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## Anna Peck Sill and the Rise of Women's Collegiate Curriculum

Lucy Townsend  
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ANNA PECK SILL

AND THE RISE OF WOMEN'S COLLEGIATE CURRICULUM

by

Lucy Forsyth Townsend

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment  
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March

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provided much assistance.

Most of all I am grateful to my husband, Jim, for supporting and encouraging me in all phases of this project.

## PREFACE

In the spring of 1926, Jane Addams of Hull House stood before a class of women receiving their B.A. degrees from Rockford College in Illinois. "Here we are at the beginning of the last lap of our first century," she said. "A certain challenge is coming to educated women of the world which would not exist in the seventy-five years just finished."

The challenge of which Addams spoke resulted from an intense struggle peculiar to the nineteenth century. Women like Mary Lyon, Emma Willard, and Zilpah Grant Banister worked relentlessly to provide American women with the higher education they had previously been denied. The institutions they founded were called female seminaries, a well defined type after 1775 and influential until around 1870. A lesser known women's educator named Anna Peck Sill founded a female seminary in the bustling frontier community of Rockford, Illinois. When Sill was born in 1816 most American girls were taught only the rudiments of learning. Even when they did manage to master the classical languages necessary for admittance into a college, they were denied entrance because of their sex.

Yet Sill refused to remain unlearned. Using her two

dollars a week earned from teaching in a New York district school, she attended one of the newly opened seminaries in frontier New York. Throughout the rest of her life, whether teaching or administering Rockford Female Seminary, she battled against poverty, ill health, and obscurantism to overcome the sexual barriers to higher education.

Anna Sill's seminary existed for thirty-three years before the Board of Trustees considered its curriculum rigorous enough to warrant the awarding of college degrees. In the first group of students to receive the coveted Bachelor of Arts degree stood the woman who would speak at the school's seventy-fifth anniversary. This young woman, Jane Addams, received the Nobel Peace Prize forty-two years after Anna Sill's death.

Jane Addams never forgot the struggle of her forebears. "I beg of you," she said to the 1926 graduates of Rockford College, "sometimes to remember the old seminary which turned out some of us in the older days." This paper is that remembrance. It tells the story of Anna Peck Sill's struggle to provide a collegiate education for the daughters of the western frontier.

## VITA

The author, Lucy Forsyth Townsend, is the daughter of Frank J. Forsyth, Jr., and Dolores (Webber) Forsyth. She was born 16 September 1944 in Pikeville, Kentucky.

She attended the Pikeville College Training School in her home town and the public elementary schools of Stevenson, Alabama and Belle Meade, New Jersey. She graduated second in her class from Marine City High School, Marine City, Michigan, in June 1962. In June 1964 she graduated with high honor from Port Huron Junior College, Port Huron, Michigan; and received the B.A. (with honor) in English (education) from Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. She received a teaching assistantship to Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee, and graduated with an M.A. in English literature in August 1970. In 1979 she graduated with an M.A. in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

She has taught writing and literature at community college and university levels. She has also taught elementary school and served as a children's Christian education director. She belongs to the Society for Educational Biography; Presbyterian Historical Society; the

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Representing Loyola University's Graduate School, she was awarded the 1884 President's Medallion. She has published curriculum, fiction, poetry, drama, feature, and historical articles.



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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY LIFE

#### An Introduction

On a spring day in 1849, a tall woman in her early thirties stepped down from a stagecoach that rumbled into Rockford, Illinois, three times each week. She wore the plain, stiff dress of a Puritan, her long dark hair coiled into a neat bun. The townspeople who gathered around the coach probably thought she and her companion were teachers, for New England women had been arriving to teach schools scattered throughout the newly settled frontier. What these strangers could not have guessed was that the tall Puritan had left behind every vestige of security--a New York teaching post, familiar faces, and salary--to set out on a bold mission. With no promise of salary or even pupils, she had only a letter from a local Congregational minister asking her to start a school. Yet the woman in the heavy, rustling skirt was no ordinary district teacher. She was Anna Peck Sill, pioneer woman's educator.

The school Sill founded, Rockford Female Seminary, was one of the few women's institutions to grow from secondary

status to full college rank. Her efforts began in an abandoned courthouse with fifty-three girls, most under ten, reciting lessons. Yet thirty-five years later, Sill's school had become an endowed institution for women, with chapel, dormitory, and lecture halls; with a library of over two thousand volumes; with literary societies; and most important, with a full collegiate course of instruction leading to a bachelor's degree.

For a nineteenth century woman to have accomplished all this, a spinster with no college education, would have seemed well nigh impossible to most people. According to the popular view, women belonged in the home where they had little need for intellectual sophistication. Anyway, women were too delicate to pursue strenuous academics, not strong enough physically to withstand the pressures of dormitory life. Higher education belonged only to men. By her example and the collegiate curriculum she offered midwestern women, Sill helped shatter such myths.

There are those, however, who have questioned whether Sill really effected any change in women's education. Wasn't it the men behind Sill, the board of trustees, who did all the planning, the fund raising, the upgrading of the curriculum? And wasn't the bachelor's degree only a fashionable but empty gesture? What evidence exists to show that the seminary's curriculum was collegiate in substance as well as in name?

A second set of questions concerns Sill, the person.

Why was she so determined to advance women academically? Was she the stereotypically bitter spinster whose career was only the product of a thwarted craving for home and family? If not, what motivated her relentless struggle to provide collegiate instruction of the highest quality?

The second set of questions is perhaps as difficult to answer as the first. Sill's journal and an autobiography which she began in later life have been lost. What remain are the reminiscences of those she influenced, public records, alumnae addresses, some correspondence, a scrapbook of newspaper articles, a memorial published soon after her death--from these can be gleaned a picture of the institution she formed and the personality behind her title.

#### Family Background

To understand Anna Peck Sill, one must know something about her ancestors. She descended from a long line of Puritans whose religious convictions and strength of character are perhaps their most dominant characteristics. Her earliest American ancestors, John and Joanna, revealed something of the family adventurousness when in 1637 they emigrated from England to Cambridge, Massachusetts, only eighteen years after the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth and seven years after the village was settled. Their son, Joseph, distinguished himself while serving as a captain in the Indian War of 1676. He married Jemima Belcher, niece of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Danford and aunt of Governor

Joanthan Belcher of Massachusetts. Joseph Sill could have settled permanently in Cambridge, yet to the west lay a vast and inviting wilderness. After the war he moved his family to Lyme, Connecticut, when the settlement was only twelve years old.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the staunchest of the Puritan Sills was Anna Sill's grandfather, Andrew, born in 1745 in Lyme, Connecticut. He took up several trades including wheelrighting, cabinet making, and farming. During the Revolutionary War, he fought as a patriot soldier, first as a minute man and then as an artificer in Henry Knox's Connecticut regiment. In 1787 over thirty thousand acres of Croghan's hundred-thousand-acre Otsego Patent went up for sale at a cheap rate; and overtaxed New Englanders surged into frontier New York to buy the land. Among these frontiersmen were Andrew Sill and his friend, Jedidiah Peck of North Lyme, who set out in 1879 to explore the region for themselves. They probably knew that only eleven years previously Tories and Mohawks had massacred thirty-two Otsego County settlers, mostly women and children, but Sill was described as having "fortitude in enduring hardships and sufferings." His friend, Peck, was considered an enterprising soldier. The two men found soil that could be adapted to cultivation and trees that would provide potash for quick cash. Two creeks watered the hilly upland, its ridges extending north and south some four thousand feet above the valley. Years later

Anna Sill described the high country this way:

[Her house] stood on a high elevation surrounded with hills and valleys, with the Catskill mountains in the blue distance at the east, a deep valley on the south, and far beyond rose hill after hill with curves of sky and changing cloud between. 2

Both Sill and Peck bought land and moved their families to the rapidly growing settlement. The following year the first United States census listed consecutively the two friends as residents of Otsego Township. For thirty-one years, Sill had served as deacon in the Congregational Church of Lyme. In the newly organized township of Burlington, he was a trustee of the Congregational society which supported the establishment of a church. Deacon Sill taught religion for seventy of his ninety years. 3

Of all Anna Sill's forebears, her grandfather, Jedidiah Peck, was perhaps the one she most resembled. Like his friend, Andrew Sill, Peck joined the patriots of the Revolutionary War. He served three or more years in the quarter-master's department. He was described as "short, ugly, one eyed, a war hero, a poor speaker, . . . a political operator of genius" and a "keen businessman (though he died poor)." Farmer, preacher, carpenter, and mill builder, Peck became Burlington's first supervisor. He also served as judge of the Court of Common Pleas for the county. 4

Peck's chief political rival was urbane Judge William Cooper (father of the author, James Fenimore Cooper) of the Federalist Party. Representing the ruling gentry, Judge



Cooper believed that only the rich and well-born should control the government. Anyone who dared disagree with the Alien-Sedition Laws, which favored the rich, could be imprisoned. Judge Peck boldly published long letters in The Otsego Herald attacking these laws. The Federalists counter-attacked by calling Peck "Squire Bushel" and "Plow Jogger." Instead of being humiliated by these epithets, Peck began to sign his letter with the nickname "Plow Jogger." The Federalists were so infuriated by his defiance that they had him arrested and taken in chains to New York City. News of his imprisonment aroused public indignation which contributed to the repeal of the Alien-Sedition Laws. In triumph Peck returned to Burlington, where he used his popularity to gain a seat in the state government. From 1798 to 1804 he served as member of the New York State Assembly. He also held office in the state senate from 1804-05. During this time he introduced bills to abolish slavery and imprisonment for debt.

5

Jedidiah Peck's greatest effort was given to the cause of education. In 1801 he introduced a bill to organize public-supported common schools, but it was soundly defeated. In 1804 he tried again but had no success. His slogan was, "Knowledge in the people is absolutely necessary to support representative government, but ignorance in them overthrows it." In 1811 Peck was appointed chairman of a special commission to study the state's educational system. The following year, the Public

Education Act became law. In the 1824 edition of A Gazetteer of the State of New York, Horatio Spafford said that the common school system was an effort to which Peck had "devoted himself with a truly patriotic, I had almost said with a prophetic ardor."

Judge Peck was a man of humble pretensions to talents, and still more humble learning; but of principles as firm and incorruptible, uniformly, through a long life, as ever any man possessed, in any country or in any age. There was a pure principle of honest patriotism about him, that made him quite obnoxious to certain dictators; and the youth of this Republic should be reminded of the sneers of a class of politicians, anxious to put him out of their way, who vainly strove to fix all sorts of imputations and odium on the character of 'Squire Bushel,' . . . He enjoyed a complete triumph, lived to see it, and his memory lives in honor, committed to your safe keeping, an instructive lesson for your remembrance. 6

Peck also had critics, one of whom wrote the following description of the fiery judge:

Jedediah Peck, the indomitable democrat, . . . was a preacher as well as a politician. He was illiterate, but a shrewd cunning man. For many years he controlled the politics of the county, put up and put down who he pleased. He had no talent as a preacher or speaker; his language was low, and he spoke with a drawling, nasal, yankee twang, so that in public speaking he was almost unintelligible. He always had his saddle [sic] bags with him, filled with political papers and scraps, that he distributed whenever he went from home, and then at night and frequently on Sundays, would hold meeting and preach.

I have always been so uncharitable as to believe his preaching resulted more from a desire to promote political than spiritual objects. Still the judge was a worthy, honest exemplary man; entitled to great credit. . . It was through his exertions the foundation of our school fund was laid and for that act alone, if no other, he is entitled to the gratitude of the state.7

Anna Sill's grandfather may have lacked formal education, but he read voraciously. One historian said that the

judge "knew large parts of the Bible by heart and his writings show familiarity with ancient and modern history, the ancient classics, philosophy, law and government."

Family members recalled his knowledge of mathematics and his teaching of surveying and navigation. His love of learning was passed on to his daughter, Hepsibah, who excelled in mathematics, and to his granddaughter, Anna Peck.

Although Jedidiah Peck died when Anna was only five years old, she probably grew up hearing about how he championed the common people in local politics and how he struggled to provide them with public-supported schools. However, there is no mention of his victories in Anna Sill's letters or other papers. A description of her home in New York briefly mentions both Peck grandparents:

The old antiquated mansion that had descended from another grandfather had a sloping roof on the north, with a large two-story front south, having a door in the center, and the house was painted red with white trimmings. It was the Old Homestead of one who held a public responsibility of honor. The grandma was there bright and active. 9

In the late 1700's Anna Sill's father, Abel, married Hepsibah, the eldest daughter of Jedidiah Peck. Abel was a farmer who lived quietly in Burlington with his wife and ten children. Anna, born in 1816, was the youngest child in the family. In 1824 when Abel was only fifty years of age, he died of typhus fever. He was survived by his wife, several grown children, and seven-year-old Anna.

Little is known about Anna Sill's grandmothers. Her

mother was a pious and diligent woman. Later in life Anna recalled that the home her mother provided was one of

industry, of early morning hours, simplicity in living and the abode of health, [sic] In it you could hear the loud buzz of the large spinning wheel and the hum of the smaller one, with distaff in hand, or the clack of the weaving loom, and see the flying shuttle and the varied occupations of farm life.

From her mother Anna learned all household tasks "including spinning, weaving and setting cards for carding wool and tow." She also learned "to braid bonnets from June grass" and to embroider.

11

Like most daughters of New England farmers, Anna spent many hours outside in the sunshine. Many years later she said that she had filled her summer days

often rambling. . . along the wild ravine to gather moss and ferns, wild flowers and wintergreen berries, or stopping to catch the tiny fish, with pin for hook and angleworm for baith; or climbing a long, steep hill with winding cow path, through the meadow land and orchard to the old mansion with its sheds and barns, its long well-sweep and oaken bucket; and near by the trim and fenced garden with its beds of pansies, bachelors buttons, pinks and caraway, its currant and gooseberry bushes and its vegetables of every name.

Such early experience taught Sill to love nature and the simple pleasures of frontier life.

12

Like her mother Anna was a tireless worker who lived simply and frugally. Like her grandfather Andrew she taught Christian precepts throughout her life. Like her grandfather Jedidiah she devoted herself with prophetic zeal to the education of ordinary people. Anna Sill also inherited her family's strength of character and frontier sturdiness. She seemed energized by the challenge of

unconquered territory.

### Education

At four years of age Anna Sill walked one mile to school where she was drilled in Webster's Spelling Book, Morse's Geography, and Murray's Grammar. She memorized each book "from beginning to end with no thought of its value." Using a key, she finished Daboll's Arithmetic when she was thirteen. Before the age of fifteen, she had read all the books in her parents' home. "There were few books in our library," she recalled later, "and I was hungry for knowledge."<sup>13</sup>

At this time Sill began to think deeply about her religious faith. Like many Puritans she kept an introspective journal in which she wrote that her soul began to cry out "for its God." She "groped in the dark but did not find Him." These words might sound as though written by someone who had grown up outside the Christian faith. Yet Anna Sill's family was highly religious. She recalled her early life this way:

I could not remember the time when I did not pray; and in addition to "Now I lay me," composed a prayer of thanks to God for his care including the petition that God would make me a Christian before I died. Prayer seemed to be innate and not taught to me by others. My father was Episcopal in preference, and one of the first books I remember to have read aside from the Bible in the Sunday School was the Episcopal Prayer-book. 14

It is sometimes said that most people living in Colonial America were religious. Actually only a small

percentage of the colonists belonged to churches. After the Revolutionary War, people in the established churches were said to be as religiously and morally apathetic as the general population. In 1782 only two students at the College of New Jersey (Princeton) called themselves Christians even though the college had been founded primarily to educate ministers.

15

By 1800, however, hundreds of people who had reluctantly attended church or had dropped out completely began to show an interest in spiritual matters. In the New England states, revivals were usually calm and serious while on the frontier they were often boisterous. Whatever its manifestation, spiritual renewal seemed genuine because of the spiritual and moral earnestness of newly converted Christians. Revivals also broke out on college campuses, and scores of young men began to train for pastoral and missionary service. Scores of voluntary associations sprang up. They promoted the evangelization of the frontier and other nations, the publication and distribution of religious literature, the support of education in the West, the abolition of slavery, and many other causes.

