweet. I remember giggling at the postcards and letters she sent to her pets when she was out of town; getting frustrated at her sometimes illegible and elusive writing; and feeling satisfied when I unearthed what I have come to regard as the real Mary Emma Woolley. Although the total amount of time I spent in the archives is somewhat embarrassing, I am glad that I got to know Woolley and her Mount Holyoke.

I would like to thank Professor Dan Czitrom and Archives Librarian Patty Albright for helping me find Mary Woolley and for offering their continued guidance; Professor Joseph Ellis for taking my project on this year and for pushing me to become a better historian and writer; my family, most especially, my mom, for listening to my ideas and helping me through my 'meltdowns'; and last, but most certainly not least, the F.F.L.s for distracting me when I needed it most, reminding me that I know more about Woolley than anyone else, and, of course, making me smile with tie-dye, Queso Nation Day celebrations, and thesis cakes.

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PREFACE

The independent work I have undertaken at Mount Holyoke College is a project of very local history. I study Mary Woolley, president of the college from 1901 to 1937.

Two years ago as a sophomore in Professor Dan Czitrom's seminar on American Radicalism, I was introduced to the Mount Holyoke College Archives. When I struggled to narrow down my topic for the semester-long research project in the class, Dan encouraged me to undertake a research project on Mary Woolley and women's pacifism in the United States by utilizing the wealth of primary documents housed right on campus. I had heard of the college archives, but I suppose you could say that I had never really sought them out. After all, spending time in what is essentially the basement of the library seemed more than a little scary. Nevertheless, after just a few visits with Archives Librarian Patty Albright, I realized what a treasure trove of primary documents lay at my fingertips and how many great stories and materials the archives had tucked away in its stacks.

Focusing on Mary Woolley's involvement in the 1932 Geneva Disarmament Conference for my seminar paper, I poured over the scrapbooks and notebooks she had kept while she was abroad and read transcripts of her speeches, her general and personal correspondences, and drafts from her unfinished autobiography. Though her handwriting had initially seemed impossible to read, I discovered a woman who had an impressive history at Mount Holyoke as well as beyond its gates, a woman who maintained great

hope in the educated women of the world, and a woman who marked the end of an era at Mount Holyoke.

In my junior year I continued my research on Woolley in an independent study advised by Dan Czitrom. As I poked through boxes and folders in the archives in search of my next Woolley topic, I was intrigued by the number of changes that cropped up in the Mount Holyoke Student Handbooks during the twenties. Student life under Woolley in that decade became my focus. I read the student handbooks, old editions of the Mount Holyoke News, students' diaries and letters, and Woolley's speeches and annual reports. As I waded through the documents this time, I discovered a careful administrator who struggled to adjust to the changes that characterized the post-World War I world and who attempted to lead a competitive institution for women in the face of the conservatism of the twenties.

This year I continued my work on Woolley under the guidance of Professor Joseph Ellis. In September I returned to the archives for another round of research. Since I had covered the end of Woolley's term when I studied the Geneva Conference and investigated the middle of it when I explored student life at Mount Holyoke in the twenties, it was finally time to get a handle on the beginning of Woolley's administration. I started with her inaugural address and then returned again to her annual reports and the index of her speeches; I looked through the minutes of the Faculty and the Trustees; and I even listened to a recording of one of her talks in chapel. I found a

woman who moved the college fully into the twentieth century, who committed Mount Holyoke to a mission of developing strong women leaders, and who developed a plan for a cautious feminist administration.

In my thesis, Mary Woolley and her administration at Mount Holyoke function as lenses through which to view American feminism, twenties' conservatism, and the women's peace movement. I examine her thirty-six year long tenure at the college in three chapters: "Chapter 1: The Woolley Recipe," which examines her early and most successful years at the college; "Chapter 2: Woolley's Mount Holyoke in the Twenties," which reveals the growing distance between Woolley and the young women of the college; and "Chapter 3: In Search of a Womanly Peace," which explores Woolley's involvement in the Geneva Disarmament Conference and the fight over naming her successor at the end of her presidency.

Woolley emerges in my work as a cautious feminist administrator who, for a long time, skillfully navigated the fault lines between radical reform and the status quo by drawing on earlier models of feminist reform as she defended women's higher education and involvement in world affairs. As time marched on, however, her continued assertions that educated women were especially cut out for world service *because* they were women made less sense to the younger women of Mount Holyoke. Ultimately, Woolley's experiences in peace activism and the fight over her succession revealed just how much American feminism had changed and how far her position as

president of the college had isolated her from broader currents in the world beyond. Her version of feminism, which emphasized female solidarity and women's unique attunement for public service, began to look old-fashioned as the post-suffrage version of feminism emphasized gender equality instead of gender difference. Woolley's presidency ended in 1937, and though she never returned again to the college, her spirit has never left it.

CHAPTER I: THE WOOLLEY RECIPE

On January 1, 1901, Mary Emma Woolley assumed the presidency of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts.¹ Arriving to continue the institution's transition from seminary to college begun under its former president, Elizabeth Mead, Woolley forever changed the college during her thirty-six year administration. Herself a member of the elite group of American women educated in the latter half of the 19th century, Woolley came to Mount Holyoke driven by a distinct sense of the importance of college education for women, and throughout her term she continuously worked to secure and demand from Mount Holyoke women the particular vision of academic excellence she exemplified.²

Born on July 13, 1863 in Norwalk, Connecticut, to Reverend Joseph Judah Woolley and Mary Augusta Ferris, Mary Emma was the eldest of four children. She grew up in Meriden, Connecticut, and Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and led a life defined by her pursuit of higher education. From 1882 to 1884 she attended Wheaton Seminary, and between 1885 and 1891 she taught courses in mathematics and Latin there. Then, at age twenty-eight, Woolley joined six other women at Brown University to become members of its first class to include women. At Brown she studied history and Latin and earned her Bachelor's degree with honors in 1894. She returned there to complete her

¹ Cole, Arthur C. A Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1940), 241.

² Merropol, Ann Karus. A Practical Visionary: Mary Emma Woolley and the Education of Women. Diss. University of Massachusetts Graduate School, 1992. (Amherst: U of Mass, 1992), 205.

Master's, which she received a year later in 1895. After her work at Brown, Woolley became an instructor of Biblical Literature at Wellesley College as well as its head of College Hall there. Then, in December of 1899, Mount Holyoke College offered Woolley their presidency. She turned down an offer from Brown to become the dean of its women's college and accepted the position at Mount Holyoke.³

Certainly then, by the time Woolley came to Mount Holyoke, she had had a wide body of educational experiences. She had experienced both single-sex and co-educational institutions; poor and modest facilities; and differing expectations for female students. By Woolley's standards, however, education for women was an obvious, necessary, and invaluable development in the United States.⁴ Women needed institutions that could rival elite liberal arts colleges for men, and Woolley entered Mount Holyoke prepared to upgrade the college and move it more fully into the twentieth century. Her time at Wellesley exposed her to strong women involved in the settlement house movement and engaged in other public roles.⁵ Convinced of women's ability to make a difference in the world, Woolley, by the end of World War I, had

³ *Ibid.*, 46, 75-78, 97-99, 106, 127, 131, 169, 329.

⁴ Wells, Anna Mary. *Miss Marks and Miss Woolley*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), 70-71.

⁵ Meeropol, 168.

changed Mount Holyoke from “the small and thriving seminary-reborn-as-a-college and turned it into a major force in the higher education of women.”⁶

As the successor to Elizabeth Mead, who oversaw Mount Holyoke’s change in status from seminary to college in 1893, Woolley was expected to continue the existing trend of improvement at the college.⁷ During the Mead years, increasing concern mounted among the trustees regarding the academic reputation of the institution. For years, Mount Holyoke had maintained a practice of relying on the alumnae to form the applicant pool for new instructors, but increasingly this was being viewed as a troubling limitation. To move away from this tradition of ‘within’ hiring, Mead hired graduates from Wellesley, Harvard Annex, Oberlin, and Smith in 1889.⁸ Complementing her expansion of the faculty, Mead also oversaw the addition of several new buildings to the college, which included five ‘cottages’ or dormitories, Mary Lyon Hall, and a gymnasium.⁹ When Woolley arrived, then, she was expected to continue similar practices that would recruit a more distinguished faculty, continue the modernization which characterized the Mead years that preceded her, and move the college more fully into the 20th century. Indeed, one congratulatory letter regarding Woolley’s appointment

⁶ As cited by Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 232.

⁷ Ibid., 232-233.

⁸ Meeropol, 220.

⁹ Horowitz, 230-231.

read: “The Trustees have chosen one who understands and respects the past and yet is not bound by tradition.”¹⁰

During her administration Woolley responded to this desire for improvement by mounting plans to upgrade the faculty, the academic standards, and the campus. Her first target was the faculty. In 1904 she introduced a system of faculty ranking with a complementary salary scale to replace the two-category structure at the college of instructors and assistant instructors.¹¹ By transferring Mount Holyoke to this system of rankings of Full Professor, Associate Professor, Lecturer, and Instructor, Woolley gave the college the requisite categories needed to cultivate as well as boast of a sophisticated faculty.¹² She aimed to attract a body of professionally trained scholars who were interested in both providing quality instruction and continuing their own original research.¹³ As a result, Woolley supplemented an aggressive hiring policy with a liberal sabbatical policy at the college. In one of her presidential reports she defended faculty leaves, writing,

The importance of these “Sabbatical years,” so-called, is very great. The profession of teaching is exhausting, mentally as well as physically, and an instructor, in order to do her best work, must stop and be re-created. She needs to become again a student, not only that she may come into touch with the progress made in her own line of work, but also to gain a broader outlook, that education which is to be found in studying under the men and women who are making history in the literary and educational world; in seeing new places and hearing

¹⁰ As cited by Marks, Jeannette. Life and Letters of Mary Emma Woolley. (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1955), 53.

¹¹ Meeropol, 224.

¹² Ibid., 224-225.

¹³ Horowitz, 233.

new things; in taking in, instead of always giving out. The instructor who has this new lease of life, brings quite as much back to the college in the way of buoyancy and a broader outlook as in the increase of knowledge. There has been no definite policy at Mount Holyoke, but leave of absence has been granted to those who have asked for the privilege. It is for the interest of the College, as well as for that of the individual, and there should be a fund of which the income could be used for the continuance of part salary to members of the Faculty who have been granted leave of absence for study.¹⁴

By emphasizing the individual intellectual growth of the faculty alongside an expectation of quality instruction, Woolley could attract distinguished scholars who would raise the reputation of the school through their academic credentials as well as own continuing research.

From 1901 to 1911, the staff at Mount Holyoke increased from sixty-nine to one hundred and thirty, and of those 130, ninety were faculty.¹⁵ Among those ninety members, thirty-four had PhD's, and notably, twelve of those with PhD's had earned their degree by utilizing Woolley's sabbatical policy.¹⁶ In addition, men were slowly becoming more standard fixtures on the faculty, and after 1926, they experienced a steady increase in their appointment to the college's varying ranks.¹⁷ Thus, Woolley succeeded in actively upgrading the quality and diversity of the faculty at the college in addition to increasing the number of faculty members to better respond to the growing student body.

¹⁴ Annual Report of the President, November 8, 1905, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 6-7.

¹⁵ Meeropol, 223.

¹⁶ Horowitz, 233.

¹⁷ Cole, 327.

Hand in hand with an upgrading of the faculty was an upgrading of the academics at the college. Woolley believed that a student must learn “to stand on her own feet, and to give a reason for the opinion that is within her,” but she continuously had to adjust for the ever-growing enrollment at the college.¹⁸ To do so, Woolley made maintaining the tradition of small classes and a low faculty-student ratio a priority by reinvigorating departments with new classes and instructors. By 1913, the student-faculty ratio at the college was 8.5:1 – lower than that of Wellesley and Vassar.¹⁹ Woolley worked to increase class offerings and added faculty members in five of the six sciences, supplemented the mathematics department with two more faculty members even though there was no increase of students declaring math as their major, and directed significant growth in the Philosophy and Psychology, History, Economics and Sociology, English Literature, English Rhetoric, Music, Latin, and Romance Languages departments.²⁰ In fact, only the Education, Hygiene, and Biblical History and Literature departments failed to receive any significant increases.²¹ Notably, by providing superior conditions in certain academic areas, Woolley could steer Mount Holyoke women into those disciplines, like the sciences, which had only recently opened to women.

In addition to developing the academic departments, Woolley improved student performance at the college by toughening entrance

¹⁸ Meeropol, 223; Horowitz, 232.

¹⁹ Meeropol, 241.

²⁰ Ibid., 229-231.

requirements.²² In 1901 the college accepted an invitation to join the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB), a policy-making organization that sought to form a cooperative body of schools using the same entrance exams.²³ Other notable members of the CEEB included Harvard, Yale, Bryn Mawr, and Smith, and by 1904 Mount Holyoke “substituted the Board examinations...for their own.”²⁴ As a result, Woolley standardized the college’s entrance process and put Mount Holyoke on par with Harvard and Yale.

Continuing this process of toughening academic standards at the college was the decision to remove all certificate privileges by 1918 and then move entirely to an exam system by 1919 when a Board of Admissions assumed the direction of entrance requirements.²⁵ For years before Woolley became president and into the first half of her administration, the college maintained ‘certificate privilege’ relationships with a number of schools. This meant that applicants coming from certificate schools would be deemed qualified without going through any kind of examination process. However, as a result, this process also meant that a number of poorer, “conditioned” students would ultimately gain admission to the college.²⁶ By moving the college to an examination system, Woolley effectively eliminated the remedial

²¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

²² *Ibid.*, 220.

²³ *Ibid.*, 238.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Annual Report of the President, 1903-1904, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 8

²⁵ Cole, 254; Meeropol, 239.

dimension of admissions and destroyed a problematic vestige of Mount Holyoke's seminary past.

Complementing these more challenging entrance requirements were developments that sought to recognize exemplary students. In 1905, for example, the National Council of the Phi Beta Kappa Society officially accepted Mount Holyoke's 1904 charter chapter, an honor that reflected the college's increasing academic stature, especially since the society granted admission to only ten of the twenty colleges who applied that year.²⁷ Additionally, Woolley oversaw the development of a system of honors to encourage students to pursue or continue independent scholarly work. Under her guidance, the Executive Board of Alumnae Associations decided, in 1905, to fund an annual fellowship for a student embarking on graduate studies, and she also secured assistance from the Carnegie Foundation for other fellowships.²⁸ By the end of her first decade as president of the college, ten students had received fellowships for graduate study, and after just two more years, seventeen additional students had earned Mount Holyoke fellowships.²⁹ Under Woolley's leadership, nationally recognized student accomplishment was becoming quite routine at the college.

²⁶ Meeropol, 239.

