

1837. The centennial of the beginning of college education for women and of coeducation on the college level 1937. [by] Ernest Hatch Wilkins. President of Oberlin college. Oberlin, Ohio June 15, 1937.

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THE CENTENNIAL OF THE BEGINNING OF COLLEGE EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND OF COEDUCATION ON THE COLLEGE LEVEL

1937

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FOUR WOMEN

IN the early autumn of 1837 four young women and thirty young men entered as Freshmen the four-year course at Oberlin College leading toward the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

The four young women were Mary Hosford of Oberlin, Ohio; Mary Fletcher Kellogg of Jamestown, New York; Elizabeth Smith Prall of New York City; and Caroline M. Rudd of Huntington, Connecticut. *They were the first women to be accepted for a standard college course. Their matriculation in September, 1837, was the beginning of actual college education for women. It was, as well, the beginning of coeducation on the college level.* College education for women thus began as coeducation.

Oberlin College had opened its doors almost four years before, and had been granted a charter by the Ohio Legislature early in 1834. Its first circular had announced that among its objectives was "the elevation of female character, by bringing within the reach of the misjudged and neglected sex, all the instructive privileges which hitherto have unreasonably distinguished the leading sex from theirs."

Until 1837, however, only men students were enrolled in the Collegiate LC

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Department, where the course offered was equivalent to that then followed at Yale College. The course offered by the Female Department was not of college grade, but corresponded to courses given in the ladies' seminaries of the East.

Mary Hosford, Mary Kellogg, Elizabeth Prall and Caroline Rudd had all been registered in the Female Department—one of them as early as the Summer Term of 1834. It is even likely that they

attended some of the classes in the Collegiate Department before 1837, for Oberlin's First Annual Report announced that the higher classes of the Female Department will be permitted to enjoy the privileges of such professorships in the Teacher's, Collegiate, and Theological Departments as shall best suit their sex, and prospective employment.

The matriculation of these four young women marked the taking of that final citadel so long and so strongly held by a world which considered the feminine mind incapable of higher pursuits of learning.

Like many events which have proved to be highly significant in the history of the world, it was not widely heralded. The early records of the College reveal no contemporary statements of its importance, no ringing phrases of oratory. The Treasurer's account-book for 1837 simply testifies in fading ink that Mary Hosford, Mary Kellogg, Elizabeth Prall and Caroline Rudd paid their admission fee into the Collegiate Department—and the current catalogue lists them as Freshmen. Four years later three of them received the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

To one observer, the event did not pass unnoticed. In the *Annals of American Education* for October, 1838, William Woodbridge reviewed

* American annals of education (Boston)?

the general skepticism toward the Oberlin experiment and summed up:

...the experiment is unequivocally successful. We consider it now fully established, that the sexes may be educated together.

This discovery is one of the most important ever made. The benefits which are likely to flow from it are immense. Woman is to be free. The hour of her emancipation is at hand. Daughters of America, rejoice!

The four young women of 1837 were pioneers for the hundreds of thousands of women who have followed in their footsteps. Today there are in the United States alone some five hundred seventy institutions of learning where college courses are open to women. It is estimated that during the past one hundred years more than one million women have received the degree of Bachelor of Arts. College education for women has had an effect upon every phase of civilization that is as incalculable as it is profound.

By order of the Board of Trustees, Oberlin College will devote the day of October 8, 1937, to ceremonies appropriately celebrating the Centennial of the Beginning of College Education for Women and of Coeducation on the College Level. In a larger sense, however, the Centennial belongs



not to Oberlin, but to the whole college world. The Board of Trustees hopes that many colleges and universities, older and younger, whether coeducational or for men or for women, may be moved to recognize this centennial in the autumn of 1937 at such time and in such fashion as may seem most appropriate to them.

Oberlin, Ohio June 15, 1937

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