16

This period, called the Second Great Awakening, has been traced to the advent in New England of Methodist circuit riders with their powerful evangelistic sermons. The message they preached was familiar enough: God's sovereignty, humanity's sinfulness, and Christ's atoning love. Yet the Methodists emphasized the believer's personal

relationship, or closeness, to God, which was only possible if one had committed one's life to Christ. Anna Sill was destined to become a part of this religious movement. She probably heard much about a believer's personal relationship with God. She knew that in order to have this dimension of faith, she needed to relinquish control over her life:

I was conscious of being opposed to God's will. I can now see that again and again the Spirit of God came to me through the truth and urged an entire surrender of all to Christ, and I would promise to myself on some definite time named I would do so, and thus delay. I felt quite willing, as I thought, to go on a painful pilgrimage, if that would make me a Christian, but to yield my heart to do all the duties of a Christian and to be saved by Christ alone, I could not. If I must be lost forever, then I will be rather than do this . . . . Thus I passed along until my fifteenth year, in the spring of 1831.

That Anna Sill finally took the necessary step of faith is demonstrated by the intensity of her lifelong Christian  
17  
commitment.

A young woman like Anna Sill, who felt a deep religious commitment and yearned for more education, had few choices open to her. Were she a boy, she might attend a Latin grammar school or be tutored by a local pastor until she had mastered enough Latin and Greek to attend a college like Yale, Harvard, or Amhurst. Because of her sex, Sill was barred from such opportunities. New England Puritans generally frowned on intellectual improvement for women, who were said to need only enough schooling for daily Scripture reading. Whenever a woman ventured beyond quiet submission to male authority, she was likely to hear Paul's injunction:

"Women should learn in silence and all humility. I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men"(I Tim. 2:11-12). When American women were first taught to read, cynics warned that wives would use their knowledge to forge their husbands' or fathers' signatures. Doomsayers said that women who learned geography would feel restricted by their homes and want to travel. When in 1829 a New York woman gave the first female public examination in geometry, 18  
clergymen predicted the breakdown of all family ties.

Behind such notions was the nineteenth century view that every woman had but one true vocation--to be a wife and mother. The professions, public office, business and all other lucrative and respected occupations were held by men. The social structure kept women socially and financially dependent on men. As one historian noted:

To step out as a wage-earner was to lose caste and be barred from the neighborhood functions. No man would be brave enough to marry a woman that had unsexed herself by becoming a literary woman. It was believed to a great extent that any woman that attempted a vocation outside of domestic service was henceforth unfitted to be a wife and mother.

Of course many women, especially the unmarried or widowed, were forced to "lose caste" because they needed the money. They did needlework, kept boarders, worked in cotton mills, did bookkeeping, set type, nursed the sick, and kept house. Anna Sill never married, so she joined the legions of women pitied and ridiculed as "spinsters." As such she could remain at home with her mother, live with one of her brothers, or take up a poorly-paid occupation. For five years



following 1831, there is no record of her activities. In that time, she must have become aware that a "genteel" profession was opening its doors to women--teaching.<sup>19</sup>

Before the early nineteenth century teachers were usually men, sometimes college students needing extra cash or perhaps a professional drop-out suffering from a handicap. A few women and young girls earned a small salary in a "dame school," which was really the teacher's home where several children would gather to learn the abc's and ciphering. When Anna Sill was growing into womanhood, forces were at work to change radically the nation's educational structure. Following the lead of New York, the states began to establish a system of common schools defined and controlled by state bureaucracies. Industrialism led to the rise of cities and an expanding economy. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants swarmed into New England, forcing a great surge of people into the frontier. It has been estimated that between 1790 and 1830 some eight hundred thousand people moved west of the Alleghenies. These conditions combined to create a great need for common school teachers. Most men refused to take up the task because of the promise of high wages in business and the professions.<sup>20</sup>

The vacuum was filled by women.

Catherine Beecher was the spokeswoman urging single women to take up the profession of teaching. She called it an extension of mothering. She argued that single women were suffering because marriage was the only way for them to

attain "competence, influence and honor." A surplus of these women "whose intellect and affections" were "properly developed" were "pent up and confined to. . . trifling pursuits." She urged these single women to educate themselves in order to teach the "more than two millions children utterly illiterate, and entirely without schools."<sup>21</sup>

### Teaching Experience

In 1836 Anna Sill joined the hundreds of women who were teaching in the newly established district schools. She traveled to the far western frontier of New York, Orleans County, where her older brother Elijah and his family were homesteading. During the next seven months she taught in a district school in Barre located a few miles from Albion. Most district teachers boarded with families of school children, but Sill stayed with her brother. To supplement the two dollars a week she earned teaching, she spun and weaved.<sup>22</sup>

Anna Sill's school was probably much like the others scattered throughout the frontier. Conditions in one such school was described by Caroline Phipps, who began teaching in a "14 x 16 ft. log shanty or shed-roofed building" near Anna Sill's school:

Her school-room was furnished with a stone chimney and a rude fireplace in one corner, behind and very close to the entrance, (a "battered" door) through the crevices of which the snow had penetrated so as to nearly extinguish the little fire upon the hearth. In this building she commenced her teaching career and used

to labor actively from 7 and 8 o'clock A.M. to 12 M. [sic], and from 1 to 5 or 6 P.M., according to the distance she chanced to be boarding from the school house. . . . every nook and corner of the log shanty was occupied, so that the buxom fourteen-year-old teacher could not cross the room without necessarily unseating a pupil at every step, in clambering over the unwieldy seats, made out of slabs or split logs set on high sticks or legs with the bark on. The only writing-table was another and wider slab, resting on long wooden pins driven into the wall, and would seat, closely, a writing class of six, at once, who had a poor light and a poorer teacher. 23

During vacation Anna Sill attended one of the few secondary schools for women, Albion Female Seminary, headed by Caroline Phipps. At this time only nine educational institutions with "female" in the title had been incorporated by the legislature of New York State.

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Year Incorporated	Number of Schools with Female in Title, New York State
1800-1810	0
1810-1819	1
1810-1829	8
1830-1839	14
1840-1849	3
1850-1859	10
	<hr style="width: 10%; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/> 36 Total

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By 1860 two of the thirty-six incorporated schools had never organized, two had merged with other institutions, and ten were extinct. <sup>24</sup> These figures show how unstable female educational institutions tended to be, a condition which

Emma Willard said could be improved if the State of New York would institute public female seminaries. By the word "seminary" she meant an educational institution which taught branches higher than primary level. In spite of Willard's repeated efforts and the support of the governor, her proposals were defeated by the legislatures of 1821 and 1823.

Most of the private female seminaries taught the social graces, which Emma Willard called "ornamental" or "frivolous acquirements," such as dancing and needlework. This, however, was not the case at Albion Female Seminary. There Anna Sill found an array of challenging subjects to satisfy her inquisitive mind. The 1836-37 catalogue promised that for five dollars a year, one could pursue

Grammar, Arith.[sic], Botany, Natural Philosophy [sic], Astronomy, with the use of Globes, Chemistry, Rhetoric, Logic, Smellie's Philos. of Nat. History, Intellectual Philos'y, Algebra, geometry, Kaime's Elements or Alison on taste, Paley's Moral Philos'y, or Wayland's Elements of Moral Science, Evidences of Christianity, etc.

For an additional five dollars a quarter, one could take French, Latin, Greek or Hebrew, "not excepting `Needle-work' and `Domestic Economy'." Sill remained at the seminary for five years, the first year as a student and then as a teacher. She probably studied and taught at the same time. The young teacher's journal entries revealed her first successful attempts at evangelism: "She records with tearful gratitude how one and another, during a season of revival, were led by her earnest words to seek and find the

saviour."

In 1843 near the end of her stay in Albion, Sill began to anguish and pray about her future. Since early childhood she had felt a keen desire to make a useful contribution to society, and now that she had completed her education she was not sure what form her service would take. She felt drawn to foreign missionary work, and it is probable that representatives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions made frequent appeals at the seminary and her local church. To her pastor, Rev. G.W. Crawford, she wrote,

I think, if I know my own heart, the primary motive which led me to acquire an education was that I might lay it at the Savior's feet, and thus be of some service to his cause. . . . I have hardly dared to ask my Heavenly Father so great a privilege, but have prayed that at least I might be permitted after death to go as a ministering spirit and whisper sweet words of peace to some poor heathen soul.

She seemed to have had romantic ideas about missionary service. Soon afterwards, she received a proposal to accompany an unmarried missionary preparing to sail for India, probably as his wife. Anna Sill turned down the proposal, and there are no extant letters or diary entries to explain her reasons. Probably she felt little affection for the man and did not think that marriage should be a requirement for missionary work. Her attitude about accepting marriage proposals was revealed in a conversation recalled by a Rockford Female Seminary student:

[The student's mother] as happily married women often are, was concerned about Miss Sill's spinster state, and

said to her with some feeling, "Anna Sill, you should marry. You should accept one of these good chances."

Quickly as a flash came the answer, "Emily Robinson, I'm not looking for a chance; I'm looking for an opportunity". 27

A second place of service which seemed equally challenging yet less isolating was found in the vast frontier wilderness beyond the Alleghenies. In the 1830s western educators or patrons of education traveled throughout the East trying to fill numerous frontier teaching positions. Most notable among these was Catherine Beecher, who in her efforts to secure teachers, helped create the Boston Ladies Society for Promoting Education at the West and the National Board of Popular Education. These organizations sent numerous appeals to Eastern women's seminaries. At Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, for example, a student wrote:

We have had a number of people here from the West, to procure teachers--from Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio--They [sic] gave such a description of those states, and their great need of teachers that I almost wanted to go--one might do so much good there, that it seems almost wicked to stay here where we do comparatively nothing." 28

Anna Sill probably heard several such appeals. Yet she wanted to do more than teach a district school. Her dream was to found a female seminary. A friend she had known since childhood, Rev. Hiram Foote, was serving with the American Home Missionary Society in Racine, Wisconsin. To him she wrote:

I have thought perhaps I might be useful as a teacher, and if possible establish a female seminary in some of the western states. Pecuniary considerations would have

but little influence in such an undertaking. My principal object is to do good.

At this time Rev. Foote knew of no opportunities for her. 29

Anna Sill might have remained secure at Phipps' seminary, but a member of the Sill family was more apt to strike out on virgin soil. Without financial support she moved to Warsaw, New York, and on 2 October 1843 opened a female seminary in part of a two-story house on Main Street. She taught English, vocal and instrumental music, painting, drawing, languages, reading, writing, orthography, arithmetic, and grammar. To her pastor back in Albion she wrote that the seminary was succeeding much better than she had anticipated "and exceeding entirely the most sanguine expectations of my friends." By the following winter she had 140 students, and for two more years the school prospered. In March 1846, however, Anna Sill closed her seminary. It is likely that the school proved a far bigger proposition than the twenty-eight-year-old teacher had imagined. She had to hire and manage teachers, develop a curriculum, advertise, and take care of a myriad details related to the property and finances. The building was over-crowded, and she probably did not have the resources to begin construction on another one. Carolyn Phipps had a large family to support her fledgling seminary; Anna Sill did not. Thus, it is not surprising that her first effort ended in failure.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1846, Sill made

more inquiries into service in the West and in the foreign mission field. Finally in August the trustees of Cary Collegiate Institute in Oakfield, Genesee County, invited her to become preceptress of the girls' branch of the school. Probably in need of money, Sill decided to accept the offer.<sup>31</sup>

Cary Collegiate Institute had been in operation for only three years when Sill arrived to take up her new position. The boys boarded in the basement; the schoolroom and chapel took up the first floor; the principal's living quarters, the music rooms, recitation rooms, parlors, and some boys' quarters took up the third floor; and the girls and their preceptress lived on the fourth floor. For twenty shillings each, two or three girls shared one of the twenty box stoves, where they cooked meals and kept warm.<sup>32</sup>

In the first year of its operation, Cary Collegiate Institute had around 136 students, half of whom were girls. At the time it was common for pupils to drop in and out of school frequently. In her journal Sill wrote that she "had the care, some of the time, of about eighty ladies." The faculty was small. B. Billings Richards served as principal while preparing to study at Yale. Aldernon Pratt taught penmanship, and Professor Roberr Blemurhasset, of Trinity College, Dublin, was in charge of ancient and modern languages. A student later recalled, "The standard of scholarship was high, and the bright minds found an outlet in a bi-weekly [sic] school paper filled with essays,



drolleries, poetry, etc." This student went on to say that two students who went on to Yale were well prepared, and their studies "did not have to be learned over."<sup>32</sup>

The frontier rusticity of the institute is depicted in the description of the professor by the same student:

His own cow was not distinguishable to him and usually had to be pointed out, when in pasture with others. A pet dog, however, knew him if he did not and responded faithfully to his tin whistle, when blown at the Seminary door, by driving the two friendly pigs to a distance. I am assured that there was a fence built around the Seminary grounds the first year, but it must have reached a rather dilapidated condition, for the pigs reaming [sic] the streets, seem to have caused much trouble to that band assembled for the pursuit of learning.

At Cary, Anna Sill made only a few entries in her journal, but she was careful to note that during the winter "a number was hopefully converted in my bible-class." She began to receive offers, including one to take charge of Phipps Union Seminary in Albion and another to become principal of a school in Le Roy, New York. She prayed about them, as she did every major decision. Then she declined both. In her second year at Cary, she received applications from Michigan, Vermont, Lockport, and a second from Le Roy, but she was sure that God had something else planned for her. She continued to correspond with Hiram Foote. He suggested that she write to Rev. L. H. Loss, a minister promoting the establishment of educational institutions in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Sill followed Foote's suggestion and was soon corresponding with several influential citizens in Rockford, Illinois.

According to one story, a board of the First Congregational Church in Rockford was searching for a pastor to fill a vacancy. A second board of the church was looking for a principal to start a female school. Rev. L.H. Loss, who had headed an academy in Beloit, Wisconsin, visited the Congregational church to candidate for the pastoral position. After his visit, one member of both boards, Mr. Sanford, was selected to write Rev. Loss asking him to take the pastorate and Anna Sill to take the principalship of the school. By mistake Mr. Sanford switched the letters so that Anna Sill received an invitation to become the new pastor. Instead of rejecting the offer, she wrote back and said that although she hadn't applied for that position, she would take it if she could spend a year in preparation. It is not at all certain that the story is true, but if it is Sill had some unusually liberal views about women's role in the church.

35

During the summer vacation of 1848, Benjamin Richards of Carey Collegiate Institute and his sister, Eliza, visited friends in Rockford. While there they recommended Anna Sill to Rev. Loss and several other men who wanted a women's school in the area.

36

Then one day Anna Sill received a letter from Rev. Loss. He explained that a group of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers wanted to establish a college at Beloit, Wisconsin, and a female seminary in northern Illinois. Perhaps she would be interested in opening a

school for girls in Rockford as preparation for the future seminary. Rev. Loss could not promise her a salary or even pupils, but she would have rent-free use of a court house if she wanted to hold classes there. The minister went on to say that he had heard of Sill's success and reputation as a teacher and wondered if she would consider moving to Rockford. The long awaited letter was in Anna Sill's hands. Here was everything she wanted--the opportunity for a larger field of usefulness, a missionary work, her own female seminary. In Rockford, Illinois, she might lay a Christian foundation for future generations. She could see her life's work before her. Surely God's answer had finally come.

## FOOTNOTES

1

George G. Sill, Genealogy of the Descendants of John Sill (Albany: Munsell & Rowland, 1859), 1-9. See also "Soldiers in King Philip's War," The New England Historical Genealogical Register 164 (October, 1887), 404-407, for a detailed account of Captain Sill's role in the war.

2

See G. Sill, Genealogy, 9f., 83-84. See also Lineage Book, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, ed. Martha Jane Seymour, 10 (Washington, D.C.: Harrisburg Publishing Co., 1899), 277; Lineage Book, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, ed. Martha Moody, 54 (Washington, D.C.: Judd & Dutweiler, Inc., 1919), 408; J.H. French, 1860 Gazetteer of the State of New York, 1860, Reprint (Knightstown, Indiana, The Bookmark, 1977), 531.