²⁷ Annual Report of the President, 1903-1904, 7; Meeropol, 241; Cole, 254.

²⁸ Meeropol, 240-241.

²⁹ Ibid., 241.

Gaining an even greater number of significant new buildings than had been overseen by Mead, the campus also benefited under Woolley.³⁰ One of the most important additions from the first part of her tenure, however, was a new library. In 1903, Woolley won a \$50,000 matching grant from the Carnegie Foundation and received a \$15,000 gift from the city of Holyoke to build the new library. Woolley successfully solicited the rest of the money needed from the alumnae, and the building opened in 1905. Upon its completion, Woolley termed the new library “a temple of learning,” and by 1911, she had increased the library’s collection to a total of 46,350 volumes – a gain of 122% since 1901.³¹ With the addition of this new and improved library, alongside modernized laboratories and classrooms, a new music building, and a student-alumnae hall, Woolley was helping Mount Holyoke to become an elite institution with all the resources necessary to develop exceptional scholars.³²

However, the changes she piloted were not simply improvement for the sake of improvement; for Woolley, they were not an end but rather a means to a larger purpose. As she upgraded Mount Holyoke, Woolley simultaneously fostered a mission at the college of developing strong, influential women leaders who would go on to change the world – a mission

³⁰ Horowitz, 236.

³¹ Meeropol, 221-222.

³² Horowitz, 236.

which required the best of instruction, the best of facilities, and the best of students to be successfully achieved.

For Woolley, central to this mission was the view that education was “preparation for service,” and she very frequently shared this view of hers with students.³³ She spoke to Mount Holyoke students at least weekly in chapel at the services they were required to attend. She used these ‘chapel talks,’ which offered her a basically captive audience, as an opportunity to talk to students about such topics as manners and decorum, current events, and passages from the Bible. However, the variety of themes covered were united by the way in which Woolley transformed her talks into vehicles for instilling in the students the awesomeness of the opportunity, privilege, and obligation the education they were receiving at Mount Holyoke offered as well as meant. In one chapel talk, Woolley called the students, “the hope of the world,” and in another she told them, “Do not be afraid of over estimating the importance of the task to which you have set your hand in coming to college, that of preparing yourself for your part in the world’s work. Neither you nor I can say today what that will be but we can say this, that there will be a place distinctly for you.”³⁴ Clearly, Woolley had big plans for the young women at Mount Holyoke, and she expected them to imagine big plans for themselves as well.

³³ Woolley, Mary. Inaugural Address, “The Mount Holyoke, Inauguration Number 1901,” Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 9.

³⁴ Woolley, Mary. “You Are The Hope of The World,” Speech 243, 20 Sept 1917, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1; Woolley Mary. Chapel Talk, Speech 118, 19 Sept 1912, Mary Emma

To Woolley's advantage, such a mission connected well to the original spirit of Christian service upon which Mary Lyon had founded Mount Holyoke, and it revitalized that philosophy. When Mary Lyon founded the college in 1837, she sought to create an environment in which Christian benevolence, academic excellence, and order thrived together.³⁵ Missionary service was an activity that Mount Holyoke graduates were readily prepared for, and Mount Holyoke women received instruction rooted in a larger goal of Christian service.³⁶

Woolley's Inaugural Address given on May 15, 1901 made immediate connection with Mount Holyoke's seminary past. In some sense, her message represented a secularization of the old missionary ethic. Describing the purpose of college education, especially for women, as "preparation for service," Woolley echoed the legacy of Mary Lyon at Mount Holyoke.³⁷ However, she told her audience, "The old – nay, not so very old – question of the propriety of a college education for a woman is no longer a debatable one."³⁸ She explored questions she deemed more pressing, which included "What is the outlook for the college woman?" and "What can the college do to prepare her for her work?", and then she asserted that, "the college must produce more than skill, expertness in 'doing things'; it must give the power

Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3.

³⁵ Marinak, Michele-Ann. *A Lost Generation?: Mount Holyoke's Women in the 1920s*. Thesis. Dartmouth College, 1995. (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1995), v.

³⁶ Marks, 55.

³⁷ Woolley, Mary. Inaugural Address, 9.

of ‘grasping the situation,’ of being equal to the emergency, of controlling circumstances rather than of being controlled by them.”³⁹

Woolley wanted Mount Holyoke to become a competitive and elite college for women that would produce thoughtful scholars and active thinkers who would apply their education in the world beyond the college. Pointing out that education for women rarely included “mathematical or mechanical studies or...the sort of training which demands close and consecutive thought,” she likened this disparity to a waste of natural resources since, “Women have already shown ability as designers and there are many lines of invention for which they would seem to have peculiar fitness.”⁴⁰ To correct this lack, Woolley recommended the creation of “new paths in this old field which college women have seldom trodden,” suggesting that such developments would merely capitalize on attributes that were particularly feminine.⁴¹

Clearly then, at the same time that it connected to the college’s past, Woolley’s mission also offered up new conceptions of the educated woman. It presupposed that women were individuals first and equal to men, qualified for and an asset to public life, and, above all, capable of changing the world.⁴² Woolley did not entreat women to become good wives and mothers, although she never devalued those pursuits. Instead, she wanted Mount Holyoke

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 9, 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

women to have the most sophisticated and challenging education possible and then go out and apply that education in the world to make it better.

Notably, however, as Woolley's lectures to assembled students gave voice to an uplifting vision of the role of women in the world, her administrative position at the college required a different voice and modulated vision. Simply put, Woolley's mission challenged traditional notions of women's roles. Yet as president, Woolley recognized the need for her to lead Mount Holyoke as a cautious administrator – she simply could not say whatever she wanted whenever she wanted to, and there were trustees to be answered to, funds to be raised, and parents to be pleased. Woolley knew she would have to negotiate the divide between her position as administrator of an institution and her desire for that institution to foster strong women leaders; she needed to find a way to be all things to all people.

As she learned to navigate her position as college president, Woolley was also establishing herself as a spokeswoman for women's education in general.⁴³ She came to be a recognized women's authority and spoke more and more frequently outside the college, and in the course of doing so, she developed a relatively unthreatening body of arguments that she could tailor based on her audience. Together, these arguments came to constitute a sort of intellectual recipe Woolley invoked again and again during the most successful years of her administration and even afterwards.

⁴² Wells, 70-71.

As much as this unthreatening recipe was a product of the fact that Woolley had to court diverse constituencies, it simultaneously allowed her to advocate strong women leaders while appearing to conform to traditional gender roles. This Woolley recipe was essentially a vision that reconciled elite education with womanhood and contained a series of assertions about women that were designed to appear unthreatening to men. On the surface, Woolley's arguments confined themselves to the terms traditionally assigned to women and therefore suggested that women would not enter into direct competition against men, but beneath, however, Woolley's recipe endorsed a much larger role for women in the world because, by her estimation, women were capable, equal to men, and much-needed.

Based on a review of her speeches given at the college and off-campus, certain components of her recipe, which essentially put forth a declaration of women's obligation of social responsibility, can be identified. These include a reconciliation of education and women's traditional role in the home, an assertion of women's 'peculiar' attunement to change the world, a revitalization of a vision of Christian service, and a portrayal of the educated woman as a natural resource to be used practically to improve society. Using these ingredients, Woolley disguised a radical agenda for women and avoided alienating more conservative constituencies.

⁴³ Meeropol, 204-205.

As a spokeswoman for the higher education of women, Woolley was constantly asked about the effect of education on womanhood.⁴⁴ Did education make women unfit to be wives and mothers? Would it put too much of a physical strain on their bodies? Was education making them unhappy as wives and mothers? In her responses Woolley worked to reconcile education and traditional women's roles and allay the fears of the critics of women's education.⁴⁵ Even if she occasionally answered back with humorous quips or gently challenged traditional conceptions of the home, Woolley most frequently responded with a pragmatic approach and reassured her audiences that education was not ruining the prospects of women to become wives and mothers.⁴⁶

One article titled "The College Woman as a Home-Maker: Does the College Fail to Fit a Girl for the Home?" printed in the October 1, 1910 edition of the Ladies' Home Journal displays Woolley's talent at reassuring audiences by operating within the terms traditionally assigned to women.⁴⁷ At the opening of the article she reminded her audience that American college women "have married and been given in marriage," and asserted that, "college training not only does not unfit women for the home, but also that it actually

⁴⁴ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 206-207.

⁴⁶ Meeropol, 207-208.

⁴⁷ Woolley, Mary. "The College Woman as a Home-Maker: Does the College Fail to Fit a Girl for the Home?," Speech 35, printed in the Ladies' Home Journal, 1 Oct 1910, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 35.

prepares them for it.”⁴⁸ Woolley went on to describe the ‘preparation’ for the home that the college provides, identifying benefits under headings such as, “Inventiveness and Adaptability are Developed,” “A Keener Appreciation of the Value of Home,” and “A College Girl’s Outlook Upon Life is Broader.”⁴⁹ Essentially, Woolley rhetorically transformed the liberal arts college from a ‘masculinizing’ institution into a vessel encouraging the skills most desirable in good housekeepers. College life fostered, for example, “the habit of systematic living [which] is invaluable for the future home-maker,” and studying logic taught “rational thought and action.”⁵⁰ Further, a college education made a woman “an intelligent sharer of [her children’s and husband’s] interests.”⁵¹ By Woolley’s argument, a college education gave women a set of tools that developed in them “Resources as Well as Resourcefulness” applicable to the home.⁵²

Noticeably, Woolley’s article made no real attempt to question the assumed connection between women and the home, and in general, Woolley chose to reconcile education and womanhood in her speeches and articles rather than to question the assumed relationship between women and the home. When Woolley did offer new conceptions of the home, her arguments were carefully balanced against her audience’s fears about education’s effect

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

on women. An article she wrote for Harper's Bazar, for example, asserted that women "must be considered as individuals and not exclusively as members of a sex."⁵³ Yet immediately following this statement, which appeared almost at the end of the article, Woolley dedicated space to the "resources and values" women gained from college, writing, "there is no place where [resourcefulness] is more desired and desirable than in the home."⁵⁴ Thus, one defense-mechanism Woolley cultivated during her administration was to temper her radical goals for women with assurances that educated women would still be prepared for traditional roles in the home.

Another way that Woolley responded to the confines of her administrative position and the experience of having to speak on a topic that assumed women and education were polar opposites was to emphasize strengths that she characterized as particularly feminine. This tactic formed a second ingredient in the Woolley recipe. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the traits Woolley identified played off long-held assumptions about women. She stressed, in particular, their heightened emotional states, natural humanitarianism, and inherent sensitivity as positive features which, by her reasoning, translated into qualifications for social service roles in the public sector. According to Woolley, women were, "Naturally fitted for [social service] by their humanitarian interest, sympathy, tact, and insight into human

⁵³ Woolley, Mary. "Some Results of Higher Education for Women," Speech 21, printed in Harper's Bazar, June 1909, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 588.

nature...”⁵⁵ By stressing these supposedly specifically feminine traits, Woolley could justify women’s education in a logical and seemingly uncontroversial way while remaining consistent with her mission for Mount Holyoke women to actively lead positive change in the world. In effect, this second ingredient in the Woolley recipe characterized women as particularly attuned to change the world *because* they were women.

Noticeably, though, Woolley never once said that these feminine traits alone could be basis enough for women’s involvement in world affairs, and she made sure not to devalue the importance of a solid education. Woolley warned, “[Women] must not rely upon these qualifications to take the place of training and an understanding of social conditions – that is, a careful study of the problem which is so difficult to solve.”⁵⁶ But by characterizing women as predisposed to certain activities, Woolley could logically defend their pursuit of higher education. After all, if an individual is predisposed to a certain valuable skill, it seems an act of common sense to encourage them to cultivate that talent. Nevertheless, by emphasizing inherently feminine qualifications Woolley could expand the boundaries of the accepted women’s sphere to include not only education but involvement in public life as well.

Another ingredient in the Woolley recipe linked public service with Mount Holyoke’s old missionary ethic and Christian values. Woolley had

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 589.

come to Mount Holyoke with a strong Christian background that had originally been fostered in her youth by her minister father.⁵⁷ At the college she continued her habit of reading the Bible daily and spoke regularly on such topics as “The Library Which is Called the Bible,” “The Place of Prayer and Worship in Daily Living,” and “Qualities Which make the Bible Educationally Valuable.”⁵⁸ In her speeches, Woolley characterized the Bible as a rich source of history and life lessons and referred to Christianity in general as a moral guide for students.⁵⁹ She said, “All Bible teaching leads up to the one central figure of Christ Himself [and] [n]o one can know how to live who does not know that life...”⁶⁰ Woolley encouraged students to model their lives after Christ, and by her estimation, the best way to accomplish this imitation was through a life of service.

According to Woolley, “Women have always been distinguished for their gift of service,” and as such, she entreated students to use this gift “to make life better, a gift of the opportunity even to do one’s part in carrying on the work which Christ came to earth to do, that is, to help to make a Kingdom of God among men.”⁶¹ To Woolley, service lacked a simple, narrow definition.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 587-588.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 588.

⁵⁷ Meeropol, 53-54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁹ Woolley, Mary. “Why Should I Study the Bible?,” Speech 97, 4 Feb 1909, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 17-18, 24, 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶¹ Woolley, Mary. “Women and Her Gift of Service,” Speech 285, 27 Oct. 1918, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley,

She wrote: “Emphasis is rightly placed upon the value of education as a preparation for service, service in its broadest sense, that of the scholar, as well as of the reformer or statesman; of the quiet men and women who form the great majority of the thinking class, as well as of the few who are in the public eye.”⁶² Clearly, to Woolley service meant far more than the long-held conception of it as missionary activity. Yet because she emphasized Christianity, a dominating element of the women’s sphere, in her definition of service, Woolley’s vision seemed far less threatening. Essentially, by linking activities which were outside of the traditional women’s sphere to Christian service, she legitimized them.

Combining her visions of women as particularly attuned to change the world and as models of Christian service, Woolley presented the educated woman as a natural resource that could be used in a practical way to improve society. By Woolley’s evaluation of the state of the world, it seemed a waste not to take advantage of the skills women could offer. Woolley told students in chapel that “there has never been a time in the history of the world when the need of trained minds united to vigorous healthy bodies and guided by high ideals and noble purposes, was so great.”⁶³ She entreated them to take their studies seriously and to not let social temptations divert them from the

MA, 1; Woolley, Mary. “Chapel Talk,” Speech 264, 3 April 1918, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3.

⁶² Woolley, “Some Results of Higher Education for Women,” 586.

⁶³ Woolley, “Chapel Talk,” Speech 118, 2-3.

pressing need for their contributions in the affairs of the world.⁶⁴ To Woolley, students had a responsibility to share with the world their privilege of having received a quality education.

When speaking off campus, Woolley urged her audiences to “consider some of the ways in which college training has helped women to be ‘extremely useful – since they have had a chance.’”⁶⁵ Linking inherently feminine qualifications and an ethos of Christian service, Woolley drew up a portrait of educated women that made them a perfect fit for dealing with the varying challenges of the world. She wrote, for example, that, “A distinguished physicist told me not long ago that for his line of scientific research a woman is peculiarly adapted, because of her lightness of touch and her ability to handle delicate instruments, and a bacteriologist urged no less strongly her qualifications for work in the laboratories where research means not only a contribution to science, but the saving of human life.”⁶⁶

She also referred frequently to the experience of World War I as an example that highlighted women’s ability to replace men at the centers of power.⁶⁷ To Woolley, the war created a unique situation which she thought Mount Holyoke students and all other educated women could capitalize on to develop significant leadership roles dedicated to avoiding the carnage of the

⁶⁴ Woolley, Mary. “Which?,” Speech 219, 4 Jan 1917, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 4.

⁶⁵ Woolley, “Some Results of Higher Education for Women,” 586.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 587.

conflict. In a sense, she implied that, if more women leaders had been available, World War I could have been avoided. By emphasizing women's special qualifications and then depicting the world in crisis, Woolley transformed their breaches of traditional roles from radical acts to the utilization of a much-needed and perfectly capable natural resource.

When taken all together, Woolley's reconciliation of the educated woman with the home, identification of inherently feminine qualities that fitted women to lead positive change in the world, revitalization of a Christian ideal of service, and portrayal of women as resources not be wasted, formed a foundation for her overarching assertion of women's obligation of social responsibility. To Woolley, educated women formed a "privileged class."⁶⁸ She thought they "ought to have on [their] diplomas "noblesse oblige"" and wanted them "to realize the beauty of [the] words "I serve.""⁶⁹ Woolley said,

The college woman knows that her responsibility does not end with herself or with her home. The opportunities to work for social righteousness are boundless. Think for a moment, what are some of the present needs of our country. Laws to protect little children, 1,700,000 of them under fourteen years of age, working in sweat shops, factories, coal mines, defrauded of the joys and the chances which ought to be the inalienable rights of childhood; the limitations of hours of work, and provision of right conditions for women and girls, that they may not be exposed to the dangers of physical, mental and moral weaknesses, the consequence of inordinate demands upon their physical strength; provisions which would make impossible the herding together of human beings in disease and sin-breeding

⁶⁷ Woolley, Mary. "Chapel Talk," Speech 282, 20 Sept 1918, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3-4.

⁶⁸ Woolley, Mary. "What Every College Woman Knows," Speech 50, given at Smith College Club in Providence, 11 March 1911, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, her hand-written notes on 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

tenements, a travesty on the name of home; the elimination of the sweat shop, even at the sacrifice of every bargain-loving drop of blood in our veins; the substitution of playgrounds and vacation schools and healthful, legitimate recreation for children and young boys and girls, in the place of the cheap shows and the pernicious amusements which flourish more or less openly in every great city.⁷⁰

Woolley had long thought educated women had an obligation to be involved in these national issues because they were educated individuals just as capable as men. However, to her audiences, Woolley developed this obligation by demonstrating at length that involvement in them, preceded by education, did not threaten the eternal distinctions between men and women. Even though Woolley thought it was an obvious choice for educated women to be socially responsible and active in the affairs of the world, by creating a context that allayed the fears of her audience, it became difficult for them to decry somewhat untraditional actions as radical. As a result, she made an increased role in the world a logical extension and obligation for women and expanded the traditional women's sphere while seeming to conform to more conservative views on what was acceptable for women.

Like any successful politician, as president of the college Woolley had learned to speak elliptically and elusively. The creation of her recipe of seemingly unthreatening arguments allowed her to maintain her mission at Mount Holyoke without alienating conservative trustees, parents, potential donors, or public audiences. Even though she still worked to foster strong

⁷⁰ Ibid., 9.

women leaders in the students at the college, Woolley was, in effect, a cautious feminist carefully negotiating the fault lines between radical reform and the status quo. She had found a way to be surreptitiously dangerous by drawing on earlier models of feminist reform.

By the time Woolley was inaugurated, the movement for women's rights had been underway in the United States for over fifty years. Since the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, women had been seeking, with increasing vigor, access to educational institutions, privileges equal to those of men, and full recognition of their inalienable rights, including the right to vote.⁷¹ Gradually, American women carved out for themselves an unofficial niche in the political system of the nation through the tactic of separatism.

Though a long-held system of differing men's and women's spheres which relegated men to public life and women to the private life of the home operated in the nineteenth century, women found a way to organize themselves and justify their involvement in the affairs of the country by highlighting their differences from men. Playing off prevalent conceptions of women as morally superior, selfless, nurturing, and pious, in contrast to aggressive, competitive, and materialistic men, women created a rationale for their political role by expanding the definition of the home from the private

⁷¹ Freedman, Estelle. "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930" in Sklar, Kathryn Kish & Dublin, Thomas (eds.). Women and Power in American History: Volume II from 1870, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002), 16-17.

household to the wider community of the country in general.⁷² At the highest levels, women's political actions took the shape of organizations seeking to correct injustices toward women and children, and in the late 1800s clubwomen characterized femininity as "a sort of expertise needed in formal politics."⁷³ Increasingly, women presented themselves as a group essential to the reform of a greedy, materialistic corporate culture, and by doing so they expanded their influence and role in the American political system.

According to Nancy Cott, author of The Grounding of Modern Feminism,

By the close of the century the spectrum of ideology in the woman movement had a see-saw quality: at one end, the intention to eliminate sex-specific limitations; at the other, the desire to recognize rather than quash the habits called female, to protect the interests women had already defined as theirs and give those much greater public scope. A tension stretched between emphasis on the rights that women (like men) deserved and emphasis on the particular duties or services that women (unlike men) could offer society, as also between the claim that women had to act for their own advantage or for the benefit of others.⁷⁴

At Mount Holyoke this 'see-saw' quality seemed to instruct the Woolley administration. Remaining a somewhat subdued part of the college dialogue throughout the nineteenth century, women's rights issues, including women's suffrage, came to the forefront during Woolley's term. At least initially, however, Woolley seemed wary of the consequences of taking a stand on

⁷² Baker, Paula. "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920." The American Historical Review, 89, (June 1984), 632.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Cott, Nancy F. The Grounding of Modern Feminism. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987), 19-20.

these controversial issues. According to alumna Susan Reed Stifler, class of 1907, “[In 1905 a] request had come to the College from the College Equal Suffrage League – headquarters in Boston – that we issue an invitation to its president to come to our campus and deliver a lecture on women and the vote. Our College President hesitated to sponsor such a lecture.”⁷⁵ Even though Woolley recognized that connections would always be drawn between Mount Holyoke – one of the original beacons of higher education for women in the United States – and the women’s rights movement in general, she balked at making “the college campus a place to take up the problems of the nation.”⁷⁶

Rather than echoing the growing and increasingly radical feminist movement of the 20th century, Woolley’s recipe allowed her to maintain a balance between threatening and reassuring messages. To be sure, Woolley identified with the later feminist movement and advocated its tenets of equal rights, self-development, and liberation.⁷⁷ But given the nature of Woolley’s position at Mount Holyoke, she felt obliged to avoid confrontational strategies at all costs. Whether a product of her age and background as well, the net result was a two-track political culture at Mount Holyoke that served Woolley well for at least twenty years. But as she moved into her third decade at Mount

⁷⁵ Stifler, Susan Reed. “In 1905 a curiously negative reaction to the suffragettes” *Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly*. Vol. 56., No. 1 (Spring 1972), Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Cott, 36-39.

Holyoke, the experience of World War I and the 1920s began to expose the limits of this Woolley recipe for success.

CHAPTER II: WOOLLEY'S MOUNT HOLYOKE IN THE TWENTIES

During the “Roaring Twenties,” a slew of economic and demographic changes whose roots predated the First World War burst onto the scene and took hold in the United States. Increased urbanization, rapid industrialization, and skyrocketing levels of immigration coincided with such social developments as the new and almost universal accessibility of the automobile, an eruption of the American mass media industry, and the development of a distinct youth culture.⁷⁸ These larger social and economic trends also intersected with several gender-based movements, including Margaret Sanger’s campaign for birth control, a widespread American fascination with Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, a new emphasis placed on the ‘companionate marriage,’ and the advent of the flapper. These modern developments spurred a fundamental redefinition of social mores in the United States in the wake of World War I.⁷⁹ American life, to some degree, came to be defined by an unbending faith in growth, prosperity, and consumerism as well as a fast-paced, pleasure-seeking mode of living.⁸⁰

In the midst of these developing social redefinitions, challenges, and novelties, Mount Holyoke College in rural South Hadley was forced to come to terms with the changes taking place in the United States beyond its borders. Still under the cautious leadership of Woolley, an increasingly careful governance of student life at the college surfaced as Mount Holyoke’s modus

⁷⁸ Dumenil, Lynn. The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), 4-12.

⁷⁹ Cott, Nancy. The Grounding of Modern Feminism. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987), 156.

operandi for confronting the changes of the decade. Indeed, if one examines the student handbooks from the twenties in ascending chronological order, an interesting progression becomes visible: as the years of the decade roll by, the books of rules and regulations become more specific, longer, and bigger; then, as the decade winds down to its close, the handbooks gradually return to their former sparer states. Rules on ‘motoring,’ mandatory chaperones, and chapel attendance were expanded, and other new regulations, such as those on “bumming” rides, appeared for the first time.⁸¹ Sunday rules of decorum were granted more space in the handbooks and defined consequences for chapel cuts, regulations for proper outings, and unacceptable activities.⁸² As in the previous two decades of her administration, President Woolley again saw the need to carefully tread the line between leading a liberal, progressive institution and maintaining the austere, unthreatening countenance so long characteristic of the college.

For Mount Holyoke and American colleges in general, the 1920s brought an unprecedented number of students as well as changes to the reasons female students gave for their attendance.⁸³ As Woolley herself put it, “[O]f late years, and especially since the war, it has become ‘the thing’ for

⁸⁰ Dumnhil, 7.

⁸¹ Student Handbook of Information, 1923-1924, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 36, 46.

⁸² Student Handbook of Information, 1921-1922, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 31-32.

⁸³ Weiner, Courtney. Her Side of Paradise: The Seven Sisters Schools and Youth Culture in the 1920s. Thesis. Princeton University, 2001. (Princeton: Princeton U, 2001), 1; Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 284.

girls to go to college, and almost every type of girl that the modern American family can produce presents herself at our gates.”⁸⁴ Attending college had become a socially popular pursuit for young American women rather than a bold exception, and in accordance, the student body at Mount Holyoke grew. The number of applicants increased each year, and although limited by the housing accommodations on campus, the number of students at Mount Holyoke swelled from 671 in 1902 to 1024 in 1925.⁸⁵

As enrollments rose, the various social trends of the twenties prompted changes to students’ lives and behaviors at school.⁸⁶ With the advent of the wildly popular automobile, which afforded a new found mobility to the American people, Mount Holyoke women had much less trouble gaining access to the life beyond the gates of their college. The car made it easier for visitors, including men, to come to campus – and for the students to leave as well.⁸⁷ Simultaneously, the widespread popularity of the movies, musical performers, and magazines gave students expanding contact with the

⁸⁴ Woolley, Mary. “The College Girl of Today and Yesterday,” Speech 467, for article in Oct 1935 issue of Woman’s Home Companion, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 12.

⁸⁵ Annual Report of the President: 1902-1903, June 1903, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3; 1925-1926 Report of the President and Treasurer, Nov 1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 14.

⁸⁶ Marinak, Michele-Ann. A Lost Generation?: Mount Holyoke’s Women in the 1920s. Thesis. Dartmouth College, 1995. (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1995), v.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

burgeoning American mass media industry, which generated new possibilities in youthful behavior, including how to talk, dress, and act fashionably.⁸⁸

As a result of such trends, Woolley and her administration had to address a new set of challenges to traditional student culture which included serial dating, men on campus, dancing, drinking, smoking, and the use of cars.⁸⁹ Smoking in particular became an especially charged issue on the campus during the twenties, and in response to this and other changes in student life, Woolley alternately expressed frustration, disappointment, and anxiety about the damage to the college's national reputation.

In reacting to the changes that followed World War I, Woolley increasingly voiced a level of frustration with the behavior of Mount Holyoke's students. Still ascribing to her mission of developing strong, educated women who would go on from the college to change the world through their good service, she struggled to adjust to the 'modern' developments of the decade. Woolley's ideals of service and commitment to causes larger than oneself were set against the "New Woman" ideal, which emphasized personal liberation and the freedom of the individual. Nevertheless, Woolley continued her encouragement of the young women to strive "to make the best of oneself, physically and mentally and socially and spiritually, that the 'best' may make the world a better and a happier place in

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸⁹ Kendall, Elaine. "Peculiar Institutions": An Informal History of the Seven Sister Colleges. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 171-174.

which to live...”; and she reminded the students that, “Knowledge is power...” while still entreating them to “cultivate the habit of thinking about big things...”⁹⁰

In the changed cultural context of the decade, it began to seem – at least to Woolley – that perhaps the young women were losing their zeal. She commented, “It is only honest to add that there are students for whom the charm of college is not mainly its intellectual offering.”⁹¹ Even if she lauded the female students of the 1920s because they “enjoyed far more social freedom than girls of twenty-five years ago and are, in consequence, less conscious of their sex...,” Woolley worried about the effect of the social change on their academic work.⁹² How much, for example, would this new conception of college as “the thing to do” when paired with an increasingly overscheduled extracurricular life steeped in the social pursuits of dating, movies, dancing, and fashion derail Mount Holyoke women from the academic greatness they were supposed to be seeking? Woolley warned, “The ease and comfort have been bought with a price, the price of losing some of

⁹⁰ Woolley, Mary. “Chapel Talk,” Speech 571, 20 Sept 1929, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3; Woolley, Mary. “Chapel Talk: The Gospel of Good Will,” Speech 414, 21 Sept 1923, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3.

⁹¹ Woolley, Mary. “The Women’s College and the Modern Girl,” Speech 537, 16 March 1928, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3.

⁹² Woolley, “The College Girl of Today and Yesterday,” 12.

the brawn and muscle of an earlier generation, of its initiative and adaptability, its power of providing for oneself, not always being provided for.”⁹³

Gradually, Woolley’s concerns about the changes taking place in students’ social lives transformed into scorn. She commented, “The girl of today follows in the footsteps of her elders in trying to do too many things. One of those “things” is amusement, so often misnamed recreation when it has very little to do with re-creation.”⁹⁴ She expressed marked disappointment regarding the new popularity of the “habit of reading light, very light literature” and going to the movies.⁹⁵ Reminding students of the emptiness inherent in the popular cheap fiction novels of the times, she asked them, “What about food for thought?”⁹⁶ And, in discouraging them from attending movies, she emphasized the questionable value of cinema and utter lack of mental effort movies demanded from their audiences.⁹⁷ Woolley lamented, “the tendency of much of the amusement of the day is away from thinking. We want to be thrilled not inspired.”⁹⁸

⁹³ Woolley, Mary. “The World as it Is,” Speech 522, 23 Sept 1927, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 2.