The fourth letter in the name "Jedidiah" is spelled with "e" or "i" depending on the source. According to Mrs. W. Alfred Wietz, "Jedidiah Peck Recognition Day," (26 July 1959), 3, Peck signed his name with an "i." The historical marker located on his farm reads, "Farm and Grave, Jedediah Peck, 1747-1821, Father of the Common School System of the State of New York," Musa Hawes, Town Historian, Town of Burlington Historical Collection, Burlington Flats, New York. All other references to this collection will be abbreviated B.H.C. See also "300 Attend Jedediah Peck Recognition Day," Freedman's Journal (29 July, 1959), 1; History of Otsego County, New York (Philadelphia: Everts & Fariss), 1878, 97.

This quotation is taken from Anna Sill's lost journal in [Henry M. Goodwin], Memorials, 1849-1889 (Rockford, Illinois: Daily Electric Register Print, 1889), 8. All of Sill's early letters and journal entries as well as an autobiography she began in later life have been lost. What remain are the quotations in Goodwin's biography written soon after her death.

3

Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790, New York (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1966), 113; G. Sill, Genealogy, 84.

4

Lineage Book, 10, 276-77. See also Darius Peck, A Genealogical Account of the Descendants in the Male Line of William Peck (Hudson: Bryan & Goeltz, Steam Book Printers, 1877), 28ff; [Goodwin], Memorials, 7. Andrew Sill's title "Deacon" is included on his tombstone, B.H.C.

5

Taken from History of Burlington Green by Harold E. Crandell, Historian, B.A.C.; H. Paul Draheim, "The Press Scrapbook," Utica Daily News, 276th in a Series, 4f.; see also "Jedediah Peck" in Burlington, Otsego County Bicentennial Frontier Days Committee (Edmeston, New York: The Bishop Printshop), B.H.C.

At first Peck was a Federalist, but later he switched to the Jeffersonian or Republican Party. See Draheim, "The Press Scrapbook," 4, B.H.C.; Ed Moore, "Father of Schools: Oneonta Past and Present," Oneonta Star (4 November 1966); Wietz, "Jedediah Peck Recognition Day," 1-30; Typescript of W.V. Huntington, Old Time Notes, an unpublished chronology of Otsego County area from earliest times to 1865, Huntington Library, Oneonta, New York, B.H.C., 1010.

6

Draheim, "The Press Scrapbook"; typescript copy of New York 1824 Gazatteer, B.H.C.

7

Typescript copy of Levi Beardsley, Reminiscences (New York, 1852), B.H.C., 18.

8

Ed Moore, "In Old Oneonta: Judge Cooper's Rival," Oneonta Star (3 June 1973). See also (Jedediah Peck) The Political Wars of Otsego (Cooperstown: Printed for the author by E. Phinney, 1796); [Goodwin], Memorials, 7.

9

Anna Peck Sill, "The Old Homestead," Alumnae Address at the Eleventh Annual Reunion of the Rockford Seminary Association of the North-West, reprinted in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (December 1884), 60-61.

10

G. Sill, Genealogy, 86. Although Sill's genealogy lists only nine children in the Abel Sill family, his account has several small errors. For a more accurate account, see Goodwin, Memorials, 7; "Hepsibah" was also spelled "Hephzibah" in family records, according to Musa Hawes, B.H.C.

11

[Goodwin], Memorials, 8.

12  
Ibid.

13  
Ibid., 9.

14  
Ibid.

15  
William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1950), 224.

16  
Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, Reprint (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1975), 504-20.

17  
[Goodwin], Memorials, 8-9.

18  
According to James Savage, A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England, 4 (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 97, eight Sills had graduated from Yale by 1850. Five physicians (direct descendants of Andrew Sill) were of Anna Sill's generation. See G. Sill Genealogy, 95; see also Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family, 2 (Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1918), 81.

19  
Calhoun, Social History, 81; Phyllis Stock, Better Than Rubies (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1978), 185.

20  
See Nancy Hoffman, Woman's "True" Profession (New York: The McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981), 1-13; Polly Welt Kaufman, Women Teachers on the Frontier (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1984), 5-49.

21  
See Catherine Beecher, "Remedy for Wrongs to Women," in Hoffman, Woman's "True" Profession, 36-56.

22  
"Elijah Peck Sill was sixteen when his youngest sister Anna was born. After his marriage to Minerva Knapp in 1827 they travelled by ox cart ot uncleared land in what is now the town of Barre, Orleans Co. [sic] New York. Finding a pleasant spot beside a tumbling brook they took a grant of land from the Holland Land Co. Batavia, N.Y. Here a new

Sill homestead was built. . . .Letter from Helen Anna Sanford Lynch to Mrs. Penniman, 7 December 1952, Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All other references to this collection will be labeled R.C.A.; G. Sill, Genealogy, 90; [Goodwin], Memorials, 11.

23

[Caroline Phipps Achilles], Pioneer History of the Phipps Union Female Seminary (Albion: Orleans American Steam Power Print Press, 1878), Phipps Union Seminary Collection, Swan Library Local History Archives, Albion, New York, 5. This story has no stated author, but since it was written and printed at the request of Judge Thomas to the principal of the seminary, the author must have been Carolyn Phipps Achilles.

24

Carolyn Phipps Achilles founded Albion Female Seminary in 1833 and changed its name to Phipps Union Female Seminary at a later date. It was incorporated by the Regents of the University of New York in 1840 under the title Phipps Union Seminary. See Carolyn Phipps Achilles, "Phipps' U.F. Seminary Home," 1 May 1872, No. 5, Phipps Union Seminary Collection, Swan Library Local History Archives, Albion, New York.

This list of schools is taken from the 356 "Academies incorporated since the organization of a State Government in 1777," French, 1860 Gazetteer, 130ff. Phipps Union Seminary was not counted because it did not have "female" in its title.

25

In the nineteenth century, the word "seminary" had both general and specific meanings. Any institution offering courses higher than primary level might be called a seminary, whether secondary school, college, or graduate school; i.e., on April 18, 1818, Congress authorized the people of Illinois Territory to set aside land and three per cent of the net proceeds of the sale of public lands for the use of a "seminary of learning." The level of this institution was not specified. Many early denominational colleges began as secondary schools and gradually advanced to collegiate level. These early schools were called seminaries.

Mason Grosvenor in a letter (5 December 1828) to Rev. J.M. Ellis wrote, concerning the establishment of Illinois College: "One of their first objects would be to establish a seminary of learning where in due time young men may acquire a thorough education, both collegiate and theological." Quoted from Charles H. Rammelkamp, Illinois College, A Centennial History, 1829-1929 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1928), 20-21.

The term "seminary" took on specific meaning when the name "theological" was placed in front of it, for a theological seminary was a graduate school to train clergymen. It was also used specifically when referring to schools of secondary status, particularly female seminaries; i.e., French's 1860 Gazetteer of New York State groups academies and seminaries together, but colleges are placed in a separate category.

Emma Willard wanted the New York State Legislature to subsidize female colleges, but she used the term "seminary" because she was afraid of being ridiculed. See Mabel Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education for American Women (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959) 1-34. For a different view, see Louise Boas, Woman's Education Begins: The Rise of the Woman's Colleges (Norton, Massachusetts: Wheaton College Press, 1935), 6ff.

For a discussion of Willard's plan for improving female education, see Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, 1 (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 305ff; Memoirs of Teachers and Educators, ed. by Henry Barnard (Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 135ff.

26

Catalogue of the Members of the Albion Female Seminary for the Academic Year, Commencing Sept. 1, 1836, & closing July 20, 1837 (Albion, New York: T.C. Strong, 1837) Phipps Union Seminary Collection, Swan Library Local History Archives, Swan Library, Albion, New York, 7. In this publication, Anna Peck Sill was listed among the students; her residence was said to be Barre; [Goodwin], Memorials, 11.

27

[Goodwin], Memorials, 11; Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 76.

28

As quoted from Arthur C. Cole, A Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1940), 121.

29

The American Home Missionary Society, a voluntary missionary society made up primarily of Presbyterian and Congregational ministers, became a major force in the religious and educational development of the frontier. Established in 1826, it sought to meet the religious need of frontier settlers. It operated in every state of the union, Texas (not yet a state), Canada, France, and Switzerland. American Home Missionaries were usually well-educated; they established many schools and colleges.



In its first year of operation, the A.H.M.S. raised \$18,000 to support 169 missionaries. In the year 1831-32, the society raised \$50,000 for 509 missionaries; in 1836-37, \$100,000 for 755 missionaries. See Marion Bonzi, "Aratus Kent and the American Home Missionary Society," unpublished paper [ca. 1940], R.C.A., 18; [Goodwin], Memorials, 12-13.

30

[Goodwin], Memorials, 13; "Women's Role Domestic," Historical Wyoming (October 1975), Warsaw Historical Papers, County of Wyoming Library, Warsaw, New York, 27; Andrew W. Young, History of Warsaw (1869), Warsaw Historical Papers, County of Wyoming Library, Warsaw, New York, 65; Joseph Emerson, "Dedicatory Address," delivered at the dedication of Sill Hall and printed in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (January 1887), 4; Margaret Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill: Visible Saint," in A Power Not of the Present (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College Press, 1973), 12.

31

Anna Sill was named as the preceptress (instructor) at Cary Collegiate Institute in "A Sketch of the History of Cary Collegiate Seminary and Alumni," unpublished typescript by a former student [ca. 1894], Haxton Memorial Library, Oakfield, New York. The institute was called a seminary in "Cary Seminary Could Have Told Many Great Stories in Oakfield," Batavia Daily News (30 November 1965). Apparently the school went by both names.

32

"A Sketch," 1.

33

[Goodwin], Memorials, 13; "A Sketch," 1-2.

34

[Goodwin], Memorials, 13; Letter from Mrs. E. M. Foote to President Gulliver, 1 June 1907, Historical Files, R.C.A.

35

Cederborg, thesis, 56.

36

Ibid., 55.

37

[Goodwin], Memorials, 15; Cederborg, thesis, 54ff.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BEST LAID PLANS

#### Meeting on the Chesapeake

It was a sunny day in June, 1844. A steamer, the Chesapeake, splashed westward through the waters of Lake Erie from Cleveland, Ohio. On board were seven men returning home from the Western Convention of Presbyterian and Congregational Ministers, where three hundred delegates from eleven states had met to discuss the religious needs of the broad Mississippi valley. They had heard an appeal for church unity. They had also made resolutions against the evils of dancing and slavery. But what had captured their imaginations was the announcement of a voluntary agency called the Western Educational Society. According to its secretary, Rev. Theron Baldwin, the newly-established society had been formed so that struggling collegiate institutions on the frontier would not be competing in their bids for financial aid from the East. The society would endorse and even raise money for a limited number of fledgling western colleges.

In a narrow stateroom the seven delegates crowded

together, excitedly discussing the possibility of establishing colleges in Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Among them was Rev. Baldwin. His friend, Stephen Peet, was the Wisconsin agent for the American Home Missionary Society. Lying on a berth, Peet was feeling ill but was full of enthusiasm. For years he had been dreaming of founding a Christian college. In 1839 he had toured nearly 575 miles of territory south of the Wisconsin River. He found rapidly growing settlements sprinkled throughout the country but only one minister within 150 miles. To the Secretary of the Society he wrote, "Send us ministers--send us good ministers--send them now." The problem was that most ministers were trained in the East, and the ones who volunteered for frontier missionary service often were restless, inefficient, or unable to endure hardships. As agent, Peet was responsible for organizing churches, helping them secure pastors, advising missionaries arriving on the field, raising money and keeping alive interest in missions. Repeatedly Peet urged the Society Secretaries not to make Wisconsin a dumping ground for inept ministers. He was sure that a college planted in southern Wisconsin would solve the problem. Young men who studied there would be accustomed to frontier conditions and would understand the people.<sup>2</sup>

A college would bring other benefits as well. An educational institution established early would draw "the kind of population most desirable--who are intelligent and willing to patronise [sic] and support such institutions."

It would promote religion. "I have never seen good order and well-regulated society to exist," he wrote, "without the influence of religion." A college would also provide many needed teachers for the common schools.<sup>3</sup>

To the men crowded together on the Chesapeake, Peet probably expressed some of these cherished ideas. Secretary Baldwin reiterated the promise given at the convention, that "a hand from the East" would "be stretched out to help on the establishment of genuine christian colleges, judiciously located here and there in the West." Standing nearby was Rev. A. L. Chapin, a Yale and Union Theological Seminary graduate returning to his Milwaukee pastorate. More than twenty-five years later he recalled,

Peet seizes on the gleam of encouragement, his uttered thoughts kindle enthusiasm and hope in the rest. There is an earnest consultation--there is a fervent prayer--there is a settled purpose and Beloit College is a living conception. 4

From this shipboard meeting emerged three collegiate institutions in three midwestern states. Yet the man who would lead the group toward a broader, more liberal educational plan was not on board the Chesapeake. He was Rev. Aratus Kent, often called the "Apostle of Northern Illinois" and "Father of Rockford Female Seminary." Kent broke the ground for planting some of the major religious and educational institutions of northern Illinois. A survey of his life reveals much about the conditions early American Home Missionaries faced in their conquest of the

western frontier.

### A Pioneer Missionary

Born in Suffield, Connecticut in 1794, Aratus Kent was the son of John Kent, a merchant of the noted family of Chancellor Kent of New York. He attended Westfield Academy in Massachusetts where he studied under Rev. Ralph Emerson, who had also taught Stephen Peet. At age nineteen Kent entered the sophomore class of Yale College under President Timothy Dwight, perhaps the most dominant personality of the Second Great Awakening. It is likely that Kent was caught up in the revival that swept over the campus in 1815-16, for he joined the Presbyterian Church in 1816. Like Yale students of the famous "Yale Band," Kent felt called to evangelize and educate settlers on the frontier.<sup>5</sup>

After graduating from Yale, he studied theology in New York while serving in several churches. He received a license to preach in the Presbyterian Church in 1820, and afterwards served as a missionary in Ohio, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. In spite of a debilitating eye condition, he spent a year studying at Princeton Theological Seminary. Then, after his ordination in Lockport, New York, he served the Lockport church for three years. He was called home from his pastorate to care for his dying father, and in June 1828 he wrote,

Having closed up my accounts and seen some suitable monuments erected over the graves of my deceased parents, I bade adieu to the place of my fathers'

sepulchers and immediately after dinner, mounted my horse and turned my face to the north. But my heart was heavy and my countenance sad, for I was like unto Abraham who went forth not knowing whither he went. 6

"Like unto Abraham" was a characteristic phrase for Aratus Kent. Throughout his life, he compared his decisions, his struggles, and his ministry to those of the Biblical servants of the Lord. He remained in New England for a short time, all the while feeling that God needed him in some more destitute western field. Yet where that field was he did not know. He was thirty-five years old and ready for a long-term commitment. After much anxious prayer, he wrote,

Going to New York city [sic], 1829, under great depression and sore trial of mind which had continued long to oppress me, . . . in reference to [a] field of labor at the West, by which I thought only of Niagara County, New York, I must needs call on Dr. S. [sic] Peters, Secretary of the A.H.M.S. [American Home Missionary Society] and inquire after a field of missionary labor. He proposed the lead mines of the upper Mississippi, of which I knew nothing before, but where there were several thousand souls with no preaching. ["I go sir, was my prompt reply," . . . 7

Kent's commission as missionary for the American Home Missionary Society was to begin in March 1829, but he started for the field immediately. He traveled west by the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Twenty-seven days later, he arrived in Galena, a bustling frontier town of between twelve and fifteen hundred people. Thousands more lived nearer the lead mines which exported around five million tons of ore each year. To Kent this vast frontier was his "own diocese" full of people from every country and language. He sized up the moral condition of the community

this way: "The vices of Sabbath-breaking, profane swearing, the free use of strong drink and the practice of gambling are very prevalent--at least beyond anything I ever saw." To the west and north were Indians. There was neither an established church nor minister within hundreds of miles.<sup>8</sup>

The day after he arrived, 18 April 1829, Kent cleared out a half-built dining hall, set up benches, and gathered in around fifty people to hear his first sermon. Afterwards he wrote,

Here is opened a great and effectual door to preach the gospel. I have long desired to know what was the will of God, and if I have never found my place, I hope that amid all discouragements, I may remember that I said I was willing to go to the world's end, if I could but be in the place God designed I should occupy.