⁹⁴ Woolley, Mary. “What College Does For Girls,” Speech 555, 10 Dec 1928, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 8-9.

⁹⁵ Woolley, “The Woman’s College and the Modern Girl,” 2.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

In Woolley's eyes, the women at Mount Holyoke, now distracted by movies, dances, dates, and "light literature," had become "wasters."⁹⁹ As they wasted their time amusing themselves, they in turn wasted the opportunities and gifts they possessed which she hoped they would use to change the world for the better. To Woolley, frivolous pursuits had serious consequences, among which she emphasized "the way in which it limits our own possibilities of achievement and of contribution to the common welfare."¹⁰⁰ Disheartened most by the students' "waste of oneself," she entreated the women of Mount Holyoke to "neglect not the gift that is in thee."¹⁰¹ Woolley, after all, still adhered to the notion that women, and particularly educated women, had special gifts to offer to the world in areas such as peace activism *because* they were women.

In the context of Woolley's disappointment and scorn, her administration increased the regulation of student life, despite the fact that student government was reorganized during the twenties to increase the responsibilities of Mount Holyoke's students themselves.¹⁰² Letters and newspaper articles written by Mount Holyoke students of the 1920s reveal a conflict between the traditional, upstanding, austere environment of the

⁹⁹ Woolley, Mary. "Waste Not," Speech 545, 21 Sept 1928, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁰² Cole, Arthur C. *A Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1940), 281.

college and the number of students who were increasingly beginning to chafe at the college's regulations, which featured rising bells, compulsory chapel, and mandatory chaperones for most social activities.

A letter written by a student from the class of 1925, for example, which described a production on campus satirizing the tradition of rising bells, sheds light on the atmosphere of social control that dominated Mount Holyoke. Suggesting a level of absurdity present at the college in terms of the governance of student life, the play presented a skit called "The Ceremony of the Bells," which included "a Dissertation on the uselessness of noisy bells [and] a poem on the torture of the over-belled college student..."¹⁰³ Another student, one Lillian Eastburn from the class of 1927, writing home, gave further evidence of the administration's efforts to sustain a more tightly controlled student life. She wrote,

We are all so sore because the Dean is getting up on her ear and has taken away Llamie dance for next year and all the Saturday night dances maybe forever because there was some drinking done at Llamie dance this year. Also they are putting chains across the road to Prospect and around the lake so that people cannot motor there with dates. This place is going to be a convent next year. I am preparing to take the veil.¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, governance of student life had been officially transferred into the hands of the students themselves upon the replacement of the Students' League with a new organization, the Community, beginning in the

¹⁰³ Correspondence of Margaret L. Chapin, Class of 1925, 21 Jan. 1923, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

1922-1923 academic year.¹⁰⁵ In theory, the purpose of the Community was to open lines of communication between students, faculty, and the administration.¹⁰⁶ Based on the honor system, which was reintroduced under Elizabeth Mead, the organization, “With the consent of the Trustees, the President and Faculty of Mount Holyoke College enter[ed] into an agreement with the Students to cooperate in the exercise of power in matters of community interest and community organization, and in a system of government to regulate the life of the students...”¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the final say was still ultimately in the hands of Mount Holyoke’s administration – in this case, an administration that consistently emphasized its concerns regarding the respectability of students’ behavior on and off campus.¹⁰⁸

Notably, more than once in the 1925-1926 academic year, the efforts of the administration to exert tighter control over student life came up for discussion in the Opinions Section of the Mount Holyoke News, largely in response to the debate surrounding the issue of how to handle the increasing incidence of student smoking. A student from the class of 1927 who submitted

¹⁰⁴ Correspondence of Lillian H. Eastburn, Class of 1927, 6 May 1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁰⁵ Cole, 282.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 281.

¹⁰⁷ Student Handbook of Information, 1922-1923, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3.

¹⁰⁸ For example, as described in the Student Handbook of Information, 1922-1923, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 4, “The foregoing agreement shall at not [sic] time be construed to authorize the regulation of the conduct of any but student members of the Community. The Administration and Faculty may call for a revision of the terms of this agreement at any time and none of its terms shall be changed without their consent. It is understood that the agreement shall remain binding only so long as

her complaints anonymously wrote a series of letters to the editor regarding the administration's control over the behavior of students. She asserted, "[The decision to abolish smoking] has been of use in demonstrating that Mount Holyoke College, for all its "democratic tradition," is autocratically governed...With all respect to college presidents and deans, for whom I have the greatest admiration, I submit that this is not as it should be. A college is not a high school."¹⁰⁹ In a different letter, despite acknowledging that "the essential fact remains that 'our government is the result of a grant from the Administration' - not of the inherent right of the students to govern themselves," the unnamed student argued for the complete transference of power to students for regulating their conduct at the college.¹¹⁰

Among all the Seven Sisters there had existed a general though largely unobserved smoking ban for students. However, Bryn Mawr became the first women's college to openly grant its students the right to smoke when, in 1925, its administration endorsed and assisted in the addition of designated smoking rooms in all the dormitories as well as other specific areas on campus.¹¹¹ Prompting responses both pro and con, Bryn Mawr's establishment of smoking rooms for its students ultimately led Mount Holyoke students to question the ban that existed at their own campus.

in the opinion of the Administration and Faculty it provides a satisfactory basis for Community life."

¹⁰⁹ "This Freedom," *Mount Holyoke News*, 29 Jan 1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 2.

¹¹⁰ "Liberty and Union," *Mount Holyoke News*, 19 Jan 1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 2.

According to the 1921-1922 Student Handbook, “While under the jurisdiction of the League, students shall not smoke, give any appearance or semblance of smoking, or use tobacco in any form,” and this regulation governed students “On the Campus, and anywhere in the Village of South Hadley.”¹¹² For the 1924-1925 and 1925-1926 school years, however, this ban on student smoking was shortened to read, “While under the jurisdiction of the Community, students shall not smoke, or use tobacco in any form.”¹¹³ The regulation of student smoking should have been in the hands of the students themselves – by way of the Community – for at least the first half of the decade. However, Woolley seemed to guide the government of the student body by tirelessly discouraging smoking and repeatedly declaring “that Mount Holyoke girls would never with her consent be given permission to smoke.”¹¹⁴

Despite Woolley’s dramatics and the seemingly stringent nature of the Handbooks, the students at Mount Holyoke laughed in the face of the college’s attempts to ban their smoking. They snuck cigarettes in secluded places on campus or went off campus. One particularly favorite place of students was the “Downs” in the local cemetery, whose tombstones offered the rule-breaking student a good cover.¹¹⁵ These ongoing violations, when

¹¹¹ Weiner, 46.

¹¹² Student Handbook of Information, 1920-1921, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 22.

¹¹³ Student Handbook of Information, 1924-1925, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 36; Student Handbook of Information, 1925-1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 29.

¹¹⁴ Cole, 285.

¹¹⁵ Marinak, 78.

combined with increasing official petitions to allow smoking on campus, did not cause Woolley to reconsider her own position, but rather to stiffen her resolve against a habit she regarded as the new symbol of a student body in moral decline.

For a while, students attempted to regulate the matter under the guidance of the administration, but in the wake of the Bryn Mawr decision, they split over what was to be done. During the fall of 1925, they undertook a referendum vote on the issue of smoking that offered four possible solutions.¹¹⁶ In the end no option emerged as the obvious victor; students voted 448 to 442 for “change.”¹¹⁷ Then, after months of mulling the issue over, the Community passed along the fate of the student smoking controversy to the Administration in late January of 1926.¹¹⁸ On April 21, 1926 a notice from Woolley and Dean Florence Purington went out to all students. It read:

To go into effect with the opening of the academic year in September, 1926.

Mount Holyoke College disapproves of smoking by college students and has made the regulation that no student may smoke while under its jurisdiction. (See footnote defining jurisdiction.)*

Every student entering or re-entering the college will be considered as having given her word of honor that she will keep this regulation. A student failing to do so will be asked to withdraw from the college.

¹¹⁶ “Mass Meeting Suggests Referendum on Smoking,” Mount Holyoke News, 6 Nov 1925, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1.

¹¹⁷ “Shall College Girls Smoke? Question is Again Agitating Campus Circles: Smoke is Rising About the Women’s College Campuses,” Springfield Republican, 29 Nov 1925, “Student Life Information: Smoking,” Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3.

¹¹⁸ “Representative Council Passes Final Measure,” Mount Holyoke News, 22 Jan 1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1.

*A student is under the jurisdiction of the college from the time she takes possession of her room in September until college closes in June with the following exceptions:

1. The Christmas and Easter vacations and all time when at her own home.
2. Overnight absences or absences for a longer time when she is not under the care of a chaperon from the college.
3. During the day when visiting at the home of a friend out of town or when in the company of her parents out of town.¹¹⁹

Surely, this was not the change that the young women attending Mount Holyoke had in mind! Formerly, “campusing” and suspension had been the penalties for smoking, but now immediate expulsion, the ultimate punishment, was the consequence. Writing her annual report, Woolley reflected on the controversy and revealed the thought process behind the administration’s decision:

The question which the administration faced was whether this was the only consideration and the present student body the only constituency whose opinion the college should regard. That the administration should also represent the opinion of what may be called “the college in the world,” the alumnae and friends whose relationship with the college is a close one, seemed logical, and there was no doubt that the consensus of opinion in this larger Mount Holyoke would be against a change of policy with regard to smoking.

In addition, the administration felt keenly its responsibility to that which is more difficult to put into words, what may be called the personality or spirit of the institution, made up of the ideals of the founder and of those whose devotion and sacrifices have been wrought into its very fabric. Considered in this light, the question was hardly debatable.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ “Student Life Information: Smoking,” Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹²⁰ 1925-1926 Report of the President and Treasurer, Nov 1926, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 9.

With such frank commentary, Woolley directly linked her anxiety about the college's reputation to Mount Holyoke's past and justified the increasingly restrictive regulations as a fulfillment of the school's very character.

With her mission for the women of Mount Holyoke as well as the reputation of the college seemingly under threat from the social nuances of the twenties, Woolley's endorsement of increasingly restrictive and meticulous rules becomes more understandable. Perhaps encouraging stricter governance of the students seemed like a simple but still direct way for her to steer students back onto the path on which she had for so long been leading them. At the same time, though, it is worth noting that her frustrations and anxieties about the students at Mount Holyoke corresponded with a particularly dominant feature of the Woolley administration during the twenties: fundraising.

Since her arrival on campus, Woolley's presidency featured a constant pursuit of donors and funds.¹²¹ As her lifetime partner, Jeannette Marks, wrote: "Mary Woolley knew that the pawns for the 'bricks' of the college for women of which she had been dreaming since 1901 and which, with the cooperation of others, she was building, were adequate financial funds."¹²² After all, if she wanted to build an institution capable of fulfilling her vision of developing strong, learned women leaders who would change the world, she needed

¹²¹ Meeropol, 202.

¹²² As quoted in Marks, Jeannette. Life and Letters of Mary Woolley. (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1955), 103.

access to a significant body of funds to upgrade the college. Reflecting on the importance of these “adequate financial funds” in one of her Reports of the President from the 1920s Woolley wrote:

[A] college must have increasing resources outside of its fees, and the development of its financial life, considered in the light of a means to an end, is important. But this development of the financial should be along the lines of a steady, progressive policy. An institution which paid attention to its academic interests only by fits and starts would be considered a fit candidate for a hospital for the insane.¹²³

In accordance, fundraising remained a central area of concern for Woolley during the whole of her administration at Mount Holyoke.

Though she had accomplished much of what she was hoping to change at the college by the twenties, Woolley never relinquished her vision for continuous improvement. Indeed, the 1919 – 1920 academic year saw the beginning of the “most ambitious effort which the college had ever made...” in terms of fundraising.¹²⁴ It marked the opening of a campaign to raise three million dollars by 1925. The goal was to secure two of those three millions to be pledged to the endowment with the remaining million set aside for the building fund.¹²⁵ Although it was successfully completed under her leadership, Woolley still maintained a to-do list for the college that nevertheless ran pages

¹²³ 1920-1923 Report of the President and Treasurer, Nov. 1923, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 4.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁵ Meeropol, 307.

long into the close of the decade.¹²⁶ Mount Holyoke, it seemed, was running a perpetual fundraising campaign.

In search of the necessary funds for the improvements she sought to bring to the college, Woolley traveled both domestically and internationally canvassing for donors. Although she lamented that “a campaign which must call upon the public in general, whether interested or not, often places the college in an undignified position [and] any course of action which causes an institution to be regarded as a beggar, rather than a benefactor, is a mistake,” Woolley always seemed to be on the hunt for financial support for the college.¹²⁷ She even went on an extended visit to the western United States to find new donors.¹²⁸

Since the people and alumnae most likely to give money to the college supported the old Mount Holyoke, Woolley’s need to continuously court funds for the college connected to the administration’s increased attempts to more tightly control student life. Notably, many of the strictest regulations added in the 1920s dealt with behavior in public places. If these helped keep students on the straight and narrow when they were in the public eye, at least theoretically then, it should have become more difficult for potential donors to remain wary about lending their names to Woolley’s Mount Holyoke.

¹²⁶ As evidenced by: Woolley, Mary. “A College Ramble with the Administration.” Speech 533, 17 Feb 1928, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹²⁷ 1920-1923 Report of the President and Treasurer, MA, 4.

¹²⁸ Marks, 105-106.

An expanded version of the statement found at the beginning of the social regulations section in the student handbook first appeared in the 1921-1922 school year, the same year the three million dollar campaign was launched. As with the controversy over smoking, a marked degree of concern about the way outsiders perceived the college surfaced. The handbook stated:

Inasmuch as the reputation of Mount Holyoke College is dependent upon the conduct of her students wherever they may be, students are under obligation to maintain a proper standard of behavior whether or not they are registered away from the College; and the League holds itself responsible for taking action in regard to any conduct of [students] which injures the College reputation.¹²⁹

Clearly, the potential for students to act in a way that might result in a bad name for the college constituted a serious concern for the administration. After all, the cultural revolution sweeping through the younger generation in the 1920s, in which Mount Holyoke women felt they were included, suggested to many Americans not just the development of vulgar habits like women smoking in public, but the collapse of morality in Western Civilization as a whole. Possibly Woolley viewed stricter community rules as a way to balance changing student behaviors, anxiety about the college's reputation, and the need for funds while simultaneously maintaining her mission for Mount Holyoke women and committing them to practices that would "...cultivate the habit of thinking about big things..."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Student Handbook of Information, 1921-1922, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 24.

¹³⁰ Woolley, "Chapel Talk: The Gospel of Good Will," 3.

However, the intersection of Woolley's mission, changing student behaviors, and fundraising aside, the wider trends of the 1920s need to be considered. Often idealized as a decade of speakeasies, flappers, jazz, and general excess, the 1920s in the United States actually saw a significant conservative backlash in response to the "modern" developments of the times. Indeed, as Mount Holyoke fashioned a more competitive and elite name for itself under Woolley's leadership and its social regulations stiffened, conservative trends including prohibition, immigration restriction, and outrage at Sanger's contraception campaign enjoyed a popular resurgence throughout the United States.¹³¹

With the disillusionment that came after reflection on the experience of World War I and the rapid social changes of the 1920s, a popular desire for "a return to normalcy" surfaced during the administratively lackluster presidencies of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge.¹³² Challenging the pluralism and excess of post-World War I America, conservatives demanded "one hundred percent Americanism" and sought to defend the so-called "traditional American way of life."¹³³ Purity Leagues and Blue Law Leagues led the crusade for prohibition as well as restrictions on immigration more strict than ever seen in this country. Simultaneously, the Ku Klux Klan resurged to its post-Civil War membership peak, attracting over five million

¹³¹ Dumenil, 145.

¹³² Fass, Paula S. The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s. (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 327-328.

members between 1920 and 1925.¹³⁴ Together constituting a nostalgic attempt to recover that long-gone, idealized, and homogeneous American way of life that existed before the Great War, these groups and others similar to them chafed dramatically at the changes brought by the twenties.¹³⁵

Notably, these groups (and Woolley, too) had to negotiate the challenging changes taking place in American feminism. With the vote newly won, the women's movement needed new direction – a new goal. United during the fight for suffrage, or at least politically focused on suffrage as the highest priority, the old split within the movement reappeared during the twenties in the debate over an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).¹³⁶ Feminists from ERA originator Alice Paul's National Woman's Party (NWP) tended to champion the argument that women should enjoy the same rights as men, nothing more, nothing less, while women involved in more voluntaristic politics and who defended protective legislation for women and children balked at totally abandoning an assertion of women's uniqueness.¹³⁷

As the internal debate within the women's movement swirled, public sensitivity to the very notion of "feminism" and its followers mounted. Increasingly, the "modern" women and the flapper, combining career and marriage and existing as an icon of women's sexual liberation, were regarded

¹³³ Dumenil, 23.

¹³⁴ Fass, 327-328.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 327.

¹³⁶ Matthews, Jean V. The Rise of the New Woman: The Women's Movement in America, 1875-1930. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 169-172.

¹³⁷ Cott, 76.

as sinister symptoms of the breakdown of the American family. Critics warned of the obliteration of sex distinctions and its counterpoint, “sex antagonism,” that is, women bitterly hating men.¹³⁸ Although ‘flappers’ were not always as scandalous as they were supposed to be, they were typically associated with such socially taboo behaviors as smoking, consuming alcohol, dancing in public, wearing revealing clothing, and sporting the boyish bobbed haircut. They represented an uninhibited “New Woman.”¹³⁹

Conservative forces were quick to stigmatize this “New Woman” as a threat to family values, even though marriage was more popular than ever in the United States and the housewife-mother model still remained the mainstream American ideal.¹⁴⁰ Since flappers caused quite visible challenge to the ideal of the chaste, respectable, passive Victorian woman, conservatives increasingly classified them as threats to the norms and values of American society.¹⁴¹ After all, women were not meant to redefine the traditional spheres of men and women, but rather to assume their roles as wives and mothers. Conservatives warned of the country-wide moral decline they assumed the advent of the flapper signaled and condemned the youth of the United States for their supposedly unpardonable disrespect towards the wisdom of their elders.¹⁴² They hoped a vigorous return to Christianity along with a resurgence

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹³⁹ Marinak, 2-7.

¹⁴⁰ Cott, 147.

¹⁴¹ Marinak, 3.

¹⁴² Cott, 61.

of Victorian morals might effectively combat the threats posed by the “New Woman” and her distinct youth culture.¹⁴³

In the midst of such negative responses, the Seven Sisters had to face the reemergence of the spinster stereotype, which suggested that higher education put a woman’s very femininity at risk.¹⁴⁴ A reality for women ever since their pursuit of higher learning began, the spinster stereotype hardened in the early 1900s and became a feature of Woolley’s presidency that eventually contributed to the development of her rhetorical recipe with its reassuring arguments about the unthreatening character of educated women. As studies revealed that graduates did not marry and have children in rates equal to those of women who were uneducated, Progressive Era critics accused the women’s colleges of promoting an Anglo-American “race suicide.”¹⁴⁵

From the start, Woolley had had to negotiate the political shoals of these gender controversies, and she did so by employing a sex-specific version of women’s rights that emphasized women’s supposedly inherent talents in the service of expanding their traditional sphere. Using her recipe with public audiences, she spoke to Mount Holyoke students on women as human beings and individuals first, but also, in echo of nineteenth-century feminist models, reminded them that women were different. Women’s difference – their unique

¹⁴³ Marinak, 21.

¹⁴⁴ Weiner, 45.

¹⁴⁵ Marinak, 52.

qualification for service in public causes – was a political advantage in Woolley’s eyes.

Though it had receded as educated women became a more common occurrence in the United States into the 1900s, the spinster stereotype returned with a vengeance as a desire for a “normalcy” replaced the liberal war-time atmosphere in the wake of World War I.¹⁴⁶ Then, as if it were not enough for conservatives to invoke the stereotype, they increasingly accused the colleges of being breeding grounds for radicals as well as for “inhibiting healthy relations between the sexes.”¹⁴⁷ Old arguments about the incompatibility of education and womanhood resurfaced and the advances made in the field of women’s higher learning again seemed under threat as conservatives linked feminism with homosexuality and a radical pursuit of women’s economic independence.¹⁴⁸

One way the Seven Sisters responded to these allegations was by expanding their available courses of study. Deviating from their long-held tradition of the liberal arts, several of the Seven Sister colleges added vocational, domestic, and cultural classes in the twenties under the guise of giving their students practical knowledge that would supplement the education provided by their traditional course of study.¹⁴⁹ Such revisions to the curriculum could appease conservative critics and make these colleges for

¹⁴⁶ Horowitz, 282.

¹⁴⁷ Horowitz, 282.

¹⁴⁸ Cott, 159-161.

women appear less threatening to traditional notions of femininity. With the addition of programs like the one in “Euthenics” at Vassar or subjects such as “Family Psychology” or “Home Economics,” the women’s colleges built up a line of defense against the charge that women’s education actually disqualified women from playing a traditional feminine role. The colleges could refer to courses like “Home Economics” as specific examples of how they were preparing their graduates for lives as wives and mothers rather than as professional, unmarried, childless, and possibly lesbian women.

Interestingly, Woolley refused to lead Mount Holyoke in the footsteps of its sister schools. In fact, she quite vociferously discouraged the addition of vocational or domestic courses to the college’s curriculum.¹⁵⁰ She acknowledge that a “swing away from the home on the recreational side has been accompanied by a similar movement in other phases of its life,” but demanded that the traditional liberal arts curriculum she had fought so hard to strengthen be maintained.¹⁵¹ As conservatives continued to vocalize their suspicions about the Seven Sisters, Woolley insisted that Mount Holyoke would not add domestic courses to its course of study, which would be a direct repudiation of the school’s history. On this issue, the Woolley recipe still worked well.

¹⁴⁹ Weiner, 34-35.

¹⁵⁰ Meeropol, 226.

¹⁵¹ Woolley, Mary. “Changing Ideals of Home Life.” Speech 472, 17 Oct 1925, printed in the Jan 1926 issue of the American Association of University Women Magazine, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 4.

In preparation for an article that was published in the Journal of the American Association of University Women titled “Changing Ideals of Home Life,” Woolley requested that each academic department and the physical education department submit a statement to her about what they were doing to prepare their students for the home after graduation.¹⁵² The Psychology department wrote back that “almost every one of our courses makes some contribution,” and the Art department asserted that “the knowledge of works of art in themselves as expressions of people who have produced them, which we try to give to our students, is a great cultural asset for a woman in her own home or in whatever home she chances to be.”¹⁵³ After receiving statements from the Sociology, Literature, Education, Economics, Physical Education, and Biblical Literature Departments as well, Woolley concluded, “[A]s liberal colleges, our function is not to become vocational, but to make perfectly clear the fact that we are laying the foundations for that superstructure, to show *where* it joins and *how*.”¹⁵⁴

In a later defense of the traditional liberal arts curriculum, Woolley observed while at a meeting of home economics workers, “[the current curriculum] develops [sic] the personality of the individual, so that she can understand and enrich the lives of those in her home.”¹⁵⁵ Repeating an

¹⁵² Ibid., 5.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 5,6.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁵ “Mome [sic] Economics Workers Hold Fall Meeting Here,” Mount Holyoke News, 23 Oct 1925, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1.

argument she developed and used again and again earlier in the century, Woolley told her audiences that the Mount Holyoke course of study provided tools transferable to a domestic life, if that was to be the fate of the graduate in question. Rather than directly challenging traditional notions of femininity, she continued, at least on the surface, her mission at Mount Holyoke (which ultimately supported an expansion of women's roles) with a defense steeped in traditional values.

In the conservative atmosphere of the 1920s during which Woolley largely refused to follow the actions of Mount Holyoke's sisters to adopt vocational, domestic, and cultural courses, a strict regulation of student life offered Woolley the bargaining point she sought. As the other schools shifted to adopt more conservative-friendly curricula, she could balance her mission, which demanded the maintenance of an ambitious academic program, by mounting a more conservative policy on student behavior. Possibly Woolley reasoned that if she could closely monitor students into maintaining more tame and conservative behaviors, critics would replace their criticism of Mount Holyoke's non-domestic academics with praise for the well-behaved, respectable, and socially acceptable young ladies it produced.

As the twenties neared their close, however, Woolley's Mount Holyoke slowly became more liberal. Regulations on student life gradually

relaxed and the student handbooks shrunk back down in size.¹⁵⁶ Rules on chapel attendance, life in the dormitories, motoring, and the requirement of chaperones all became a little less suffocating for students.¹⁵⁷ Even though Woolley still did not approve of these relaxations, she seemed to recognize that there were aspects of student life she simply could not control. Still, however, she continued to speak to the students of an idyllic atmosphere steeped in her beliefs of the necessity of women's higher education, the importance of self-discipline as a higher priority than self-fulfillment, and women's crucial place in the world.¹⁵⁸

Over time, Woolley's initial reaction against the changes of the twenties and her maintenance of a recipe of unthreatening arguments may have constituted the beginning of her ugly end at Mount Holyoke. Even if her actions were not in alignment with the decade's conservative trends, they suggested a sort of parallel last gasp attempt by Woolley to hold onto a nostalgic vision of the American past that, in truth, was impossible in the post-war world. Her degree of frustration with the students revealed an increasing disconnect between Woolley and the young women of Mount Holyoke, and her calculated assertions that educated women were especially cut out for world service *because* they were women became somewhat dated as New

¹⁵⁶ Marinak, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Cole, 284.

¹⁵⁸ Meeropol, 306.

Women rejected, largely speaking, sex-specific declarations in favor of a more straight-forward belief that women wanted the same rights as men.¹⁵⁹

Although Woolley thought the “women’s sphere” was anything a woman could do well and that women were individuals first, her continuing dialogue on women’s difference, while not surprising since she presided over a college for women only, suggested her growing distance from the then contemporary version of American feminism. As she entered into the final years of her administration, Woolley’s experiences in peace activism and the fight over her succession ultimately revealed just how far her position as president of the college had kept her behind more recent gender-blind visions in American feminism.

¹⁵⁹ Freedman, Estelle. “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930” in Sklar, Kathryn Kish & Dublin, Thomas (eds.). Women and Power in American History: Volume II from 1870, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002), 15.

CHAPTER III: IN SEARCH OF A WOMANLY PEACE

Into the twilight years of her presidency, Woolley looked more and more to the world beyond the gates of Mount Holyoke College. As one scholar of the moment wrote:

The years of developing student interest in suffrage, settlement work, and peace activism gave way in the twenties and thirties to years of exhorting educated women with newly-acquired political rights to utilize their new powers constructively. Woolley felt a sense of urgency to the work needed for peace and unity in the world. Without lessening her efforts on behalf of Mount Holyoke, she took on increasing responsibility for advocating the significant role of college women in world leadership.¹⁶⁰

Having spent years on improving the quality of the campus, academics, and student life at the college, Woolley increased her involvement in affairs decidedly outside the immediate scope of Mount Holyoke and became a living symbol for the students of the very mission she had so long hoped to instill in them. At least initially, the trustees lauded her more conspicuous role in such a variety of social causes because it increased the college's reputation and garnered publicity for Mount Holyoke.¹⁶¹

Among the many causes Woolley embraced, she became a major contributor to and supporter of the American movement for peace and disarmament. By the close of her administration, Woolley had developed a glittering résumé that plotted her support for the cause of peace. Her speaking career on peace began at Carnegie Hall in 1907, where she declared,

¹⁶⁰ Meeropol, Ann Karus. A Practical Visionary: Mary Emma Woolley and the Education of Women. Diss. University of Massachusetts Graduate School, 1992. (Amherst: U of Mass, 1992), 306.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 330.

The achievement, the distinction of the representative womanhood of today, is that it unites the intellectual and the emotional for some larger social end than the world has ever known before. Her opportunity extends from neighborhood nursing to world organization in the cause of peace...The union of the intellectual and the emotional gives to a woman peculiar fitness for work in uplifting humanity...If we would substitute arbitration for brute force, peace for war, an ideal of world unity for national and racial antagonisms, the reasonable hope of permanent accomplishment of those ends lies in the education of the children and the youth of today, the men and women of tomorrow...¹⁶²

Applying her formulaic recipe specifically to pacifism, Woolley made world peace a pursuit for which women were uniquely qualified.