Kent's belief that God had given him a divine mission energized and sustained him. He preached, held revivals, established Sunday schools and libraries, organized temperance and anti-gambling societies, and made extended tours into the prairie, sometimes traveling 375 miles. He always carried along a wooden box full of tracts, religious books, and Scriptures, and in one year alone distributed<sup>9</sup> more than a hundred thousand tracts.

Often the work was discouraging. He tried unsuccessfully to hold meetings in a dining room, barroom of a tavern, and the Galena Courthouse. Finally he spent his own salary on an old courthouse, a "log building 20 feet by 30 feet, without chinking and having a jail with its grated window in the cellar." There he and another teacher taught a day

school of sixty children. On Sundays he preached and  
 10  
 superintended a Sunday school.

The people in Galena seemed to accept him. The man  
 who had requested that the American Home Missionary Society  
 send a missionary to Galena wrote the Secretary to say,

On my arrival I was much gratified to find that he  
 [Mr. Kent] was very popular, and I think he still  
 continues to be so. As far as I am competent to judge,  
 he possesses that kind of manner and tact which will  
 enable him to do his duty as a faithful servant of his  
 Lord and Master without giving offense. He will tell  
 them their duty in such a way that they cannot help but  
 see it, and very probably they may not like the  
 admonition or reproof--yet they cannot take exception to  
 the gain of it. I think him an excellent judge of  
 character and of human nature generally. . . .

Yet after more than two years of unremitant labor, the  
 Presbyterian church he established had only six members, two  
 from Galena, two from a village five miles away, and two  
 11  
 from Wisconsin forty miles away.

In 1832 Kent returned to the East and married Caroline  
 Corning from Hartford, Connecticut. During the next several  
 years, their three children died in infancy; afterwards,  
 they reared and educated twelve orphans. Gradually Kent's  
 church began to grow, his revivals of 1837, 1840, 1841, 1842,  
 and 1844 adding many to the congregation. Every year he was  
 required to report his activities to the American Home  
 Missionary Society. In 1866 he wrote that he had preached  
 2,169 sermons in 477 places and had traveled around twenty  
 thousand miles. In another report he said that he had been  
 lost at night on the prairie three times and had been in



danger of drowning six times.

Kent's gaunt figure on horseback became a reassuring sight, not only to established church families, but also to incoming missionaries. Years of lonely plodding through undulating prairie grass and over mud roads had molded him into an independent, practical thinker. He knew every sprouting village, the condition of every Sunday school, its prospects of spiritual growth. Rugged frontier conditions had stripped away any social graces he may have once acquired. His grammar was faulty, his spelling flawed. To earnest young missionaries, he proved an hospitable and prudent counselor. To the less ardent, he was blunt, even abrasive. All the force of his personality and intellect were narrowed to one, far-reaching goal best expressed by himself:

On one of my preaching tours I ascended a high ridge overlooking the Mississippi for many miles. It was a magnificent sight. And I made my reflections audible. Lord Jesus I take possession of this whole land for thee. . . . 13

To take over the land for Jesus Christ meant a conquest of the hearts and minds of the people. Kent waged that battle mainly by preaching. His sermons, often short and extemporaneous, rang with an earnest faith deepened by long years of toil and hardship. Yet Kent knew that his preaching would produce only temporary gains. Like his Puritan ancestors, he reasoned that the way to assure long-term gains would be through Christian education. He wrote,

But, when we look to ultimate and far-reaching results, the great desideratum towards which we should bend our outmost [sic] efforts, is to establish and sustain a system of thorough Christian institutions, and render it accessible [sic] to all. And to effect this, we must have local agents stationed at all points in the great field. But all history shows that there are no agents so efficient in Christian education as Evangelical Ministers. 14

The establishment of collegiate institutions would require a large Christian population and affluence. Both conditions were lacking when Kent entered his field. Yet soon after his arrival his brother, Germanicus, became the first of the New England entrepreneurs to settle in the rich Rock River basin. Soon a tide of Puritans followed his lead.

#### Settling the Rock River Basin

In 1831 Germanicus Kent left his dry goods business in Alabama to make his fortune in Galena, Illinois. The next year the famous Indian chief, Black Hawk, stirred up the Sac and Fox to war against the encroaching settlers. Eight hundred braves raced over the Illinois prairie, killing, burning farms, and scattering the pioneers. In hot pursuit rode U.S. Generals Scott and Atkinson with their troops and volunteers. One militia was led by a young man named Abraham Lincoln. The Indians fled through the Rock River valley, across the sacred bluffs of Turtle Creek (now Beloit, Wisconsin), into central Wisconsin and finally westward to the Mississippi. There Black Hawk was captured, and the Indians who had hunted along the Rock River for

centuries were forced to stay permanently west of the Mississippi. As late as 1865 people living on the land that had once been the sacred bluffs of Turtle Creek saw Indian elders pointing out their old camp and burial grounds to young braves.

15

After the peace talks of Fort Winnebago, the conquering soldiers returned to Galena where they spread stories about the wild beauty and fertile soil of the unsettled Rock River basin. Hearing these reports, Germanicus Kent and another adventurer, Thatcher Blake, loaded supplies on a Democrat wagon and set out to explore the area. They travelled northeast for around ninety miles. Finally they reached a small mining village called Hamilton's Diggins where the son of Alexander Hamilton provided them with a canoe. From there they paddled downstream to Rock River and set up a camp at a tributary now called Kent Creek. There were no roads in the region, not even an Indian trail. Stretched out before them were prairies full of blackberries, strawberries, wild plums and grapes. The streams were full of fish, and the woods and river banks glowed with wild flowers. There was a proliferation of prairie chickens, quail, deer, and bears.

16

Kent and Blake staked claims on the west side of Rock River and later settled in with their families. Within a year Kent had built a sawmill at the fords of Kent Creek and Rock River. Thus began the settlement later called Rockford. In 1877 a local historian wrote,

The first religious services held at Rockford were at the house of Germanicus Kent, on the second Sunday of June, 1835, and were conducted by his brother, Rev. Aratus Kent, of Galena. On that occasion every soul in Rockford [eleven settlers] attended divine service [sic].

In five years the Rockford settlement had grown to 235 residents; by 1841 it numbered eight hundred.<sup>17</sup>

To the north settlers poured into the Turtle Creek basin where six hundred Winnebagoes had once lived in thirty-five lodges. There they founded a village and named it Beloit. By 1836 Wisconsin had acquired a distinct territorial government. It had a population of eleven thousand. By 1842 forty-seven thousand had settled in the area. In 1845 Wisconsin was estimated to have a population of one hundred twenty thousand and was said to be growing faster than the nearby states.<sup>18</sup>

#### The Beloit Conventions

On 6 August 1844, two months after the meeting on the Chesapeake, fifty-four church leaders from three states traveled to a convention in a tiny village on the southern edge of Wisconsin. Their meeting place was an imposing Congregational church, one of the first three Protestant church buildings in the territory. From its tower hung the first bell in the Rock River valley, and in its basement the Beloit Seminary met for instruction.<sup>19</sup>

The group called themselves "friends of Christian education in Northern Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa." They

called on Aratus Kent to preside. For two days they prayed and talked "with some sharp collision of opinions but with harmonious results." Finally they passed two proposals: to establish a "Collegiate Institution for Iowa"; and to establish a "Collegiate and Female Seminary of highest order, one in northern Illinois near Wisconsin and the other in Wisconsin close to Illinois." To clarify their educational priorities to the churches represented, they also resolved:

1) that fundamental to the evangelization of the West is the establishment of collegiate and theological institutions where "orthodox" and "pious" ministers might be trained;

2) that parents should consecrate their sons to the ministry;

3) that churches should help promising young men educate themselves for the ministry;

4) that the churchmen of the West should cooperate with the Western Education Society; and

5) that "permanent Female Seminaries of the highest order for the education of American women should have a prominent place in our educational system."<sup>20</sup>

The last proposal distinguished this convention from many others, for it recognized the educational needs of women. Its inclusion among the resolutions was due to the strong leadership of Aratus Kent. More than twenty-five years later, a Rockford Female Seminary board member said:

He [Kent] was there to plead for the education of women. . . . As he went up and down sowing the word of life upon the prairies, the conviction deepened more and more in his soul that this great inland had no greater need than that of educated and sanctified womanhood in the school and in the house. 21

It took courage for the delegates to commit themselves to establish an institution "of highest quality" for women. Money was scarce on the frontier, and people were skeptical about pouring money into the education of their daughters. However, a few first rate eastern seminaries for women had managed to sustain themselves, notably Mount Holyoke at South Hadley. By 1845 at least three good female seminaries had also been founded in Illinois, but none were in northern part of the state. The earliest was Jacksonville Female Academy founded in 1833 as the female branch of Illinois College. In 1836 Benjamin Godfrey donated \$110,000 for the establishment of female seminary of high quality. Located in Godfrey and called Monticello Female Seminary, the school was superintended by Theron Baldwin for a time. In 1845 the Methodists voted to establish the Illinois Conference Female Academy (now MacMurray College) in Jacksonville. Between 1830 and 1860 the total number of female seminaries established in Illinois was twenty-seven, but those in northern Illinois must have lacked quality. In her historic account of 1856, Anna Sill stated that Rockford Female Seminary arose because of "a great want of an Institution of high order in this region."<sup>22</sup>

The trustees' first priority, however, was the men's

college. To establish such an institution would require careful planning followed by years of hard labor. Western colleges had a bad image. Many settlers had so little faith in the quality of frontier colleges that they sent their sons to eastern institutions. One newspaperman wrote of the 1840s and 1850s,

A graduate of a Western College was regarded by our Eastern friends, not as a Bachelor of Arts, but as a kind of superficial educated quack, fit only to teach the young idea of the West how to shoot in log school houses. 23

People were also suspicious of college founders. It was common for speculators to buy thousands of acres of frontier land and, to attract buyers, draw up plans of future towns to be erected on the property, complete with business blocks and even collegiate institutions. Some ministers hired faculty and erected buildings without first gathering community and eastern supporters. When the nation was plunged into a depression, these flimsy institutions quickly went bankrupt.

24

To dispel the suspicion that they were mere speculators and to gather broad-based church support, the delegates at the Beloit conventions planned to invite representatives from all Presbyterian and Congregational churches within traveling distance. They prepared a circular and sent a visiting committee to unrepresented bodies. They planned to publish religious newspaper expressing "moral," "religious," . . . and "education interest" but this idea never materialized. At three

subsequent Beloit conventions, more Illinois and Wisconsin delegates promised their support, the number rising to sixty-six in the fourth and final gathering. However, after the first convention Iowa delegates stayed in their home state they established Iowa College (later Grinnell College).<sup>25</sup>

At first the men's institution made steady progress. By October 1844 residents of Beloit had pledged seven thousand dollars toward the erection of a college edifice in their village. In spite of complaints that the Beloit site might inhibit the future planting of a northern Illinois college and that some Beloit delegates were self-seeking, the members of the third convention voted overwhelmingly to locate the college in Beloit. At the fourth convention in October 1845, a board of trustees was selected to preside over both college and female seminary. Aratus Kent was elected president. In 1846 a college charter was obtained from the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin. The cornerstone of the first building was laid in the summer of 1847, and that fall five young men began their prescribed course of studies.<sup>26</sup>

To put the college on a sound financial foundation, Stephen Peet took time off from his labors as Wisconsin agent for the American Home Missionary Society to raise money. With his usual enthusiasm, he traveled throughout Wisconsin and the East urging ministers and friends to support the first American college north of the



southern shore of Lake Michigan and westward to the Pacific Ocean. He received a ten thousand dollar pledge from a relative in Connecticut. He also raised one thousand dollars from Wisconsin ministers and was pledged 160 acres of Wisconsin land. By the end of its second year, Beloit College seemed able to finance itself and pay its debts. 27

### Only on Paper

The Board of Trustees felt confident about what a college was and what it ought to do. Since many trustees were graduates of Yale College, they simply modeled Beloit College after the older institution. It came to be called the "Yale of the West." The female seminary was another matter. The only thing the trustees were certain of was that it should be "of highest quality." A. L. Chapin, the trustee with the most knowledge of educational matters, was selected to write to perhaps the best and most famous eastern women's institution, Mount Holyoke. In 1846 Chapin requested,

If you can send us some documents, or explanations of yr. [your] own wh.[which] will give us a particular & correct idea of that model [Mt. Holyoke], for so we regard it, you will much oblige us, the Trustees, & I trust also subserve the interests of education in this great valley.

Although Chapin probably received a response, three years later a trustee wrote that the board still "hardly knew how to move." 28

The selection of a seminary site caused much

deliberation. The residents of Rockford pledged thirty-five hundred dollars toward the erection of a building. Because this was a large bid and Rockford was the county seat of Winnebago County, it seemed a likely location for the school. However, a resident of the village of Pecatonica (now Rockton) offered a twenty-acre site if the school were placed there, and another Pecatonica resident offered a ten-acre site in addition to a pledge of three thousand dollars for a building. To further complicate matters, people in Belvidere, Elgin, and Freeport sent word that they planned to present proposals. After considering all the pledges, the Board in 1845 voted to accept the Rockford bid. The institution located there would be called Rockford Female Seminary.<sup>29</sup>

A seminary charter was drawn up and on 25 February 1847 was passed by the Illinois legislature. This document included a clause which would have profound effects on the institution, for it gave the trustees power to award college degrees: "also, to have power to confer on those whom they may deem worthy all such honors and degrees as are usually conferred in similar institutions." Since female seminaries of the 1840s did not award college degrees, the Board of Trustees probably had no idea that this clause would support such a practice. Yet their standards were high. In section two of the charter, they stated that they planned to build a seminary of such size that its accommodations would be "sufficiently extensive to afford

instruction in the liberal arts and sciences adapted to the highest order of Female education."<sup>30</sup>

After the charter was granted, nothing further was done for over two years. At this critical juncture, Rockford Female Seminary might have become simply another paper institution that never materialized. It was a common occurrence. In 1840 Rev. Lemuel Hall reported to the American Home Missionary Society that some "friends of education at Madison" were planning to establish a school. In 1843 Rev. J.U. Parsons persuaded the Wisconsin Convention to start a college provided that Parsons could raise seed money and acquire property for the institution. In 1849 a circular was published and signed by six Presbyterian clergymen, including Aratus Kent, to raise support for a theological seminary to be founded in Galena. However, none of these proposed institutions came into existence.<sup>31</sup>

To divert the trustees from the seminary were the multiplying problems of Beloit College. They needed a president, but they had been unable to find one after many inquiries. They also needed faculty who would teach for low pay; the ideal professor would be able to raise his own salary. They found what they wanted in Jackson Bushnell and Joseph Emerson, two college instructors who arrived in Beloit in 1848. The young men found an institution with no cash funds. The college building "stood floorless, windowless and roofless," and it had been that way for six months. It seems that after the initial enthusiasm had died down,

jealousy erupted and Beloit supporters began to squabble over the slavery issue. The subscription had dwindled, the trustees had become discouraged, and the whole enterprise seemed doomed. Undaunted by these developments, the two faculty members canvassed the city, held another meeting to raise subscriptions, and eked out enough money and labor to continue construction on the building.

32

In addition to public apathy and discontent, the economy took a sharp turn downward during the winter and spring of 1848-49. A bushel of wheat sold for about "three shillings," and "dressed pork on the street 1 3/4 cents per pound." Eighteen miles south of Beloit on the Rock River, the town of Rockford suffered a fever epidemic. Within three or four months there had been around fifty funerals. Then the hydraulic works were destroyed several times, causing financial problems for many businesses.