By 1908 Woolley was an active member in nearly a dozen peace organizations. Among these were included the Woman's Peace Party, the League for Permanent Peace, the American School Peace League, and the League of Nations Association. As World War I became a reality for the United States, Woolley supported faculty-led peace petitions on campus and encouraged student participation in 'war relief' activities that supplemented but did not replace their traditional course work. She also attached a rider to her endorsement of Wilson's declaration of American entry into World War I that asserted "war is fundamentally wrong." After World War I, she remained active in the organizations she had joined, served as delegate to the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1925 and again in 1927, and continued to envision world

¹⁶² Woolley, Mary. "The Relation of Educated Women to the Peace Movement," Speech 1, 16 April 1907, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1-2, 4.

peace as a pursuit in which women functioned as the essential ingredient for achieving international cooperation.¹⁶³

Woolley defended peace with her characteristic pragmatism. In speeches she enumerated economic, humanitarian, and religious reasons for its necessity that complemented her assertion that “no nation liveth to itself!”¹⁶⁴ She questioned the argument that war spurs economic growth and reported, “[T]he daily cost of a great European war, including help to the poor (20 cents to one in ten) and the reduction of import, is computed at \$49,950,000.”¹⁶⁵ Simultaneously, she stressed the slaughter of bright, talented individuals, the dismantling of families, and the negative psychological effects war had on soldiers and civilians. Equating war to a waste of human life that translated to a loss of human potential and ability, Woolley told audiences, “The old theory that war is useful because it eliminates undesirable elements in the population is not true... War, instead of making a nation virile, diminishes in appalling ratio its chances of virility in the succeeding generation.”¹⁶⁶ In addition, she argued that it was impossible to reconcile war with Christianity. Woolley asked, “How has it come to pass that we who bear the name of Christ in these so-called Christian lands, have wandered so far

¹⁶³ Meeropol, 280-288.

¹⁶⁴ Woolley, Mary. “What Can Education Do for the Cause of Peace?,” Speech 128, 10 April 1913, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 4.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.

away from Him and His teachings?”¹⁶⁷ To Woolley, a world of peace was not an option, but a necessity.

Unsurprisingly, Woolley depicted education as a key ingredient in women’s lives for promoting peace and discouraging war. She viewed schools as prime resources for developing the atmosphere of international understanding necessary for maintaining peace in the world. Ironically, quoting a member of the German government who said, “Modern Germany is the work of the schoolmaster for the last thirty years,” Woolley emphasized the ability of teachers to shape young minds.¹⁶⁸ Believing that “Americans should be well informed on the international situation...,” she urged a “real study” of international relations, the teaching of “right history,” and student and teacher exchange programs to foster an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world.¹⁶⁹

To unify all her plans for the attainment and maintenance of peace, Woolley emphasized the special obligation and expertise of women. She maintained that women had a specific duty to be involved in the work for world peace and claimed that women “have a peculiar contribution to add to

¹⁶⁷ Woolley, Mary. “Women and the War,” Speech 234, 12 May 1917, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Woolley, Mary. “What Can Education Do to Further the Possibilities of International Cooperation?,” Speech 176 excerpted in the 1915 Advocate of Peace, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 203.

¹⁶⁹ Woolley, Mary. “Women’s Part and Power in the Peace Movement,” Speech 639, 29 Sept 1932, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 2; Woolley, Mary. “The Place of the Teacher in World Problems,” Speech 684, 11 Nov 1933, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 5.

the contribution of men, including especially the problem of international understanding, of the substitution of reason for armed force.”¹⁷⁰ Another time she said, “I should like to emphasize the part that women may play [in peace] because they are women!...The masculine point of view is often ‘War is horrible, but how are we going to abolish it, deep-rooted as it is, in the history of humanity?’ The feminine point of view: ‘War is horrible, and it must go.’”¹⁷¹ Because of their “peculiar” disposition for pacifism and their connections to war as mothers, wives, sisters, and children of the men who fight, Woolley made peace a women’s issue and characterized women’s pacifism as obvious, necessary, and an expression of common sense. By her reasoning, if women were in charge, wars would be much less frequent.

For years, women and pacifism had been intimately connected. As historian Harriet Hyman Alonso wrote, “What had begun in the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century evolved into a full-fledged feminist peace movement. Women’s rights and world peace had become so intertwined that organizational leaders maintained a feminist consciousness even when the times dictated that they address only issues of war and peace.”¹⁷² During World War I, organizations such as the Women’s Peace Party tackled both the

¹⁷⁰ As quoted in Marks, Jeanette. Life and Letters of Mary Emma Woolley. (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1955), 77.

¹⁷¹ Woolley, Mary. “Women’s Part in the Settlement of International Problems,” Speech 665, 20 April 1933, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3-4.

¹⁷² Alonso, Harriet Hyman. Peaces as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights. (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1993), 124.

evil of war and the fight for women's suffrage, and from these, activists developed peace as a distinct women's issue, claiming a "unique opposition to war" which stemmed from the fact that they were female.¹⁷³ This longstanding linkage between women and the dream of perpetual peace received considerable support after 1919, when the full exposure of the unspeakable carnage on the Western front prompted widespread revulsion and a "never again" sentiment.

With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the vote, women's peace organizations were no longer forced to share the stage with suffrage, and in the atmosphere of disillusionment following World War I which stemmed from the failure at Versailles and the sense that the United States had been pulled into a foreign war, the women's peace movement peaked as it capitalized on desires for American isolationism and "a return to normalcy."¹⁷⁴ Membership lists of existing peace organizations grew and new groups sprung up and flourished as Americans, especially American women, wrestled with the utopian goal of ending war forever. The women's organizations maintained the longstanding premise that women had special reason to organize for peace and sincerely believed that, now that women could vote, a new political era of permanent peace was at hand. An array of pacifist stances emerged from the active organizations with solutions

¹⁷³ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 124.

including the limitation of the production and acquisition of armaments, movement towards global disarmament, the outlawing of war, and the creation of a world-governing peace organization.¹⁷⁵ It was a time of incredible optimism that in hindsight looks far-fetched and painfully naïve.

As the United States entered into the 1930s however, the diversity among the peace organizations slowly transformed from a wealth of potential into a growing weakness.¹⁷⁶ The varied organizations struggled for strength through consensus but there was none to be found. Simultaneously, the Great Depression shrunk funds and memberships, and American war sentiment rose in response to growing Japanese imperialism and fascism in Europe.¹⁷⁷ Although isolationist sentiments still remained strong among most Americans, world peace was starting to look like wishful thinking.

Despite signs of an ailing peace movement at home and increasing militarism abroad, hope for world peace still lingered in Woolley and other women pacifists. Late in 1931, Woolley was appointed to serve as the sole woman on the American delegation to the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments that took place in Geneva from February to July of 1932.¹⁷⁸ Her appointment marked the first time that a woman served the United States as an official international delegate.¹⁷⁹ Article 8 in the League of

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 86-89.

¹⁷⁶ Chatfield, Charles (ed.). *Peace Movements in America*. (New York: Schocken, 1973), 68.

¹⁷⁷ Alonso, 124.

¹⁷⁸ Meeropol, 315.

¹⁷⁹ Detzer, Dorothy. *Appointment on the Hill*. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1948), 104.

Nation's covenant had declared a need for a world-wide reduction of armaments, and, in September of 1925, the League issued a call for an international disarmament conference to meet that stipulation. Between 1926 and 1930 a Preparatory Commission attempted to draw up an agenda for such a meeting, which eventually materialized into the conference at Geneva in 1932 in an international climate drastically changed by events in Japan and Germany since planning had begun six years before.¹⁸⁰ Although the United States never joined the League of Nations, which was to Woolley, "one of the keenest disappointments of [her] life, a disappointment personal in its intensity," President Hoover organized an American delegation consisting of Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson; Ambassador to Belgium, Hugh Gibson; Senator Claude Swanson; Norman Davis, formerly of the Department of State during the Wilson administration; and Woolley.¹⁸¹

Though Woolley claimed her appointment had come as a complete surprise, a campaign on her behalf orchestrated by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) had preceded it.¹⁸² Before Woolley's name was even being considered, Dorothy Detzer of the WILPF had been working to pressure the Hoover administration to include a woman on the delegation, while other members of the organization were seeking signatures

¹⁸⁰ Dell, Robert. *The Geneva Racket 1920 – 1939*. (London: Western Printing Services Ltd., 1941), 90.

¹⁸¹ Woolley, Mary. Draft of "Introduction to My Career as a Diplomat," Mary Emma Woolley Records, Autobiographical Material, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1, 2.

for disarmament petitions. Then, however, “the State Department announced that if the women’s organizations ‘could get together’ and agree on one woman, the Administration would take this matter ‘under consideration’ and ‘maintain an open mind’.”¹⁸³ As a result, as Detzer put it, “the women got together.”¹⁸⁴

After long discussion and consideration, the women’s organizations agreed on “the name of a good Republican, Dr. Mary Woolley, President of Mount Holyoke College.”¹⁸⁵ Yet just prior to the announcement of the delegation, Detzer received a phone call reporting that Woolley had not made the final list. Securing a last minute meeting at the state department, Detzer warned the Hoover Administration of the “stupidity” inherent in their failure to include a woman and asked, “Has the Administration forgotten that elections come with fair regularity in this country?”¹⁸⁶ Before leaving, she reminded them that “*women and elephants never forget.*”¹⁸⁷ Grudgingly, the state department finalized Woolley’s position on the delegation.¹⁸⁸

Woolley accepted her appointment without hesitation, and the press seized the novelty of her position even before it was made official by the Hoover administration.¹⁸⁹ Woolley reminisced, “Within a few moments after

¹⁸² Ibid., 1.

¹⁸³ Detzer, 104.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Wells, Anna Mary. Miss Marks and Miss Woolley. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), 214.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Secretary Stimson's call the telephone rang again and from that minute there was hardly an interlude. The Press, of course was in the vanguard, and interviews and photographs, including a motion picture staged in the living room of the President's House, consumed the main part of the succeeding days."¹⁹⁰ Letters of congratulations flooded Woolley's mailbox.

Correspondents such as Edith M. K. Tibbetts, called the conference "a great mission for humanity" and reminded Woolley of the responsibility that rested on her shoulders, speculating that "a move may be made by which this world may be set at rights."¹⁹¹ Others expressed confidence in Woolley's abilities and characterized her appointment as a logical extension of her peace activism. The dean of Vassar College, C. Mildred Thompson, wrote for example, "I could think of no appointment that would be so fitting...as your own."¹⁹² Still others suggested that Woolley was particularly qualified to serve on the delegation because she was a woman, as did one man who opined, "Certainly there is need for the sympathetic and human influence and understanding of womanhood at such a time..."¹⁹³ A sense of victory and pride in Woolley's

¹⁹⁰ Woolley, "Introduction to My Career as a Diplomat," 1.

¹⁹¹ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Edith M.K. Tibbetts to Mary Woolley, 26 Dec 1931, General Correspondence, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁹² Mary Emma Woolley Records, C. Mildred Thompson to Mary Woolley, 28 Dec 1931, General Correspondence, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Ma.

¹⁹³ Mary Emma Woolley Records, George Tamblyn to Mary Woolley, 24 Dec 1931, General Correspondence, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

appointment characterized the letters, and one telegram even called it “a great victory for the womans [sic] movement.”¹⁹⁴

As her departure neared, the letters shifted to suggest proposed resolutions, statements of support, petitions, and propositions. Letters came from men, women, children, mothers, organization representatives, church groups and schools.¹⁹⁵ C. Mildred Thompson wrote again, encouraging Woolley to work for disarmament by “upholding the only genuine security among nations as being that based upon friendliness and common understanding;” a fifth grader suggested preventing war “by each nation minding its own business;” and Evelyn Albright urged Woolley “to bring about World Disarmament [since] any kind of armament only arouses suspicion and mistrust.”¹⁹⁶ Even if the Hoover Administration regarded Woolley’s appointment as merely symbolic, the persistence of the WILPF and other women’s organizations which had accompanied her appointment exposed the significance and importance they attached to the conference. Woolley’s correspondents believed she had the potential to influence the outcome of the conference, and their letters made clear that she was going to Geneva as a representative of American women, students, and the American

¹⁹⁴ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Josephine Schain to Mary Woolley, 24 Dec 1931, General Correspondence, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁹⁵ Mary Emma Woolley Records, General Correspondence, Dec 1931, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁹⁶ Mary Emma Woolley Records, C. Mildred Thompson to Mary Woolley, 28 Dec 1931; Evelyn [?]ock to Mary Woolley, 5 Feb 1932; and Evelyn Albright to Mary Woolley, 26 April

peace organizations, particularly those run by women – a heavy burden to carry in what was essentially a lost cause.

On January 20, 1932, after spending time in Washington D.C. to prepare for the conference, Woolley left for Geneva.¹⁹⁷ Compared to the other delegates, Woolley was the least experienced diplomat in the group. In private she described herself as an “untried diplomat,” but publicly she approached the conference with confidence and enthusiasm.¹⁹⁸ One newspaper article quoted her as saying, “I feel sure that this conference will mark a starting point of a new spirit in international relations...”¹⁹⁹

On February 2, 1932 the conference opened its first session with an ironically delayed start due to the Japanese bombardment of Shanghai – an event now seen as one of the preludes to World War II.²⁰⁰ Paying no mind to such an ominous beginning, which foreshadowed the conference’s ultimate futility, Woolley remained optimistic. She wrote to Jeannette Marks, “The opening addresses are almost finished [and] everyone commented on the liberal spirit of the addresses.”²⁰¹

In Geneva Woolley served on three committees: the Committee on Petitions, the Budgetary Control Committee, and the Moral Disarmament

1932, General Correspondence, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁹⁷ Wells, 216.

¹⁹⁸ Woolley, “Introduction to My Career as a Diplomat,” 5.

¹⁹⁹ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Scrapbook, Geneva 1932, “Dr. Woolley Believes Women Will Win Arms Cut; Draws Inspiration From the Difficulties at Geneva,” Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁰⁰ Meeropol, 320.

Committee.²⁰² At the same time though, Woolley was also serving, albeit unofficially, as a liaison between the unofficial and official delegates, since her appointment had come, in effect, from the ability of the American women's organizations "to get together."²⁰³ Her work in the Committee on Petitions followed this unofficial aim of her appointment to the conference.

The Committee on Petitions consisted of five members, and Woolley was its only woman.²⁰⁴ On the committee, Woolley helped secure an official presentation in a formal ceremony of the millions of petitions that had been sent to the conference from over 50 countries.²⁰⁵ One such petition, which came from May Bell Harper, director of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union, requested "in the name of 54,000 members who have signed the Cause and Cure of War Disarmament Petition...the securing of the fullest measure of world disarmament possible."²⁰⁶ Woolley estimated that there were eight million signatures from women's groups alone, and when the committee balked at having a ceremony because of the sheer number of petitions, she argued that their overwhelming number made an official presentation all the more necessary.²⁰⁷ On February 6, over four hundred women came together in a "great gathering" to witness the presentation of the

²⁰¹ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 21 Feb 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁰² Meeropol, 319-322.

²⁰³ Ibid., 319.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 320.