33

These conditions might not have diverted trustees who were fully committed to establishing the female seminary. Beloit College had several such men. Stephen Peet had spent so much time soliciting funds for Beloit College that he raised the ire of the American Home Missionary Society, and in 1847 he was asked to resign his position as agent. For several years afterwards he spent all his time raising funds for the college. Jackson Bushnell and Joseph Emerson together gave over seventy-five years of service to the development of Beloit College. In time Emerson family influence would bring over fifty thousand dollars to the

institution. By 1849, A. L. Chapin had been elected president. He remained committed to his post for the next thirty-six years in spite of many offers elsewhere. 34

Rockford Female Seminary seemed to have no such supporters. Only one man, Aratus Kent, had strongly urged the development of the seminary for women, yet he had neither the time nor commitment to make it a reality. His letters to the secretary of the American Home Missionary Society during the 1840s were full of the problems and prospects of the churches in the area. He continued to travel widely, doing most of the work of an agent. In 1847 he was asked to take the title of general agent for northern Illinois. At first Kent refused, saying that he was not adept at raising funds, his wife's health was "feeble," and he wasn't sure that God had called him to that service. In time, however, he decided to accept the appointment and took up his new duties on 10 September 1847. What Kent's decision meant was that he would have even less time to take on the responsibilities of the female seminary. He probably realized that without a concerted effort, the school for women would never become a reality. It was probably with a twinge of guilt that he wrote in 1850:

At Rockford I spent a Day [sic] on business pertaining to the Female Sem. located there, and was urged by the other members of the Ex. Com. to remove my family to Rockford. I have been so officious from the first in getting up that Institution that they seem determined to put me on all the business committees. . . . I feel no little reluctance at leaving my 'Old stamping ground'. . . .

In spite of several entreaties, Kent never did move to Rockford. Instead he continued to devote most of his energies to the work of the American Home Missionary Society. What remaining time he had left, he devoted to Rockford Seminary and Beloit College.<sup>35</sup>

It seems evident that no one on the Board of Trustees would dedicate his life to the cause of women's education. The trustees had other priorities. If the female seminary were going to become a reality, the trustees needed to find a strong educator who would make that commitment. In the spring of 1849 that person was traveling by stagecoach to Rockford. She did not have the endorsement of any of the leading members of the Board of Trustees. She didn't even know them. In the next several years Anna Sill would have to earn their trust.

## FOOTNOTES

1

The activities of the Western Convention are described in William Ganson Rose, Cleveland, The Making of a City (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1950), 195; see also Robert H. Irrmann and Helen L.D. Richardson, eds. "The Text: The Origin & Early Progress of Beloit College," in Chapin's Corner Stone Speech, (Beloit College, 1967), 16, 24; A. L. Chapin, "A Paper on the Acts and Aims of the Founders of Beloit College," in Exercises at the Quarter-Centennial Anniversary of Beloit College, July 9, 1872 (Janesville, Wisconsin: Garrett Verder, Printer, 1872), 5-6; Colin Brummitt Goodykoontz, Home Missions on the American Frontier, (reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 383-94.

The formal name of the "Western Society" was "Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West." It was also called "College Society."

In 1931 President Maddox of Rockford College said that a 1844 newspaper clipping reported that the Cleveland delegates had passed the following resolution: "the exigencies of Wisconsin and Northern Illinois require that those sections should unite in establishing a college and a female seminary of the highest order--one in Wisconsin near to Illinois and the other in Illinois near to Wisconsin." Typescript, "An Address by President Maddox of Rockford College, at the Centennial Banquet (1931), Aratus Kent Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 3. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Kent: R.C.A.

It seems improbable that this resolution was made as early as the Cleveland Convention. I have been unable to find a newspaper article about the Cleveland gathering in the Rockford Forum, the only Rockford newspaper in 1844. There was no Beloit newspaper at this time. However, this resolution was passed by the first Beloit Convention, 6 August 1844, and was reported in an untitled newspaper article, Rockford Forum, 11 June 1845. See (unpaged) Beloit Convention Minutes, 6 August 1844 to October 2, 1845, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to the Beloit Convention Minutes will be abbreviated Conventions: R.C.A.

2

Lawrence E. Murphy, Religion and Education on the Frontier: A Life of Stephen Peet (Dubuque, Iowa, 1948), 47-49; Goodykoontz, Home Missions, 59, 183-84.

3

Letter of Stephen Peet to J. P. Brown, 29 July 1839, quoted in Murphy, Religion, 89.

4

Chapin, Quarter-Centennial Address, 6.

5

[Horatio Newhall], "Sketch of the Life and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Aratus Kent," Galena Gazette, (23 November 1869), Kent: R.C.A.; Joseph Emerson, Typescript of fragment of a rough draft of an Address at Rockford Seminary and College Semicentennial, 14 June 1899, Emerson Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Emerson: R.C.A.

Timothy Dwight, grandson of the renowned Puritan, Jonathan Edwards, was president of Yale from 1795 to 1817. He spent six years lecturing on the nature of Christianity and its moral implications to seemingly uninterested Yale undergraduates. However, in 1801 one-third of the campus was converted to Christianity. The same phenomenon happened in 1812-13 and 1815. A number of Yale graduates became noted missionaries, ministers, professors, and college presidents on the frontier.

The "Illinois Band," also called the "Yale Band," fostered evangelism and Christian collegiate education on the frontier. Seeing an article in the Home Missionary (the magazine of the American Home Missionary Society) about plans for the establishment of a seminary of learning in Illinois, they joined the society, raised ten thousand dollars to support the school, and went to Illinois to help establish it. There were seven members of the band, Theron Baldwin among them. The school they founded was Illinois College, one of the oldest collegiate institutions in the state. See Charles H. Rammelkamp, Illinois College, A Centennial History, 1829-1929 (New Haven: Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1928), 9ff.

6

As quoted from A.L. Chapin, "In Memorium," Beloit College Monthly, 16 (March 1870), 122. Although it is said that Kent asked to be sent to "a place so hard that no one else will take it," I have been unable to find this statement in his letters written at the time he joined the American Home Missionary Society in 1826. See Letters of Aratus Kent, 1825-30, Amistad Research Center, 400 Esplanade Ave., New Orleans, LA 70116.



7

Ibid., 122-23; see also typescript, Ralph Maclay Crissman, "Rev. Aratus Kent," in Manual First Presbyterian Church, Galena, Illinois, 1907, Kent: R.C.A., 1-2.

8

Gordon A. Riegler, "Aratus Kent, First Prebyterian Minister in Northern Illinois," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, 13 (December 1929), 364, 369.

9

Chapin, "Memoriam," 123; typescript, John H. Edwards, "Rev. Aratus Kent," The Church at Home and Abroad (July 1895), Kent: R.C.A., 5.

10

See Chapin, "Memoriam," 124; see also typescript, "Historical Sketch," from the Centennial Celebration of the First Presbyterian Church, Galena, Illinois, Kent: R.C.A., 2-3.

11

As quoted from Riegler, "Aratus Kent," 367.

12

Edwards, "Aratus Kent," 8; Chapin, "Memorium," 125-26.

13

Letter of Aratus Kent to Secretary Milton Badger, 5 April 1845, Microfilm letters of Illinois missionaries to the central office of the American Home Missionary Society, Wheaton Graduate Library, Wheaton Graduate School, Wheaton, Illinois. All future references to this microfilm collection will be abbreviated Kent: W.M.C.

14

Ibid.

15

Mason H. Dobson, "As It Was in the Beginning," in The Book of Beloit, (Beloit, Wisconsin: Daily News Publishing Company, 1936), 5, 6; "Beloit College. Its Origin and Aims," reprinted from The New Englander, 31 (April 1872), 1; H. M. Whitney, "A History of Beloit College," reprinted from the Columbian History of Education in Wisconsin, 1893, 4.

16

Alice Balsley, "Rockford Settled by Kent, Blake," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 25; Horace White, "The Beginnings of Beloit," in Semi-Centennial Anniversary of Beloit College (Beloit, Wisconsin, 1897), 110.

White's descriptions is of early Beloit, which is eighteen miles north of Rockford. Both towns are on the same river and are similar in vegetation and wildlife.

17

The History of Winnebago County, Ill., Its Past and Present, (Chicago: H. F. Kett & Co., 1877), 222; William Vipond Pooley, The Settlement of Illinois from 1830 to 1850, History Series 1, 220, of Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1908), 429-30.

18

"Beloit College, Origin and Aims," 1; Robert C. Chapin, "Epochs in the History of the College," in Semi-Centennial Anniversary of Beloit College (Beloit, Wisconsin, 1897), 43.

19

In the minutes of the first convention, four men were listed as representatives of Iowa; fourteen were from Illinois, and twenty-five were from Wisconsin. Also in attendance were Rev. Theron Baldwin, Secretary of the Society for Promoting collegiate and Theological Education in the West (the Western Education Society) and Rev. H. L. Loss from Ohio. The latter had been head of the Beloit Seminary and would take the pastorate of the First Congregational Church in Rockford in 1846. See Conventions: R.C.A.

It should be noted, however, that in his Decade Address entitled "Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, Commencement Exercises, 1861," Sill Scrapbook (a collection of local newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary), 16, A. L. Chapin said that twenty-seven delegates from Illinois attended the convention. See also Chapin, "Founders of Beloit College," Quarter-Centennial Address, 5; Edward Dwight Eaton, Historical Sketches of Beloit College (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1928), 21.

20

Chapin, "Founders of Beloit College," Quarter-Centennial Address, 6; First Convention Minutes, 6 August 1844. Details of convention resolutions are taken from the minutes of subsequent conventions, Conventions: R.C.A.

21

Joseph Emerson, "Dedicatory Address," delivered at the dedication of Sill Hall, 1887, and printed in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (January 1887), 2.

22

Clarence P. McClelland, "The Morning-Star of Memory," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, 36 (1943), 253-66; Clarence P. McClelland, "The Education of Females in

Early Illinois," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, 36 (1943), 390; Anna Peck Sill, typescript, "Historical Account of Fem. Sem," March 22, 1856, Anna Peck Sill Papers, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Sill: R.C.A.

23

This quotation is taken from an undated [probably 1861] newspaper clipping Sill Scrapbook, 15-16. Some newspaper clippings in the scrapbook include dates; many do not, yet it is possible to figure out dates from arrangement and details in the articles.

24

See John S. Brubaker and Willis Rudy, Higher Education in Transition, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 59-60; Donald G. Tewksbury, The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War (1932; reprint, Archon Books, 1965), 1-9.

25

There is no further reference in the Beloit or Rockford Archives of the newspaper that was to be published in Chicago. See Conventions: R.C.A.

26

Historical Sketch of Beloit College, report prepared for the U.S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Madison, Wisconsin: Atwood & Culver, 1876), 4-8.

27

Eaton, Sketches, 23; Murphy, Religion and Education, 112.

28

Letter of A. L. Chapin to Rev. J. Hawes D.D., 20 January 1846, Chapin Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All other Chapin papers will be abbreviated Chapin: B.C.A. Letter of Joseph Emerson to his mother, 22 November 1849, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All other references to this collection will be abbreviated Emerson: B.C.A.

29

See Beloit College Board of Trustee Minutes, Pecatonica, Thursday morning, 15. The date is not given, but it is assumed to be November, 1845. Pages not numbered, Minutes, Board of Trustees, 23 October 1845 - 18 September 1850, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois.

30

"An Act To Incorporate the Rockford Female Seminary," Section 1, in Records of the Board of Trustees of Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 1, 2.

31

Murphy, Religion and Education, 89-91; Letter and circular from Aratus Kent to A.L. Chapin, 19 May 1849, Chapin: B.C.A. Kent wrote to Chapin, "This circular is no child of mine but in its present shape I could not withhold my name." For a discussion of some unsuccessful attempts to found permanent educational institutions in northern Illinois, see Cederborg, Thesis, 24ff.

32

J. J. Bushnell, "A Paper: Reminiscences of Early Days and the Financial Affairs of the College," in Exercises at the Quarter-Centennial Anniversary of Beloit College (Beloit, Wisconsin; Garret Verder, 1872), 22-23.

33

Bushnell, "Financial Affairs of Beloit College," Quarter-Centennial Anniversary, 26; a newspaper article entitled "Rockford Female Seminary," [ca. 1850], Sill Scrapbook, 2; Cederborg, Thesis, 96.

34

Murphy, Religion and Education, 80; Bushnell, "Financial Affairs of Beloit College," Quarter-Centennial Address, 23; Eaton, Sketches, 32; Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Chapin, Aaron Lucius"; R. K. Richardson, "Making and Makers of Beloit College," in Book of Beloit (Beloit, Wisconsin: Daily News Publishing Company), 35.

35

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## CHAPTER III

### ON HER OWN RESPONSIBILITY

#### Putting Down Roots

In May 1848 the women of the First Congregational Church of Rockford fairly tingled with excitement. Two lady teachers from the East were on their way to Rockford to establish a school "exclusively for young ladies." At the time there were no public schools and only two private educational institutions in Rockford, a town of twenty-five hundred inhabitants. Since 1844 the women of the church had heard much talk of a female seminary to be associated with Beloit College, but so far nothing tangible had been done. In the meantime, their daughters were growing up without the advantage of a good education. Thus, the pastor of the First Congregational Church, Rev. L.H. Loss, and other influential men of the town had formed a temporary board of trustees for a local seminary. They knew that Miss Anna Sill was willing to start a schools "on her own responsibility" (without wages or promise of students), that she had an excellent reputation as a teacher, and that she had even run her own female seminary in New York; but they

were still speculating about her ability to head a successful seminary in their town. The women in the church were more concerned about their daughters taking full advantage of whatever education Miss Sill had to offer. Their daughters were wondering about whether the new principal would be kind and even tempered.<sup>1</sup>

A young girl was anxiously awaiting the coming of the eastern teachers because they were going to board in her home. Forty-two years later she recalled Anna Sill's arrival:

Although I was less than three years of age. . . on a certain day in early June, dressed in my Sunday gown, I stood with my sisters on our front porch awaiting the arrival of the Chicago stage; believe I heard the horn sound, the driver crack his whip, saw the four horses and coach dash up to the door, and my father step forward to assist a young lady to alight. . . . Her first words, the firm hand clasp, set the fears of the elders to rest; her loving kiss and warm embrace won the hearts of the children.

With this greeting Anna Sill had successfully passed the first test--she had won the approval of a prominent member of Rockford, Judge Selden M. Church. She soon gained the respect of Rev. Lewis H. Loss. Although he may have hoped that she would head the school to be associated with Beloit College, he could promise her nothing. She would have to meet the approval of a majority of the Beloit Board of Trustees.<sup>2</sup>

Anna Sill never seemed to doubt that her school would flourish. It was God who had sent her to Rockford, and he would uphold her. On May 29 she wrote in her journal: "Sent my advertisement to the press. My success is yet to

be known, for 'my times are in the hands of the Lord.' I trust I am prepared for whatever cup He in His all-wise providence may mingle." As if she were certain she would be approved by the Beloit Board of Trustees, Sill boldly advertised her school under the name the Board had selected for their school, Rockford Female Seminary. She called her school a "permanent Institution, one in which the public may safely rely for the complete English and Classical Education of Young Ladies." She also began a scrapbook in which she carefully preserved for the rest of her life articles, editorials, advertisements, and other mementoes of the seminary's institutional life.<sup>3</sup>

Sill set to work immediately. She settled into Judge Church's household, prepared the courthouse for instruction, interviewed trustees, worked out teaching arrangements with Eliza and Hannah Richards, and called on the families of her prospective students. She would continue this last practice throughout her years at the seminary. Carrie Spafford Brett remembered the visit of the new principal this way:

When I was a child of six summers, two ladies called one day to see my mother . . . . Presently one of the ladies asked me if I went to school. I replied, 'No, Ma'am, I am waiting for Miss Sill to come.' She at once informed me that she was the one for whom I was waiting and that her companion was Miss Richards who was to have charge of the little girls. This incident Miss Sill never forgot, and she ever considered me her first scholar. 4

From the child's response to Sill's question, one might think that Rockford had always been without schools.

Actually over sixty teachers had come and gone in the first twenty-one years of the town's history. Although some of them had been successful, none had remained for long. What Rockford parents wanted was a good school that would sustain itself year after year. They couldn't have known that of all the schools founded in Rockford before 1855, only "Miss Sill's school" would survive.