²⁰⁶ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Conference Materials, Petitions for Peace, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁰⁷ Woolley, "Introduction to My Career as a Diplomat," 10.

petitions.²⁰⁸ Though she secured the formal presentation, in the end, nothing was ever done at the conference to address the concerns voiced in the petitions. The Committee on Petitions, like her place in the American delegation, was of mostly symbolic value. Just as the State Department did not expect Woolley to have much impact on the conference as a whole, the Committee on Petitions had little, if any, influence on the wider activities of the conference.

Woolley's second committee assignment was to the Budgetary Control Committee.²⁰⁹ The Committee was charged with the task of setting limits for money spent on arms, and to the annoyance of her fellow members, Woolley "stood out as long as she could for a minimum of armament expenditure."²¹⁰ One committee member complained, "If we protest...she just closes her eyes and says, 'You don't understand; there is a new spirit in the world. Besides, the President told me to work for the maximum of reduction, and I propose to work for that.'"²¹¹ Woolley, it seems, still clung to the unrealized notion that women, now enfranchised, might be able to shift the American political system with their morally superior judgment. However, she confided to Marks that "Membership on the Budgetary Commission is no sinecure" and came to the conclusion that "Men and politics are both queer!"²¹²

²⁰⁸ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 6 Feb 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁰⁹ Meeropol, 321.

²¹⁰ As cited by Meeropol, 321.

²¹¹ As cited by Meeropol, 321.

²¹² Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 11 March 1932 and 21 Feb 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

The third committee she served on was the Committee on Moral Disarmament, and it was composed of the five official female delegates at the Geneva Conference.²¹³ Its mission was to develop a plan for the “disarming of the mind” to encourage an international will for peace. Eventually, the committee composed a list of proposals to achieve Moral Disarmament that included “the education of the younger generation, cooperation of the intellectual world, and utilization of technical means of springing information...”²¹⁴ However, as the “women’s committee” at an almost entirely male conference, the Committee on Moral Disarmament, like the Committee on Petitions, went largely ignored and faded into obscurity. Writing home, Woolley noted its rhetorical status as a “somewhat unnecessary appendage to material disarmament.”²¹⁵

Outside committee work, Woolley contributed to the conference by working with the other American delegates on the speeches they gave and proposals they recommended.²¹⁶ She also made a more discreet contribution to the conference when she decided to do something about the petitions and cables she was continuing to receive from around the world which called for significant international disarmament.²¹⁷ Growing frustrated at timidity of the American delegation, Woolley picked a selection of one hundred

²¹³ Meeropol, 322.

²¹⁴ Woolley, Mary. “Disarmament,” Speech 874, undated, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 3-4.

²¹⁵ As cited by Meeropol, 322.

²¹⁶ Meeropol, 320.

“marvelous...human documents” from the total of over 2000 she had received in support of disarmament, and sent them directly to President Hoover.²¹⁸

Woolley explained, “I thought that the poor man should know more than what politicians choose to pour in his ears!”²¹⁹

Whether or not her package directly encouraged Hoover to approve the American delegation’s desire to take a more forceful stand, the American delegation secured approval in June to introduce the Hoover Plan, which proposed a reduction of all world armaments by one third.²²⁰ With only a few delegations willing to relinquish that much, forty-one of the countries represented eventually accepted the Benes Resolution – a compromise version of the Hoover Plan which committed the nations to an ambiguous and elusive “substantial reduction of world armaments.”²²¹ By the time the conference closed in July, “there were no specific agreements to limit or reduce armaments.”²²²

Even before she arrived in Geneva, Woolley had received clues that perhaps the conference would not be as successful as she had once hoped. Stopping in France on the way, Woolley met the mayor of Cherbourg, whose discouraging parting words were, “Good luck to you at the Conference.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 323.

²¹⁸ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 20 May 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Meeropol, 325.

²²¹ Ibid., 326.

²²² Ibid.

Disarm everyone – except France!”²²³ She had resolved to be optimistic and hard-working; but as she acquired a political education in Geneva, her frustrations about the possibility of peace through arms limitation and reduction increased. She frequently wrote home to Marks, voicing her growing disenchantment with the conference.

After the initial sense of direction and purpose that came with the opening of conference wore off, Woolley recognized the difficulty of the task that lay before her and the other delegates. On February 21 she wrote, “As Senator Swanson says, ‘What is the use of talking about moral disarmament when every country says it is already morally disarmed!’ Now comes the task of applying these high moral principles and this is not going to be so easy!”²²⁴ She increasingly grew tired of the unwritten rules of international diplomacy and complained about the suspicions maintained between the various delegations. She wrote, for example, “Litvinoff’s [a Soviet delegate] scheme appeals to me, but alas! the other nations think it only a scheme to promote communism and there seems no chance for it.”²²⁵ As France emerged as a country especially unwilling to give up her ‘defenses,’ Woolley grumbled about the unwillingness of certain countries to give up anything that might threaten their ability to defend themselves. She wrote, “For a week, I have sat

²²³ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 31 Jan 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²²⁴ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 21 Feb 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

‘glued’ to the chairs in the assembly, listening to endless speeches, being stirred by the small powers...and depressed...by the ‘big’ ones.”²²⁶

Woolley also sent home remarks on the absurdity of the attempts made in the General Assembly to draft a resolution. In an ironic tribute to the powers of film given her previous dismissal of movies as mind-numbing influences on Mount Holyoke’s students, she wrote, “I would give a great deal to have a movie to show the United States Senate!”²²⁷ Woolley was deeply troubled by the ineffectiveness of the conference. She lamented, “I feel so helpless not only for myself – but for our delegation.”²²⁸ On another occasion she fumed,

You are right in thinking that there are some difficulties in being a woman. I must be effective but not aggressive; womanly but not womanly; equal to social obligations but always on hand for the business ones; informed but unable to take my pipe and join other “pipers” in the corridors during translations – et cetera, et cetera!!²²⁹

Woolley wanted the American delegation to take a firm stand and really make an impact on the conference, but talk replaced effective action. She wrote, “Events move slowly. It is surprising how much time is consumed in [illegible] action.”²³⁰

²²⁵ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 28 Feb 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²²⁶ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 11 March 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 6 March 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²²⁹ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 22 April 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²³⁰ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 11 March 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

As March came to a close, the delegates at the conference were granted a three-week recess that Woolley looked forward to with great relief. During the time off she visited Paris and returned to Geneva early to get a head start on work related to the conference. While in Paris Woolley delivered speeches on the ‘accomplishments’ of the conference to date and expressed an enthusiastic sense of optimism that contrasted sharply with her private letters home.²³¹ As president of Mount Holyoke she had learned to be a politician, and that experience instructed her defense of the conference.

In her first address, Woolley was quoted as saying, “Geneva feels that much solid groundwork has been laid. Resumption of the conference’s work will be made with optimistic feelings.” Then, according to an article on her second speech, “Three outstanding gains – official statements in favor of disarmament, increased mutual confidence through conversations, and setting up of machinery for settling problems when the Conference reopens on April 11 – were credited to the disarmament conference at Geneva by Miss Mary Emma Woolley...” She characterized the conference up until the point of the recess as “two months of significant happenings” and called for an “emphasis on the positive rather than upon the negative” as well as a recognition of the “unrecorded advances” made through conversations between nations. Woolley asserted, “These opening weeks have been only the preliminaries to the real

²³¹ As told in Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 19 March 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

work of the Conference...but they have not been discouraging preliminaries – far from it!”²³² She had become the conference’s official public optimist.

Knowing that it would not have been good publicity for the conference to reveal the frustrations she felt and the difficulties she identified with the conference, Woolley’s optimism functioned as an attempt to reassure the public and simultaneously present international disarmament as a still viable, attainable option. She genuinely wanted to see real results come out of the conference in Geneva and believed that her own dream of seeing great accomplishment there was possible. However, she was up against the slew of delegations that had come to the conference with little intent of causing real movement toward world peace and pressure from the organizations that were relying on her. She wrote, “There is inevitably a strain at Geneva which I realize more when away from it.”²³³

After the recess, Woolley returned to Geneva with a renewed sense of purpose. She had recuperated and felt well-rested. Soon enough, though, her disenchantment with the conference returned. Her biggest lament remained the failure of the Hoover administration to support more aggressive action by the American delegation. She wrote, “The acting Secretary of State is not as progressive as Mr. Stimson and I think the Administration needs to be

²³² All quotes from articles enclosed in Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 28 March 1932, (*The Herald Tribune*, Paris ed.), Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²³³ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 28 March 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

extorted a bit!”²³⁴ A week later she wrote home asking, “Can you suggest a synonym for “patience,” the thing of which we need the most?”²³⁵

By May, it seemed Woolley had decided to face the conference with an unflagging doggedness. Although its endless meetings and lofty pronouncements continued to irritate her, Woolley’s letters shifted to suggest a determination resident in her to accomplish something in Geneva however small that might be. She wrote, “I can’t understand this attitude of going down into our boots whenever things fail to be on the crest of the wave. [Illegible] does not give up in time of war because there are difficulties; why do it in this crusade?”²³⁶ She became defensive and wrote Marks, “You say: ‘Can’t you do something over there?’ Well, we are trying to do something!”²³⁷ A restless desire for some last minute accomplishment and a feeling that that accomplishment might be just around the corner obsessed her. On June 9 Woolley wrote, “I need all the support I can get for these are anxious days. I have a feeling, intensified, that June will decide whether anything is to be accomplished before the summer adjournment...”²³⁸

²³⁴ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 22 April 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²³⁵ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 16 April 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²³⁶ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 5 May 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²³⁷ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 28 May 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²³⁸ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 9 June 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

Finally, the American delegation received approval to submit their Hoover Plan. Woolley wrote excitedly,

While at luncheon Mr. Gibson came up to me with a beaming countenance to say that a cable had just come from the President granting all that we want – and more! I went right up to his office and read it feeling transported to the Seventh Heaven. It is great.

Of course there will have to be the right handling in order not to “spill the beans,” but it gives the delegation a free hand and puts the United States in the position of suggesting something rather than trailing behind.

As if breathing a sigh of relief, she closed her letter, “Thank the Lord!”²³⁹ Yet, her optimism subsided as the negotiations turned into stalemate. On July 1, Woolley wrote, “I hardly know where to say we ‘are at.’”²⁴⁰ She speculated on “maneuvers” between the English and French delegations to “block” the proposals of the Hoover Plan and called the Japanese delegation “a menace to civilization.”²⁴¹ As successful resolution seemed less likely, Woolley’s thoughts shifted to coming home. Then, on July 24 she described the conference’s closing writing: “Mr. Henderson was great yesterday in “summing up” when he said that the “resolution did not go as far as many of us would like, but laid down a great program which must be fulfilled at the next session... We adjourned just before one in an atmosphere of happy

²³⁹ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 19 June 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁴⁰ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 1 July 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁴¹ Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 1 & 3 July 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

speeches and good feelings...”²⁴² To Woolley, Geneva had come up short, but she could not admit that it was a complete failure.

Upon its conclusion, a consensus of dissatisfaction and disappointment dominated the women’s organizations. In private, Woolley conceded that there had been many “missed opportunities” at Geneva.²⁴³ With the ambiguous and unenforceable Benes Resolution as its primary success, the conference and Woolley’s performance there eventually became characterized as failures. Detzer reflected, “I have always felt that had the U.S. delegation contained one outstanding personality...the results might have been different. One could hardly expect...the timidity of Mary Woolley to stir and sway the conference.”²⁴⁴ Historian Harriet Hyman Alonso speculated, “Perhaps [Woolley] had simply felt overpowered by the dominant male presence in an international arena so unlike her own female world at Mount Holyoke.”²⁴⁵

Upon her return to the United States Woolley gave many speeches on the “accomplishments” of the Geneva conference to head off its critics. As she described the conference in her speeches, it bore little, if any, resemblance to the frustration and disillusionment she had voiced to Marks in so many of her letters home. She asserted, “The inference that the first session [of the

²⁴² Mary Emma Woolley Records, Mary Woolley to Jeannette Marks, 24 July 1932, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

²⁴³ As quoted in Meeropol, 326.

²⁴⁴ Detzer, 112.

²⁴⁵ Alonso, 121.

Disarmament Conference] accomplished nothing is a mistake.”²⁴⁶ Woolley emphasized the significance of the Hoover Plan, the Benes Resolution, the French and British plans, and the establishment of a Permanent Arms Commission as well as the mobilization of public opinion, the beginnings of moral disarmament, and the expression of an international will for peace.²⁴⁷

Nevertheless, as one part of what was basically becoming an in absentia presidency, the Geneva Conference eventually created an opening for criticizing Woolley’s more than three decade leadership of Mount Holyoke. The conference had taken her away from campus for more than seven months and then continued to do so for many months more as she defended its worth and continued her other pacific activities.²⁴⁸ Woolley’s last five years at Mount Holyoke, as Anna Mary Wells wrote, became “hard years for the college as well as for her; she had been requested specifically, by students, faculty, and trustees, to lessen her outside commitments in order to devote more time to the college. Yet...she devoted less time to the college than ever in the thirty preceding years.”²⁴⁹ Furthermore, the experience of the conference aligned her with an ultimately futile undertaking and created the sense that all her time away had been wasted. Woolley continued to talk about

²⁴⁶ Woolley, Mary. “The Disarmed Mind,” originally given 20 Feb 1933, Speech 658, excerpt published in the Pan-Pacific Union Bulletin, December 1932, Mary Emma Woolley Records, Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 16.

²⁴⁷ Woolley, Mary E. Internationalism and Disarmament. (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 16-22, 30.

²⁴⁸ Marks, 157-160.

²⁴⁹ Wells, 224.

peace as a women's issue even though it became quite clear that, as a woman, she had had little effect on the conference in Geneva. Though unarguably she had been pigeon-holed into a symbolic position that stifled her abilities, Woolley's optimistic talks in the face of a disintegrating peace movement and growing German and Japanese militarism abroad, which essentially offered a preview to World War II, seemed only to throw into sharper relief the limits of her feminist recipe and idealistic mission for Mount Holyoke women.

Compounding all this, the trustees and Woolley, who returned from Geneva at age sixty-nine, both knew that it was time to start looking for a successor. For some time, Woolley had planned to retire at seventy, deeming that an appropriate age at which to step down, but in September of 1932, Henry Hyde, president of the board of trustees, had asked her to remain in office until the college's centennial in 1937.²⁵⁰ Having never made his request official, Hyde died the next year, but Woolley upheld his wishes nevertheless.²⁵¹ Alva Morrison replaced Hyde as president of the board of trustees, and with the assistance of Howell Cheney and Harry P. Kendall, he undertook an "opposition to Miss Woolley and a good deal of what she stood for" in her last years at the college that crystallized in the struggle to name her successor.²⁵² Morrison, it seemed, wanted to fundamentally change the Mount Holyoke Woolley had led, which was so dedicated to the development of

²⁵⁰ Wells, 223; Marks, 155.

²⁵¹ Wells, 223.

²⁵² Ibid., 228.

strong women leaders, into a less gender-driven school. The Boston Globe suggested, “In degrees varying with their temperaments, these men of affairs had experienced masculine impatience with the ways of spinster management.”²⁵³

A Committee on the Succession to the Presidency had been appointed from the board of trustees as early as 1932, but a new committee of three men (Morrison, Kendall, and Cheney) and two women (Mary Hume Maguire and Rowena Keith Keyes) formed in 1934.²⁵⁴ Slowly it became evident that Woolley might be replaced by a man.²⁵⁵ When it became known early in 1936 that the trustees did indeed intend to appoint a male president, a drawn-out conflict ensued between the faculty members, students, trustees, alumnae, women’s organizations, and Woolley herself. Claiming that no suitable female candidate existed, the trustees eventually selected Roswell Ham, a Professor of English at Yale.²⁵⁶ After thirty years of dedicating Mount Holyoke to a mission that emphasized the development of strong women leaders, Woolley asserted that the appointment of a male president suggested that the college had failed in its task. She wrote to the trustees, “The choice of a woman for the post seems to me most important from every point of view. I should feel that the celebration of the Centennial of Mary Lyon’s effort to open opportunities to women as human beings on an equal basis with men would

²⁵³ As quoted by Wells, 228.

²⁵⁴ Wells, 229; Meeropol, 334.

²⁵⁵ Marks, 161.

better be omitted, if a part of that celebration is the installation of a man as President of Mount Holyoke. The importance of this action is not limited to Mount Holyoke.”²⁵⁷

Woolley’s years of publicly and rhetorically reconciling education and women’s traditional role in the home, asserting women’s peculiar attunement to change the world, revitalizing a vision of Christian service, and portraying women as an underutilized natural resource had become a vestige of the past. Her tactic of defending women’s education, and by extension women’s leadership, with a recipe of unthreatening arguments no longer worked its old magic. But because she was still president of the college, Woolley knew she could not make her protest seem personal even if she was solidly against the appointment of a man.²⁵⁸ She never attacked Ham directly but continuously spoke on the tradition of women’s leadership at Mount Holyoke, emphasizing how deviation from that would have implications beyond the scope of the college and suggesting that the appointment of a man “would be a blow to the advancement of women.”²⁵⁹ However, the faculty (led by Jeannette Marks), the alumnae (led by Amy Rowland and Caroline Smiley’s Committee of 100), and the American Association of University Women each mounted campaigns in protest of Ham’s appointment.²⁶⁰ Simultaneously, though, the overwhelmingly male Board of Trustees vigorously defended their selection

²⁵⁶ Marks, 171-172; Meeropol, 340.

²⁵⁷ As quoted by Marks, 161.

²⁵⁸ Meeropol, 344.

²⁵⁹ As quoted by Marks, 165.

with the help of a smaller group of alumnae.²⁶¹ The pro and anti factions spat back and forth, and each released increasingly sensationalized publications and sent in letters of support or protest.

To those protesting the appointment of a man, the trustees had acted in violation of tradition, censored Woolley unfairly, manipulated ambiguous by-laws, ignored the majority opinion of the faculty, appointed an unqualified individual, and kept the alumnae in the dark.²⁶² However, Ham's supporters wrote off the protesters as "a handful of antiquated females."²⁶³ They thought the appointment of a woman was unnecessary and by no means mandatory at Mount Holyoke. Several times, their comments suggested that female leadership at the college was unneeded because the major goals of feminism had already been achieved. One class of 1931 alumna wrote, "It seems to me that a militant attitude about careers for women is now quite unnecessary."²⁶⁴ Ham himself offered, "Mary Lyon was not a feminist. She was used to working with men...Besides, the fight for feminism is over now."²⁶⁵

While the division was by no means clearly split between young and old alumnae, as a vocal group of Mount Holyoke women rejected the almost one hundred year tradition of women's leadership at their college, it became evident how much American feminism had changed, and as such, how much

²⁶⁰ Meeropol, 341-342, 348.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 358.

²⁶² Ibid., 351-352

²⁶³ As quoted by Meeropol, 360.

²⁶⁴ As quoted by Meeropol, 360.

²⁶⁵ As quoted by Meeropol, 353.

Woolley's vision of the same had not. It seemed, as one historian put it, that "[t]he old feminist leaders lost their following when a new generation opted for assimilation in the naïve hope of becoming men's equals overnight."²⁶⁶

While co-education was never explicitly considered during the succession fight, the trustees appointed a male president to move the college as far away as possible from the particular Mount Holyoke Woolley had created during her thirty-six years. Ham, who brought a 'normal' family to fill the president's house and supposedly had access to wealthier, male donors, would modernize and balance Mount Holyoke's sex separatism, which at the time of the college's founding had been obvious and essential but by the end of Woolley's term had become tradition at best and a feature to be carefully supervised at worst. Woolley's years of promoting "women as human beings" by way of a defense that emphasized female solidarity and sex-specific traits that attuned women for significant roles in the world had been unseated by a complacency at the college about the need for female solidarity and the pursuit of women's rights. In that sense, the appointment of a male president represented a half-step towards coeducation at the college. However, her organization of the Centennial celebration, the last major undertaking of her

²⁶⁶ Freedman, Estelle. "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930" in Sklar, Kathryn Kish & Dublin, Thomas (eds.). Women and Power in American History: Volume II from 1870, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002), 15.

presidency, granted Woolley the last word and a last opportunity to rouse Mount Holyoke women into action.

EPILOGUE: THE END OF HER ERA

On May 7 and 8, 1937 Mount Holyoke College commemorated its one hundredth anniversary with a Centennial celebration. Planned by Woolley with the assistance of thirty committees and fifty subcommittees, the two-day event included an impressive program of remembrance, speeches, honorary degrees, song, dance, and dramatic interpretation.²⁶⁷ Between thirteen and fourteen thousand invitations were sent out to colleges and universities, family, friends, alumnae, faculty, federal and state officials, international groups, and domestic organizations.²⁶⁸ As revealed by the preliminary invitation, the purpose of the celebration was “not only to honour [Mount Holyoke’s] founder and with her the generous donors who made possible her dream, but to commemorate and renew her pledge.”²⁶⁹

Planning for the Centennial celebration had begun in May of 1934, but as the event approached, Woolley seized upon the celebration as an opportunity to air some of the controversial issues that swirled about the campus as the decision to appoint a man to the presidency of the college became known.²⁷⁰ Indeed, the foreword in the official college publication on the event remarked, “The election of a new president, to take office a year later, focused the attention of the College, of the alumna, of the English-

²⁶⁷ Meeropol, Ann Karus. A Practical Visionary: Mary Emma Woolley and the Education of Women. Diss. University of Massachusetts Graduate School, 1992. (Amherst: U of Mass, 1992), 366.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 364.

²⁶⁹ The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College: May 7-8, 1937. (Menasha: George Banta Publishing Company, 1937), opposite title page.

²⁷⁰ Meeropol, 364.

speaking world, for at least an enlightening moment, on the contemporary record of educated women. The final year of the first hundred, and the final year of an unbroken succession of women principals and presidents, became an unexpectedly stimulating time, in an unexpectedly conspicuous place, for the celebration recorded in this book.”²⁷¹

Working in open conflict with Edgar Furniss from the Board of Trustees, Woolley sought to develop “a symposium on Women at Work in the World.”²⁷² She envisioned an event in which, “The participants would be Mount Holyoke alumnae who were accomplished in their respective fields, not alumnae who represented the ‘rank and file’ as Furniss would have liked.”²⁷³ Insisting that the college grant honorary degrees only to women and exclude presidential appointee Ham from the event, Woolley pooled together some of the most distinguished women leaders in the world. In the context of her failure to preserve women’s leadership at the college, Woolley dedicated the Centenary “to Mount Holyoke’s 17,472 daughters of the first century,” fashioned it as a celebration of women’s advancement in the world, and planned it to include a frank evaluation of the threats that existed to women’s progress.²⁷⁴

The Centennial officially opened at 7 o’clock on Friday morning with the light-hearted “Student Frolic,” which celebrated the interconnectedness of

²⁷¹ The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College, in “Foreword.”

²⁷² Meeropol, 366.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Mount Holyoke and its daughter schools with a symbolic Maypole dance.²⁷⁵ However, gears shifted at nine o'clock with the Centenary Service of Commemoration, in which the litany included a prayer "...for all who today are entering in to this goodly heritage, that they may not fail nor falter, but in loyalty to great traditions and in realization of a great opportunity, may be worthy of all who have gone before."²⁷⁶ A sense that the college stood at a very significant crossroads pervaded the proceedings of the two-day event.

After the service, the Alumnae Symposium, featuring Frances Perkins and Woolley, kicked off the Centennial's speaking program. The rest of the day included the Alumnae Luncheon, a powerful talk by historian Mary Ritter Beard, 'Departmental Exhibits,' a historical pantomime about Mount Holyoke's opening day in 1837, a party in the college's garden, an interpretative dance recital entitled "Changing America," and a 'Canoe Pageant' on Lower Lake. The next day, women speakers dominated the podium with topics including "Women in Public Affairs" and "Woman and Peace." Honorary degrees were bestowed upon twenty women and the Goldman Band played a concert at the end of the day that concluded the Centennial celebration.²⁷⁷

Commenting on the whole of the Centennial, a reporter wrote, "From all that was said and done here a stranger would assume that Mt. Holyoke has

²⁷⁴ The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College, following title page.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 8.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., vii-viii.

no trustees and Miss Woolley no successor.”²⁷⁸ Over the course of the celebration the guests at Mount Holyoke had listened to “...a program of speeches addressing women’s loss of opportunities for leadership, men’s unfair exercise of control over women’s decisions, and women’s unquestioning and expected subservience to male leadership.”²⁷⁹ Frances Perkins, Mary Ritter Beard, Margery Corbett-Ashby, and Virginia Crocheron Gildersleeve had emerged as the most frank among the speakers.

During the Alumnae Symposium, Perkins spoke on the underutilization of the power of women’s groups. She pointed out that they continued to make social contributions and also noted that “the actual number [of women in them] who occupy important public positions is exceedingly small...”²⁸⁰ Later in the day, not so subtly bringing up the loss of women’s leadership at Mount Holyoke, Beard told her audience, “What happens on this campus is symbolic of happenings in all women’s education.”²⁸¹ Then, on Saturday, to the horror of several gasping members of the audience, Corbett-Ashby asked, “How many [women] are heads of great educational establishments?”²⁸² She continued her talk with an honest account of women’s loss of leadership positions in the world and made a request for, “Loyalty of

²⁷⁸ As quoted by Meeropol, 368.

²⁷⁹ Meeropol, 368.

²⁸⁰ Perkins, Frances. “The Role of the College Woman in the Community,” in The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College, 27.

²⁸¹ Beard, Mary Ritter. “The Direction of Women’s Education,” in The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College, 59.

women to women, fair play from men.”²⁸³ Picking up the themes introduced by Corbett-Ashby, Gildersleeve asserted, “It is less easy for our sex to gain those professorships in colleges and universities... True, we have made great progress in the last hundred years in opening professorships to women but not much, I imagine, in the last twenty-five, for we have not many more women professors in coeducational universities, and we have proportionately fewer in women’s colleges...our sex seems to be losing out on both fronts.”²⁸⁴ By the analysis of Beard, Corbett-Ashby, and Gildersleeve, the loss of female leadership coincided with decline in women’s education as a whole.

Woolley’s organization of the Centennial had maintained her characteristic dignity but revealed, through the speeches of others, the significance and tragedy of the loss of women’s leadership at Mount Holyoke College. Still conscious of the fact that as president she could not simply say whatever she wanted to whenever she wanted to, she recruited a panel of women who spoke succinctly and, in effect, gave Woolley the last word. Her planning turned the Centennial into a ‘teach-in’ of sorts and allowed her to leave Mount Holyoke advocating, albeit indirectly, a campaign for women’s solidarity.

On July 27, 1937, soon after leading her last Commencement ceremony and sorting and packing up her belongings, Woolley left Mount

²⁸² Corbett-Ashby, Margery. “Women in Public Affairs,” in The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College, 81.

²⁸³ Ibid., 85.

Holyoke for good.²⁸⁵ She moved into Marks' house in Westport, removed from her friends and family. Hoping to stay active in her retirement, Woolley continued her activities in pacifism to promote international understanding and disarmament, despite the reality of World War II, until a stroke in 1944 severely disabled her. Confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life, Woolley died on September 5, 1947.²⁸⁶

During her thirty-six years at Mount Holyoke, Woolley forever changed the college. In the end however, she may have lingered too long. Her calculated recipe had allowed her initially to modernize the college and establish the requisite facilities for developing strong women leaders without appearing radical. Over time though, the gap between Woolley and the young women of Mount Holyoke had only widened. Her experience in the twenties had included an honest disappointment in the students, an unprecedented fundraising campaign, more restrictive policies on student life, accusations by conservatives that women's colleges developed spinsters, lesbians, and radicals, and actions by the other Seven Sisters which challenged the maintenance of a strong liberal arts curriculum at the college. Her beliefs in "women as human beings" were tempered by her position as president and the reputation of the college, and as such, her distance from contemporary feminism was only increased. As she became a more distant and, finally,

²⁸⁴ Gildersleeve, Virginia Crocheron. "The Bright Countenance of Truth," in The Centenary of Mount Holyoke College, 91, 92.

²⁸⁵ Wells, Anna Mary. Miss Marks and Miss Woolley. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), 239.

basically in absentia president, Woolley's became also, it seems, a vestige of Mount Holyoke's past in which she had led a secular version of the Mary Lyon missionary ideal. Although the Centennial celebration credited Woolley with creating the modern Mount Holyoke, there was an undeniable sense that an era had ended at the college. Woolley's time at Mount Holyoke was up, and as she left, her vigor for developing strong women leaders seemed replaced by a studied complacency at the college about women's rights.

Looking back over the nearly seventy years after Woolley left Mount Holyoke, one recognizes, as the speakers she selected for the Centennial had warned, that indeed the women's movement was not over. While Woolley was behind the mainstream feminist wave of her present and was dubbed an anachronistic vestige of a "spinster" past, she was ahead of the movement's future waves and was, in a sense, almost prophetic. Suffrage was only one milestone in a fight which still continues today for women's full equality in the world. Women rallied together during the rebirth of American feminism in the late sixties and early seventies and told the world that, while women and men should be equal in rights, they are also different. Mount Holyoke College still remains a special place for women to become leaders, pursue academic excellence, and instruct positive change in the world. Although she never returned to the college, history, in some sense, has validated Woolley's

²⁸⁶ Meeropol, 380, 389; Wells, 244, 255.

assertions of women's uniqueness, and her spirit has lived on at Mount Holyoke and in the world ever after.

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