### Classes Begin

On 11 June 1849 Anna Sill and her assistants walked down the street from Judge Church's home to the old courthouse. On the lawn stood some of the fifty-three children, most under ten, who attended the first day. Each gave her name, and after Sill rang the bell, they hurried inside. One child recalled that the principal held up "the most beautiful hand I ever saw." The room was perfectly silent as the principal crossed the two tiers of seats and stood on a platform where once a judge had presided over the courtroom. On the platform was a table where the principal kept her Bible, some books, and flowers ("she always had flowers"). Many of the children were awed by the tall, regal woman with the soft white hands and "calm, self-possessed face." In her long gray dress with a white collar and pink bow, she appeared far more elegant than the rough pioneer women with their worn, red hands. On the principal's feet were slippers, which she wore even in cold weather, and she



always kept ribbons in her desk drawer just in case a girl  
 needed one.<sup>6</sup>

After taking the roll Sill explained that she had come from the East in order "to establish a school in the wild Northwest." Since she always began the day with scripture reading and prayer, she probably did that next. Likely she also required each student to memorize a scripture verse, another of her long-remembered customs. Many teachers began classroom instruction with devotional exercises, but Miss Sill was more intense than most. One student wrote later: "The children became impressed with her earnestness. They realized that they stood in the presence of a devout Christian woman." After prayer the principal led her students in singing one or two hymns, the following lines being her "especial favorites":

May we within thy courts be seen,  
 Like a tall cedar, fresh and green.

One resident of Rockford recalled hearing hymns sung in the afternoon when the school had its closing devotional exercises:

Passersby often paused to hear the sweet childish treble floating out on the quiet air, guided and sustained by Miss Sill's clear soprano, and the fuller, richer voice of Miss Melinda Richards. . . . 7

After the first morning's exercises, Sill organized the youngest girls into the Floral Band. She gave each child the name of a planet, star, or flower. One student was named "Laverial" for a newly discovered planet, and another girl with long gold hair was "the comet." Pupils learned

about the solar system by pretending that they were orbiting around the sun. Mercury, Venus, the Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and even the moons of Uranus made imaginary trips around the person who represented the Sun. This small exercise endeared the children to their new principal. She used her imagination to make learning interesting.

### Frontier Conditions

It wasn't easy to hold school in the old courthouse. The seats were "low and uncouth affairs," and the summer sun streamed relentlessly through uncurtained windows. By the second day the number of students had jumped to sixty. A visitor reported in the local newspaper that 102 were present the day he spent at the seminary. Some of these were young women in their twenties who had heard of the school and either taught or borrowed money to attend. They "felt the importance of making the best possible use of their time," wrote a teacher. To provide for students from other locations, a boarding house across the street from the courthouse was made ready. Sill invited her older sister, Mrs. Helen Hollister, to come west and run the establishment. With the boarding funds, Sill "improved the school room, bought the books needed, placed curtains in the windows, and prevailed upon the scholars to supply desks."

Still more young women came. Because the boarding

house accommodated only sixteen to twenty people, some students boarded with families. Conditions in the boarding house were primitive. Students shared space with three to seven others, crowding into rooms thirteen by fifteen feet. Each night they set up cots and stored them in the daytime. They carried wood for old sheet-iron drums that stood in each room, built their own fires, and cooked their own meals. One student cook was dubbed "Professor Pancakes." In winter the halls and rooms were so cold that water froze in the wash pans. At night students read by candle light. One girl advised a prospective student to bring tallow candles because her own would be "cheaper and better" than what she could buy in Rockford. An alumna commented many years later, "We certainly had to endure hardships, but life has been easier for us ever since on account of the discipline."<sup>10</sup>

#### Educational Aims

God bless the ancient Puritans!  
 Their lot was hard enough,  
 But honest hearts make iron arms,  
 And tender maids are tough.

-The Puritans

On the first page of her scrapbook, Anna Sill pasted four articles: a poem about the Puritans; a copy of the Mayflower Compact; an article called "Home Education of Daughters"; and another by Horace Greeley called "Universal Education." All reflected Sill's educational aims.

First, Anna Sill sought to develop "a moral and religious character in accordance with right principles" in each of her students. To the alumnae she said that the chief glory of the seminary lay in its Christian ideal. "It really takes for its motto that of the oldest college [Harvard College] of our land, "For Christ and His Church." Just as her Puritan forebears had settled the New World and established New England colleges "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian Faith," so Anna Sill had come west, as she wrote in her journal, "to glorify God and save Humanity."<sup>11</sup>

Jane Addams recognized the religious impetus which she said gave Sill's school "the highest grace any institution can possess":

Miss Sill gave it [Rockford Female Seminary] that strong religious tone which it has always retained. She came to Illinois in an unselfish spirit--not to build up a large school, not to make an intellectual center, but to train the young women of a new country for Christian usefulness. She unaffectedly and thoroughly made that her aim. The spiritual so easily speaks over all other voices, it arrests us at once.

The religious dimension was characteristic of many female seminaries, for a majority of them were sponsored by religious denominations. It was perhaps most keenly felt at Ipswich, Mt. Holyoke and Rockford Female Seminary where the principals were fervidly religious.<sup>12</sup>

Second, Sill tried to inspire in her students a "missionary spirit, or a spirit of self-denying benevolence

toward all." She believed that the Christian life is one of service, "not to acquire the most good, but to give oneself" for the good of others. Although she had refused her one offer to become a missionary, she remained a supporter of missions throughout her life. In 1865 she wrote to friends, "I asked my Heavenly Father that if I was not permitted to enter the foreign field, I might see one of my pupils go in my stead." Like Mary Lyon she gloried in sending off students and teachers to foreign fields and corresponded with them regularly. By 1884 forty seminary representatives served both in America and around the world. In Sill's farewell speech she said:

The Seminary was founded upon the principle of benevolence, and it has been the aim of those in charge to develop that spirit in its students. . . . The Seminary has given to benevolent objects in sums varying annually from \$100 to \$450, and one year in the time of our Civil War \$750, besides large sums given to educational purposes. 13

Sill did more than encourage her students to give. She accepted a low salary to cut costs and used large portions of her pay to buy equipment and add to building funds. She lived in one or two small rooms and frequently shared her quarters with teachers or students. Those who couldn't pay their fees often received loans or outright gifts from her. When Helen Hollister died, Sill took in her sister's only daughter. A relative wrote, "Amelia [Hollister] lived at the college, became a student in due time, graduating in 1866. Anna became a second mother to Amelia." She also took special care of orphans who had

been left at the seminary. A teacher of much influence at the seminary wrote of Sill, "To those who knew her best, Miss Sill's leading characteristic was benevolence." It was perhaps inevitable that students like Jane Addams, Julia Lathrop and Catherine Waugh McCullough would follow the example of their principal.<sup>14</sup>

Third, Sill sought to prepare women for the duties of the home. Unlike Mary Lyon and Zilpah Grant Banister whose seminaries were designed primarily to educate teachers, Sill emphasized the necessity of educating women for domestic duties:

Women's sphere is in the home-circle, truly, primarily so, and that is why I would have her educated, thoroughly and systematically educated, for this her heaven-appointed orbit, that she may be qualified to perform the duties and to meet the responsibilities of this sphere. . . . How few realize the extent of the moulding influence of a mother upon the maturing character! 15

That women should be educated for their "proper sphere" was an argument used against as well as for higher female education. When the first students began their seminary course, Sill was warned "that these young ladies would not teach, that they would be married, and it would all be lost." Sill argued that a woman's duties required the highest intellectual, moral, and domestic development which only an elevated educational institution could provide. "No education," she said, "can be of great value which does not prepare for the practical duties of home and social life." That she had formulated this educational aim early in her career is reflected in the scrapbook article which stated:

The aim of education seems to be to fit each of us to fill with ability and propriety our individual station in life. A correct home education must, therefore, be the corner stone of all that is truly desirable, excellent, or beautiful in female accomplishments. . . . The American mother should, above all others, feel the importance of training her daughters to habits of domestic industry, to the cares and duties of real life, which tend to call forth the energies and enterprise of their natures, which qualify for usefulness rather than to shine and dazzle.

Catherine Beecher had spread this view throughout America, and Sill may have read Beecher's writings. The founders of the Illinois Conference Female Academy (now MacMurray College) in Jacksonville had placed this educational aim at the top of the list, as did most of the early women's colleges.<sup>16</sup>

The year Sill founded the seminary, the first woman, Elizabeth Blackwell, received a medical degree. Twenty years later Iowa became the first state to admit a woman, Arabella Mansfield, to the bar. Religious leaders fought hard against the demands of educated women for acceptance into these and other professions. Yet Sill did not fight this trend. In 1884 she proudly told the alumnae that Rockford Female Seminary graduates were serving in the medical profession, in "literary circles," art, science, and "moral enterprises."<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, Sill sought to educate "the poorer and less favored classes of young women, hitherto debarred from the higher education" Like her grandfather Peck, she identified with common people who had to struggle to educate themselves. The article she pasted in her scrapbook

expressed the dream of universal education which inspired the Father of New York's Common Schools as well as his granddaughter: "Universal Education! Grand, inspiring idea! Who will not labor, and court sacrifice, and suffer reproach, if he may hasten, . . . its blessed coming?"

At Mt. Holyoke Mary Lyon reduced housing costs by requiring her students to share in the household responsibilities. She said that she intended to educate middle class women. Anna Sill followed the same practice but made special efforts to help poor women. In 1849 Mount Holyoke's yearly tuition and board totaled sixty dollars. At Rockford Female Seminary, a student would pay from eleven to sixteen dollars a year tuition and forty to sixty dollars to board with a local family. In an attempt to raise scholar-ship money, Sill related the following:

I have frequently met with those who are very anxious to be educated, but cannot command the means. With tearful eyes they have repeated again and again--'I do want an education, but I am poor;' or, 'I do feel I must be educated, I want to be useful in the world.' . . . 'Can you take me and wait until I can teach?' How could I listen to such a request without sympathy--deep sympathy? How could I say 'No!' How could I turn away one thirsting for knowledge? . . .

When tuition fees were raised by the board of trustees, Sill wrote to the board president, "We are too expensive for a certain class." She continued to insist on lowering fees because she believed strongly that education belonged to all people, not simply to the wealthy.

Sill did not believe that just because one was poor or female she should receive an inferior education. On the



contrary, she always challenged her students to reach for the highest intellectual attainment and was frequently criticized because she pushed them too hard. She set great store by the resolution passed by the Board of Trustees that the proposed seminary was to be of "the highest order, bearing the same relation to the education of Young Ladies as the College to the education of Young Men." This statement was included in each year's catalogue, and it remained her ideal. She could put up with poverty, inconvenience and hard labor, but not with mediocrity. In 1879 she told the alumnae,

But what was the ideal of the Seminary at this time? [1840's] Its charter gave the power of conferring degrees, and so the ideal was collegiate, and it must work out the best ideal then existing of the liberal education of young women, but it must not assume the name, college--it would be a misnomer, and to confer degrees on young ladies would not be approved by any college president or professor. But it might have floating over it the college ideal, and the private opinion might be held that young women ought to have equal advantages with the young men, and that they are as capable of obtaining a liberal education as they are. 19

In the men's colleges, the "faculty psychology" concept of mental discipline was popular as it had been for centuries. According to this view, a proper collegiate experience expanded and balanced the student's mental powers so that he could lead the community intelligently. By studying rigorous subjects, notably the ancient languages and mathematics, the student gained a comprehensive, broad view of life. It was commonly believed that women were not created to be intelligent community leaders; they

were designed to be loving wives and mothers. In 1879, one seminary alumna said, "Culture and intelligence are not now regarded as the signs of a masculine ambition among women, but as their highest charms." While not a main emphasis, mental discipline gradually crept into the female seminaries. It was argued that women needed balanced mental powers to enable them to meet any emergency. To Sill mental discipline was an integral part of a more general disciplining of the student's character. She had a quick, sharp mind and she loved to be stimulated intellectually. Yet like Joseph Emerson she taught that the intellect was a tool for divine use. Mary Lyon put it this way:

Elsewhere I had read and studied for my own gratification. I had sought knowledge for the delight I derived from its acquisition. Here [in Mr. Emerson's school] I was taught that knowledge was desirable principally as a means of usefulness to others, and that literary selfishness was as sinful as any other selfishness. 20

Anna Sill's educational aims were not revolutionary. They resembled those of most female seminaries throughout the nation. Sill's genius was not in the theoretical realm; rather, it was in her ability to raise support for a new kind of institution; to motivate a learning community to strive for academic excellence; and to found, breathe life into, and nurse a fledgling enterprise until it was strong and vibrant.

### Curriculum

In 1849 Rockford Female Seminary students were

required to write compositions, the best of which were carefully copied into a magazine called The Gleaner.

The third issue is the only extant copy of this early literary effort. In it is the question, "How should a lady be educated to fill the station her mother occupies?"

A student's answer, edited by two classmates, says that the learner should have geography "for without it she would be ignorant of the . . . earth"; history; physiology and chemistry "for in them is combined the art of cooking"; philosophy; rhetoric; letter writing; composition; mathematics, "necessary in business life as well as to strengthen and discipline the mind"; astronomy; and  
21  
languages.

This essay reflected a much debated topic in the nineteenth century--the proper curriculum for women. Since higher female education was in its infancy, curricula varied considerably from school to school. Polite finishing schools offered mainly "ornamental" subjects like fine needlework; landscape, figure, flower, and velvet painting; dancing; and music. Some seminaries taught mainly academic subjects as well as courses in teacher training. Others included courses in physiology, calisthenics, and domestic science. More numerous were schools offering a dazzling array of subjects, some in the ornamentals, others in basic branches, and even a few in the ancient languages. Historian Thomas Woody studied the curricula of 162 seminaries and found that thirty-six subjects appeared

repeatedly between 1749 and 1871. Of those listed

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Frequently Taught Courses (1749-1871)

spelling	mental philosophy	plane trigonometry
reading	Latin grammar	evidences of Christianity
writing	Greek grammar	natural philosophy
composition	German	chemistry
botany	French	geology
logic	arithmetic	astronomy
rhetoric	algebra	physiology
music	plane geometry	calisthenics
drawing	moral philosophy	ornamental needlework
U.S. history	ancient history	plain needlework
geography	modern history	political science
painting	English grammar	plane geometry

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subjects appearing in seminary catalogues most often between 1830 and 1871 were English grammar, mental philosophy (psychology), rhetoric, algebra, moral philosophy, natural philosophy (physics), chemistry, botany, moral philosophy, and astronomy.<sup>23</sup>

In 1832 when Mary Lyon wrote her first published appeal for the seminary she envisioned, she said that although male colleges had a long tradition to guide their efforts, "There is no acknowledged standard of female education, by which an institution can be measured. A long list of branches to be taught, can be no standard at all." Thus, Lyon fashioned her seminary's curriculum after women's institutions she knew and revered: Ipswich, Hartford, and Troy.<sup>24</sup>

Anna Sill probably learned what a seminary curriculum should include mainly from her experience at Phipps Union

seminary and Cary Collegiate Institute. It was also customary for principals to exchange catalogues and read of the latest teaching methods in educational journals. Although Sill had not yet visited Mary Lyon's seminary, her school was called "Mt. Holyoke of the West." Teachers at the seminary said that she was thoroughly familiar with the work of Lyon as well as the writings of Joseph Emerson, the innovative female educator who mentored Mary Lyon and Zilpah Grant Banister. How much Sill knew of these leading New England educators before moving to Rockford is not known. The members of the Beloit Board of Trustees were certain to have given Sill their publications as well as the letters of Zilpah Grant Banister. Since Mary Lyon's seminary stood for the highest standard in female education, Sill enthusiastically adopted Mt. Holyoke as her ideal.<sup>25</sup>

A Rockford Female Seminary catalogue was not published until 1854, so one can only piece together Sill's initial curriculum from newspaper clippings and student remembrances. She offered instruction in the primary branches, a common practice for seminary founders. Local primary education was often deficient and the school would have a better chance of patronage if it offered courses to a wide age group. Sill probably had both reasons in mind when she sent her first advertisement to the Rockford Forum. Initially most of her students took primary subjects from Eliza Richards, but to the growing body of older students she promised "a systematic English Course, as far as

practicable in three regular Classes . . . . Also, the Ornamental Branches and Modern Languages." For extra tuition, students were promised instruction in piano (thirty dollars per year), use of a piano (six dollars per year), water color painting (eleven dollars per year), drawing (seven dollars per year), French (six dollars per year), and German (six dollars per year).<sup>26</sup>

One of the early students remembered that Hannah Richards had taught mathematics, "mental arithmetic her strong point." Algebra was taught the second year. A newspaper columnist said that on the day he visited the seminary, students took "composition, reading, . . . colloquial recitations or declamations." Of the classes in composition and colloquial recitations, he said:

The articles read from the "Gleaner," [the student magazine] gave evidence that the fields of literature had not been gleaned in vain, or the mines of thought explored without finding a gem. The paper was very well read, with this exception--too great haste, which should doubtless be attributed to a slight embarrassment, having its origin in becoming modesty. 27

The "Visitor," as he signed the article, also mentioned vocal music and domestic sewing, two so-called ornamental subjects. Sill's piano, which was said to have been shipped west in a wagon, was used as the seminary's practicing instrument. Miss H. Patrick taught drawing and painting. In addition, Sill taught "fine manners," admonished the girls about appearance, and even wrote frequent letters to the children's parents probably about their daughters' cleanliness and neatness. One of Sill's often-quoted mottos

was, "Dress is the flowering out of character." Such instruction was probably expected of a female seminary. <sup>28</sup>

Puritans of the nineteenth century generally frowned on dancing and other "worldly" pleasures. When a church near Rockford was given a melodian, the minister was so upset by the "organ of evil" that he preached against it, then carried it outside, and refused to have it back. Sill forbade waltzing and theatre-going, but she was not against the music of the melodian. When students did their calisthenics, Sill played the melodian, but she kept the tempo slow. "The exercise could not be wicked," explained a student, "because the melodeon [sic] could not be played fast." <sup>29</sup>

How much science and history were taught in 1849 is not known. One student recalled studying Watts' On the Mind, one of the principal's favorite texts. Sill may have used Joseph Emerson's 1829 edition with questions to stimulate student thinking. Emerson advised teachers to "ask the printed questions. Keep a record of performance. Go over again without record, with much lecturing, questioning, and plain talk." Isaac Watts' celebrated text was used to teach mental and moral philosophy. Emerson considered it "the best work of its size every composed by man." He went on to say that it explained "how to judge and reason, but in the most extensive sense how to think." A difficult book, On the Mind was not usually required of first year seminary students; however, common school

teachers returning to take classes were considered mature enough to understand it. Mary Lyon wrote of it, "I consider it a privilege to teach this book. I rejoice more and more that I have undertaken it."<sup>30</sup>

### Instruction

Both in colleges and female seminaries the most popular teaching methods were recitation and lecture. Especially prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a recitation was a dialogue between teacher and student. The student was daily assigned a portion of a textbook, previous lecture or scientific demonstration. Often the tutor would draw names at random, call a student's name, ask specific questions and expect the student to respond correctly. The advantages of the method were that the student would be disciplined to study for each session, and the tutor could readily tell which students had studied diligently. The main disadvantage was that recitations often degenerated into a simple question and answer session requiring only rote<sup>31</sup> memory.

One of the most frequent criticisms of women's schools was that the girls learned only to parrot. It was said that the pupils were rushed through a great number of textbooks so that they could hold stimulating conversations and thus "shine" in society. This accusation was not limited to women's seminaries. Joseph Emerson, who attended Harvard and later served as a tutor, criticized the college for



requiring students "to apply vigorously to ten studies, almost or entire new, in the course of a single month." In the early years this criticism was not leveled against Anna Sill's seminary. Like most nineteenth century educators, she held daily recitations. She even set aside a room for this purpose. After listening to the students recite, an examining committee reported that the teachers had obviously tried "to elicit thought on the part of the learners, rather than merely to take them through a given number of text books."<sup>32</sup>

Sill expected her student to work hard. They wrote abstracts and essays, gave public readings, corrected grammatical errors on paper and in their speech, and memorized daily scripture verses. In later years, their principal recalled:

School was to them [the early students] no holiday pastime; it meant hard work. They were thorough scholars as far as they went, for they studied with a right good will. There were among them good writers.

This diligence was recognized by the first examining committee, which remarked that the students "had performed an unusual amount of hard labor in study, under judicious and energetic training."<sup>33</sup>

Although the press was highly praiseworthy of the seminary, calling it the "honor of the village," some of Sill's methods were criticized. An early Rockford resident recalled many years later that he had heard that when Sill addressed the school, the girls were required to sit with

their arms behind their backs and to lean forward "until their forehead [sic] rested upon the desk in front. This attitude corresponded to the soldier's attention." Sill was reputed to have unusual control over her students. The same man remembered hearing that

On Monday morning at roll call each girl was to rise in her place and tell whether she had attended church services the day before, and where, if she had not, it was expected that she would give a good and sufficient excuse for her neglect of duty. So great was the influence which this remarkable lady exercised over her pupils that nothing less than severe illness could keep them from attending church on Sunday morning. 34

This story may have been true, for in later years Sill required all students to stand at Sunday dinner and give a synopsis of the sermon they had heard that morning. Most colleges and seminaries of the period required students to attend daily chapel and Sunday worship services, but it is doubtful that students had to prove they had paid attention. Like her grandfather Peck, Sill had an "indomitable will," and she sometimes used extreme measures to control student behavior. Those with the most spirit were likely to rebel. It was said, for example, that all Sill's students faithfully attended church services, except one.

This independent young lady always replied to the usual Monday morning query with a sturdy "No" that made the cold chills run up and down the spinal columns of the other girls. And when interrogated as to the reason for her delinquency she invariably responded that she thought she would rather sleep. . . . In church-going Rockford, it was little less than heresy, and it argues well for the attractiveness of the young lady that she was not entirely ostracised by the other pupils of the school.

In later years another strong-willed student named Jane

Addams refused to give in to Sill's influence. Many years later she wrote that although she was the subject of much prayer at daily chapel exercises and prayer meetings, and although a teacher privately urged her to become a missionary, she was "singularly unresponsive to all these forms of emotional appeal."<sup>35</sup>

### Uncertain Times

A little more than a month after Anna Sill opened her school, the Beloit Board of Trustees met. Instead of agreeing to collect the Rockford pledges for construction of a seminary building, they decided that Rockford had defaulted on its pledges. Thus, they voted to accept new proposals for the location of the seminary. They would make a final decision at the next annual meeting in July 1850. This news must have been a blow to Anna Sill. She probably heard about it from her minister, L.H. Loss. He had promised Aratus Kent that if the board were willing to take Sill's seminary under its care, the town would raise one thousand dollars to "purchase the house and lot occupied by the School." Of course, he couldn't know whether this pledge would be large enough to ensure the location of the seminary in Rockford.<sup>36</sup>

To make matters worse, Loss decided to leave Rockford for a church in Joliet. This news was bound to be even more discouraging. Anna was a loyal Congregationalist. She attended church three times each Sunday as well as the mid-

week meeting, the Missionary Society, and the Sewing Society. She also conducted a prayer meeting and taught a large Bible class. She felt drawn to her ministers because they shared her deep commitment to the Christian faith. To her pastor in New York, she had communicated her deepest longings. She probably did the same with Loss. What would she do without her closest link to the Board of Trustees? Sill probably didn't realize that her minister had "not been well disposed to the College [Beloit] on personal accounts," and that his endorsement may have hindered rather than helped her.

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In her journal, Anna poured out her grief at the departure of her friend. Surely, she reasoned, this was a providential test of her faith:

I feel that I shall indeed be shut up to the faith, and left to trust in God alone for the prosecution of this work. And thus it has always been when I began to lean on earthly props. I feel that God would discipline to faith. . . . Oh, for more holiness of heart, for entire consecration to God. What can I, a feeble finite creature do? I feel in want of all things. How much wisdom, prudence, zeal, tempered with moderation, is required to fill my station! 38

In the next months Sill probably puzzled over why the Beloit Board had voted to consider new seminary locations, especially since no one had tried to collect the Rockford pledges. What would their final decision be? A year was a long time to wait.

## FOOTNOTES

1

Ada Potter Lathrop, Alumnae Address printed in "The Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (February 1883), 42; Aline Bartholomew, "Our College Up the Steeps of Time," The Taper, 9 (1920), 17; Katherine Church Keeler, Address given at Founder's Day printed in "Home Happenings," Rockford Seminary Magazine 14 (June 1891), 140.

2

Keeler, Founder's Day Address, 140.

3

[Henry M. Goodwin], Memorials, 1849-1889 (Rockford, Illinois: Daily Electric Register Print, 1889), 15; advertisement in Sill Scrapbook (collection of newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary from 1849 until after Sill's death), Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 1. All future references to this collection will be labeled History: R.C.A. Also see Maggie Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 41.

4

Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 60.

5

Maggie Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 42.

6

Cederborg, Thesis, 86, 71, 73; "Being a Boy in Old Rockford," typescript from Rockford Morning Star (n.d.), R.C.A.

7

[Goodwin], Memorials, 16; Cederborg, Thesis, 87; "Being a Boy in Old Rockford," 2-3.

8

Cederborg, Thesis, 87; Keeler, 141.

9

[Goodwin], Memorials, 15; An article entitled, "For the Forum [Rockford newspaper]: Rockford Female Seminary," signed by A Visitor, Sill Scrapbook, 2; The teacher's assessment of the mature students is taken from a typescript of an autobiography of Harriet Stewart Judd dealing with her experiences as a teacher at Rockford Female Seminary. The note at the top of the typescript says 1851-52, but events in the narrative date it the following year. Harriet Judd had known Anna Sill at Phipps Union Seminary. Sill persuaded her friend to teach at the newly opened seminary before the first building was erected. See Harriet Stewart Judd, Autobiography History: R.C.A., 3. This account of Sill's activities is quoted from the remembrance of one of her first scholars as found in Goodwin, Memorials, 16.

According to George Sill, Genealogy, 8, Helen Sill, born May, 1810, married Roswell Hollester. The spelling of this name is probably incorrect. Helen Anna Lynch, one of the Sill descendants, wrote that Helen married George Hollister. Helen Hollister may have been a widow when Sill asked her to move to Rockford. See letter of Helen Anna Lynch to Mrs. Penniman, 7 December 1952, History: R.C.A.

10

Katherine Brown Kerr, "Decus et Veritas," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (July, 1884), 265; Mary Town Claflin, "The Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (February, 1883), 42; L. Louise Farnham Kent, "Rockford Seminary Association," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (December, 1884), 321; "The Eighth Annual Reunion," in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (January, 1882), 11.

11

Anna Peck Sill, "Rockford Seminary, Its Ideal," Address at the Sixth Annual Banquet and Reunion of Rockford Seminary, Chicago, 1879, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 7 (March, 1879), 77; "The Compact in the Mayflower," Sill Scrapbook, 1; For a thorough discussion of the Puritan influence on Anna Sill, see Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 35-38.

12

Jane Addams, "Alumnae Essay," in [Goodwin], Memorials, 72-73.

13

[Goodwin], Memorials, 19, 26; Anna Peck Sill, "Woman an Architect," Alumnae Address at the Tenth Annual Reunion of Rockford Seminary, Chicago, 1884, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (March, 1884), 98.

14

Letter of Lynch to Penniman, 7 December 1952, History: R.C.A., 2; Cederborg, Thesis, 77; Mary E.B. Norton, Letter to the Alumnae Association of Rockford Seminary, in [Goodwin], Memorials, 69.

15

[Goodwin], Memorials, 28-29.

16

Anna Peck Sill, Address before the Reunion at Minneapolis, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (June, 1883), 186; Sill, Alumnae Address, 1879, 77; "Home Education of Daughters," Sill Scrapbook, 1; Mary Watters, The First Hundred Years of MacMurray College (Springfield, Illinois: Williamson Printing & Publishing Co., 1947), 44-45; see also Thomas Woody, History of Women's Education in the United States, 2 (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 192f.

17

Sill, "Woman an Architect," Alumnae Address, 1884, 98.

18

[Goodwin], Memorials, 19, 27-28; Horace Greeley, "Universal Education," Sill Scrapbook, 1.

Mary Lyon wrote that her "thoughts, feelings, and judgment" had been turning toward "the middle classes of society. . . . For this class I want to labor, and for this class I consider myself rather peculiarly fitted to labor. . . . This middle class contains the main springs, and main wheels, which are to move the world." As quoted from Arthur C. Cole, Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1940), 18-19.

See also Elizabeth A. Green, Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates, (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1979), 120; advertisement, Rockford Female Seminary, 1849, in Sill Scrapbook, 1.

Sill's quotation is taken from a typescript of a letter from Anna Sill to Professor J. Emerson, Rockford, 3 October 1872, Emerson Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. During the last few years of her term as principal of the seminary, Sill grew increasingly concerned about the cost of tuition. Not only did she frequently ask the board to lower tuition fees, but she also raised money for student aid, even during her retirement. See Cederborg, Thesis, 215-16, 219, 225.

19

Sill, "Rockford Seminary, Its Ideal," Alumnae Address, 1879, 76.

20

John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, Higher Education in Transition (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 104-105; Miss Landon, Address at the Sixth Annual Reunion, Chicago, 1879, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 7 (March 1879), 74. Mary Lyon's statement is taken from Harriet Webster Marr, The Old New England Academies Founded Before 1826 (New York: Comet Press Books, 1959), 82-83.

21

The Gleaner, Rockford Female Seminary, 1 (10 October 1849), Student Activities Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois.

22

Woody, History of Women's Education, I, 417-18.

23

Ibid.

24

Mary Lyon, "New England Female Seminary for Teachers" (1822), in Pioneers of Women's Education, ed. Willystine Goodsell (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1931), 264.

25

Cederborg, Thesis, 15, 17-18.

26

Marr, Academies, 90-92; advertisement for Rockford Female Seminary, 1849, Sill Scrapbook, 1.

27

Cederborg, Thesis, 15; see the article, "For the Forum [the Rockford newspaper], Rockford Female Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 2.

28

"For the Forum," Sill Scrapbook, 2; Jane Addams, Appeal Letter to the Alumnae and Former Students of Rockford Seminary, July 1, 1891, in Sill Scrapbook (n.p.) mentions the piano's origin; Cederborg, Thesis, 72; Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 48.

29

Bartholomew, "Our College," 17; Cederborg, Thesis, 90.

30

Cederborg, Thesis, 89; Marr, Academies, 176, 211, 212.



31

John S. Brubaker and Willis Rudy, Higher Education in Transition (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 84-88.

32

See Ralph Emerson, Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson, Pastor of the Third Congregational Church in Beverly, Ms. and Subsequently Principal of a Female Seminary (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834), 158. Emerson felt that the hasty perusal of many books caused injury to one's mind. He also thought that the heavy academic demands at Harvard undermined students' health. See also "Examination of the Rockford Female Seminary," Rockford Forum, 14 April 1852, in Sill Scrapbook, 3.

33

Anna Peck Sill, "Build Well and for Eternity," Address at the 1886 Alumnae Reunion, Rockford, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 14 (July 1886), 216; "Examination," Sill Scrapbook, 3.

34

"Being a Boy in Old Rockford," 3.

35

Ibid.; see also Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 47.

36

"Resolutions Relative to Rockford Female Seminary," File No. 4, 24 July 1849, Minutes of Board of Trustees, 23 October 1845 - 18 September 1850, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. Letter of Aratus Kent to Dexter Clary, 15 October 1849[?], Rockford Seminary Folder, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin.

37

Kerr, "Decus et Veritas," 267; letter of Joseph Emerson to Samuel Emerson, 3 December 1849, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin.

38

As quoted from [Goodwin], Memorials, 16.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON PROBATION

#### Public Examinations

In frontier Rockford, the examinations of "Miss Sill's School" were grand occasions. As the appointed hour approached, one was likely to see mothers and fathers escorting their trembling daughters into the old courthouse. Local ministers and other community leaders who had agreed to serve on the "Board of Visitors" arrived and were properly escorted to their places. Likely the principal and her assistant teachers were reassuring the youngest students and giving them last-minute instructions. There would be usual number of bachelors who attended all such occasions in hopes of catching the eye of a pretty girl. Soon the chairs were packed with people, some coming to find out what went on in a female seminary, others wondering if perhaps their daughters might benefit from Miss Sill's school.<sup>1</sup>

To many settlers a school exhibition offered a pleasant diversion from hard labor and boredom. Sometimes the audience was so loud and unruly that the local press

called it "somewhat an impediment to the proceedings, a disturbance to others, and a reproach to themselves."

Other times the people sat in breathless silence as Miss Sill's students parsed sentences, answered questions about the history of the states, solved difficult algebra problems, played the mandolin or piano, translated Latin, read compositions, sang songs, recited poetry, and held colloquies.<sup>2</sup>

On these occasions, usually held twice a year, the person really being evaluated was Anna Peck Sill. She had to prove to the parents that their money wasn't being wasted. She had to demonstrate to the Rockford board of trustees that her school was worthy of their endorsement. And perhaps most important at first, she had to convince the Beloit Board of Trustees that she was competent enough to head the chartered seminary. Three months after the opening of the school, the first examination was held. It was shorter than later three-day extravaganzas, but it met the hearty approval of Rockford. Although a newspaperman was not present, the Rockford Forum reported what others had said: "that the excises [sic] were highly gratifying to all, and exhibited a system of arrangement, and effect of training very creditable to the teachers."<sup>3</sup>

The second examination, held in February 1850, was even more important because it fell before the board meeting in which the seminary's location would be determined. This might be Sill's only chance to display her abilities to any

Beloit board member who attended. The newly elected president of Beloit College, A. L. Chapin, was invited as well as Professor Joseph Emerson. Listed among the six examiners was the name of the board president, A. Kent, possibly making his first acquaintance with the much-<sup>4</sup>discussed principal.

There is no record of what the students did at the second examination. However, the report of the "Board of Visitors" was published in the newspaper, and Sill must have been elated when she saw it. The board said that the examination was "full and thorough," and was "conducted by the teachers with marked ability." The students were well ordered, and they had obviously studied diligently. Sill was probably most pleased by the following statement: "We were especially gratified in observing Moral culture everywhere harmoniously blended with the Intellectual--a feature the more noticeable, because, unhappily, so rare." The report sounded good, but undoubtedly Sill wondered what the board members had thought of her. Had she known Kent well, she might have realized that more than most other board members, he would appreciate her values and temperament. In his line of work, Kent had learned to size up people quickly and accurately. In an 1851 letter he called Anna Sill "our excellent and devoted Principal." Thus, in a short time, he had probably already begun to  
<sup>5</sup>respect the lady principal from New York.

### The Interim Minister

At this time Sill was also making the acquaintance of another key Beloit board member, Joseph Emerson. In November 1850 Lewis Loss left his post in the Rockford Congregational church. Until a new minister could be found, his pulpit was supplied by the young professor from Beloit College. Tall, handsome, and cultured, Emerson was the much-loved son of a distinguished New England family. His father, Ralph, was an Andover Theological Seminary professor, who had tutored Aratus Kent, Stephen Peet, and the female educator, Zilpha Grant Banister. His uncle was the noted Harvard tutor, writer, and female educator, Joseph Emerson. The status of the family had increased greatly due to a distant cousin named Ralph Waldo Emerson. When Joseph Emerson had left his position as Yale College tutor to take an uncertain post at Beloit College, he could hardly have realized that he would have a key role in founding and supporting the female seminary. Sill was probably a bit awed by the Beloit professor who was working quietly with the Board of Trustees. After all, he had received a classical education from one of the finest colleges in the East and studied theology at Andover Seminary. Like many members of his family, he was deeply religious. Although not ordained until 1860, he preached frequently and was often called upon to supply vacant pulpits.

Emerson's first priority was the fledgling men's

college, but he was also vitally interested in the female seminary. His mother, Eliza Rockwell, and his sisters were artistic, cultured, and well-educated. Like his uncle, Professor Emerson wanted women to have excellent educational opportunities, but he was not so forward-looking nor so original as his uncle. Nevertheless, he was willing to support the advancement of female education. Six months after his arrival, he wrote and asked his father, who had many connections, to help raise endowment money for both institutions. A few weeks after the Beloit Board of Trustees had resolved to accept new bids for the seminary's location, his mother sent important news, "We have proposed to Mrs. B. [Zilpah Grant Banister] to make your female seminary her residuary legatee."<sup>7</sup>

The possibility of a substantial gift from the Banister estate provided just the encouragement the Beloit board needed. No doubt the donor would want to influence the enterprise, and Banister was well-qualified for the role. For several months Emerson frequently sought advice from the woman whose seminary at Ipswich had been the model for Mt. Holyoke. By letter he explained that the executive committee needed her advice because "this is a new work to them and they . . . have no will or fancy of their own respecting it." More specifically, he asked Banister to give advice on the seminary's proper location, its faculty, course of study, "family arrangements," discipline, size and composition of its board of trustees, etc. "I want a

first class seminary," he wrote to his father, ". . . on such a plan as Mrs. Banister would propose."<sup>8</sup>

Although only twenty-eight years old, Emerson was already a shrewd judge of people and situations. In December 1849 he wrote a long letter to his brother in which he described his delicate position in the female seminary matter. He explained that the executive committee had entrusted the founding of the seminary to a select committee, to which his name had been added:

I am the youngest professor and in a sort responsible for the success of a matter which more properly belonged to almost anybody else, and obliged to get on with it by the side of those to whom it should belong, and still unable to get even their assistance--much less their direction. 9

While preaching in Rockford, Emerson became aware of the rivalry between people living on the east and west sides of Rock River, which ran through the middle of town. "The Seminary," he wrote, "if they have it there, will be on the east side probably, and the west side will not do much for it." He also realized that some Rockford residents were jealous of Beloit's institutions and that the two towns might soon become entangled in a "fierce war" over the location of the railroad. He concluded,

I mean that this College [Beloit] shall not (if I can help it) become involved either in fact or in men's minds in any local rivalries; and so I want to see a stake or two set in Rockford by which we may hold the religious and educational sympathies of the two places together.

Emerson also wrote a letter to Aratus Kent, telling him that he wanted to support the seminary which Anna Sill

had started and that he intended to attend the school's examination. The older man was cautious. "Certainly you ought to attend their examination and encourage that school," he told Emerson, "but you cannot locate the <sup>10</sup> seminary we have in charge."

A few days later the trustees met to work out the details of a circular that would be sent to the towns in northern Illinois. It stated the terms for submitting pledges and said that the board's final decision would be made "especially - upon the amount of subscriptions." Here was the crux of the matter. The board had learned from bitter experience in Beloit that raising pledges was one thing and getting the money was another. They wanted to put up another substantial building, and Rockford's broken-down courthouse simply wasn't good enough. The best way to find out which community would support the construction of a seminary building was to see which town would promise the most money. Yet the board was wise enough to stipulate that other things also would determine their final decision, such as "religious, moral & social influences." <sup>11</sup>

### The Final Decision

During the summer of 1850 three towns worked feverishly to raise pledges, each probably spurred on by reports of what the others had done. Rockford's first subscription, pledged in increments ranging from five to four hundred dollars, gradually increased until it exceeded



the thirty-five hundred dollars pledged in 1845. One Thursday afternoon a group of women was attending a meeting when they decided to raise one thousand dollars for the seminary site. By the following Monday, they had collected the total amount. Finally the deadline for bids arrived, and the three towns submitted their subscriptions.<sup>12</sup>

Not long afterwards an article appeared in the popular Prairie Herald, published in Chicago. It gave a history of the Beloit Conventions and the action of the current board. It reported that during the first year of Anna Sill's seminary, 240 pupils had attended, 92 of whom had boarded in Rockford. It said that the school was "daily extending its influence wider" and "continually taking a deeper hold of the confidence and favorable regard of the whole community." In addition, it reported that three towns had sent proposals, Rockford offering the largest subscription," \$6215, \$500 [sic] of which is to be used for the purchase of a site." The article concluded,

On the score of pecuniary inducement, therefore, we feel abundant assurances that Rockford will be preferred. And we doubt not the trustees will find at Rockford other of paramount considerations, in the fact that there is now established there just such a school as they desire to build up, and it will only remain for them to accept the means subscribed, and with it cast around that school whatever of influence and patronage they can control.

Anyone reading the Prairie Herald article probably thought that Rockford had little chance of losing the bid for the location of the seminary.

Anna Sill must have valued this article, for she pasted it in her scrapbook. A few days before the board meeting in which the trustees would decide the seminary's site, however, she received a letter from Emerson in which he reported the amounts subscribed: Freeport \$5,500, Rockford \$6,215, and Rockton \$6250. Now it looked as though Rockford might lose the bid. These developments must have put her into an agony of suspense.

14

Finally the day of decision came, 18 September 1850. The board members arrived and settled into their places. To Aratus Kent, Joseph Emerson, A.L. Chapin, and the other ministers, this was no mere meeting. It was an opportunity to do God's will. They believed that their decision would profoundly affect many generations, and they wanted to be sure they voted wisely. Thus, they probably prayed more fervently than usual. When the votes were counted, Rockford had won by a narrow margin. In a published report Aratus Kent explained that of the \$6250 Rockton had promised, the town had proffered "the interest annually at 6 percent of a 1000 Dollars until the principal should be paid. . . . But it could not be used immediately in the erection of Buildings [sic]." Thus, Rockford was voted as the site of the seminary.

#### A Victory of Sorts

The walls of Rockford Female Seminary must have echoed with cheers when the news arrived that their town was the

selected site for the female seminary. It was a short celebration, at least for their principal. The next day the Rockford Female Seminary Board of Trustees met for the first time. They elected Aratus Kent president, Thomas D. Robertson secretary, and Asa Crosby treasurer. They also elected an executive committee to handle day-to-day matters. They adopted the charter of Rockford Female Seminary and began making definite plans about the collection of pledges, purchase of property and design of buildings. The last item of business concerned the principal of the seminary. They did not elect Anna Peck Sill.

16

The Board of Trustees moved cautiously, and they considered the selection of a chief executive officer worthy of careful consideration. When calling A.L. Chapin to be Beloit College president, Aratus Kent wrote,

We repeatedly united in prayer for we felt that the future growth and symmetry [sic] and usefulness (not to say the very life) of the infant we were nursing would depend very much upon the man to whom we should entrust its early education and subsequent discipline.

The board had spent many months looking. They had selected A. L. Chapin only after he had been offered the prestigious job of Secretary of the American Home Missionary Society. Anna Sill had no such prestigious offer. Her qualifications were still questionable. Thus, instead of electing Sill principal, the board resolved to "recognize the school already established in this place under the charge of Miss Sill as preliminary to the Seminary."

17

For two more years Sill waited for the board's full endorsement. During this time she must have wondered if she would ever completely have it. And, in fact, she never did. This knowledge undoubtedly grated on Sill, for she wanted their approval. She was aware that without the board her efforts would be limited to one town and perhaps one generation. Yet it was hard to give up her authority and even galling to have it taken by men who felt superior. By this time she probably also began to realize that it was not "Miss Sill's School" the board planned to support but one of their own creation. Anna Sill would do until they found someone better. The problem was that they couldn't find anyone better, even though they tried several times. Over the years as Sill's prestige and influence grew, she increasingly asserted her right as head of the seminary. She simply wouldn't take a subservient role, and she only grew more stubborn as the struggle intensified. Anna Peck Sill was a fighter, like her Grandfather Peck. Although Peck had only one good eye and little formal education, he wouldn't let the more cultured and powerful keep him from asserting the rights of the common people. Anna Sill fought a similar battle for women.

18

### Gaining Ground

For the next four years, classes met in the old courthouse, where one hundred girls crowded together to learn, as one alumna put it, "something of how to learn."

The forty to fifty primary students continued as before. The more advanced studied United States and French history by the topical method. They solved algebra, geometry, and trigometry problems. In geography they traced with chalk the outlines of selected states; described rivers, boundaries and lakes; and learned to put in their own words the region's history, climate and production. In astronomy they used Matteson's maps to locate and discuss the  
 19  
 constellations.

In 1850 a young Yale graduate named Henry M. Goodwin arrived in Rockford to assume the pastorate of the First Congregational Church. A polished speaker and writer, he had a mystical faith and warmth of personality that quickly won the hearts of his parishioners. He was also respected by the Board of Trustees, particularly President Chapin, who  
 20  
 appreciated Goodwin's cultivation and sincerity.

One of the most impressive members of Goodwin's church was the tall, slender principal of the female seminary who arrived at church with a long procession of girls at her heels. Like many Yale graduates, Goodwin was vitally interested in education. Soon he was invited to be an examiner on the "Board of Visitors," and then to teach Latin at seminary. In 1853 he became a member of the Board of Trustees, a position he held for forty years. He married Martha French, a seminary teacher, in 1854. Henry Goodwin probably felt that all women should be as vivacious, cultured, and religious as his wife. Although

Sill lacked charm, she had a spiritual devotion and strength of character which Goodwin admired. For the rest of her life, Goodwin and his wife were two of Sill's staunchest friends and supporters.

21

During this probationary period, Anna Sill's responsibilities continued to grow. In addition to entertaining numerous strangers, friends, and patrons who visited the seminary, she taught history, language and literature, political economy, mental science, natural theology, moral philosophy, and music. Only after the ten o'clock retiring bell did she have time to answer her large correspondence. She had numerous social responsibilities. A bevy of decorous young women, escorted by attractive teachers, added considerably to Rockford's social life. Churches organized clubs for the "sems," as they were called, and sponsored numerous town and seminary gatherings. Whenever an entertainer visited Rockford, the seminary girls were besieged with invitations. They responded by attending en masse. In return, they invited the entire town to scientific and literary lectures, often offered by Beloit College professors.

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On Friday evenings the boarding house parlor was filled with young men, some from Beloit College, others from Rockford and surrounding communities. Since they didn't believe in playing cards or dancing, they passed the time in "polite" conversation under the careful scrutiny of a teacher or the principal.

23

During the pledge-raising summer and following fall Sill had her first real taste of raising money. Although the women of Rockford had pledged a thousand dollars to purchase the seminary site, they were offered eight acres for only five hundred fifty dollars. Raising the promised amount, however, was no small feat. Money was scarce, especially for women. Thus, mothers turned their daughters' dresses so they would last another year, went without new bonnets, and held fund-raising entertainments. Anna Sill and her assistants worked feverishly to make these social events a success. Finally, on 22 October 1850 the money was raised and the property bought. Located across the Rock River from Kent Creek, the campus had so many trees the school was often called "Forest Hill Seminary." The grounds were described this way:

The steep bluffs descended to the water's edge, and were covered with grass and bushes and trees, particularly red cedars. Just below, where the river curves and broadens it is dotted with little islands. It was a secluded spot, too, though it was just below the ford. . . where emigrants going westward crossed with their covered wagons.

When the women of Rockford purchased the seminary grounds,  
24
 Rockford Female Seminary became truly theirs.

#### Education for Men and Women

By Christmas 1850 the Board of Trustees had arrived at five principles to govern the "establishing and organizing of the Seminary." Since President Chapin was the acknowledged expert on educational matters, he probably had a

leading role in this effort. In many ways these principles paralleled those of Beloit College. There were differences, however, because the board believed that the sexes had distinctive natures and roles.

25

Both institutions were founded by New England Puritans who believed that the only sure foundation of society was a well educated Christian population. Thus, for both college and seminary, the first governing principle was religious. The trustees resolved that the moral and religious influence should be "pure, elevated, and efficient," and that although the institutions were sponsored by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, a nonsectarian spirit would prevail.

26

Second, both institutions were to set academic standards "at the highest practical point." For the college, this meant a rigorous program to develop mental discipline. According to "faculty psychology" theory, perhaps best articulated by the Yale Report of 1828, one's intellect was developed, not by acquiring a specific amount of information, but by exercising the mental faculties. According to President Chapin, Greek, Hebrew and Latin would exercise "the mind's power in analysis and synthesis." Mathematics and science taught one how to carry out a scientific investigation and "view the boundless realm of knowledge which invites explorers." History and mental philosophy (psychology) were sources of "practical knowledge." Moral philosophy taught the "philosophy and moral principles necessary to complete general preparation for a



broad and useful life." The four-year collegiate course of study was prescribed because the student's possible "weak side" might not be properly strengthened if he were allowed to choose his subjects. The goal was "a symmetrical development of a man, with a will power that can, if need be, overcome aversion and cross inclination."<sup>27</sup>

The seminary was supposed to be the equal of the college. From the beginning its most advanced course was called "collegiate." The women were to have many of the same subjects the men had so that they would develop all their mental capacities "in a balanced proportion." However, instruction was to be given "in due proportion for imparting those accomplishments which adorn and grace the female mind." This phrase meant that the three-year seminary course was less rigorous than the men's Collegiate course. For men, intelligence was essential; for women, it was merely decorative. In his 1862 Rockford Female Seminary "Anniversary Address," President Chapin said,

"The distinguishing faculty of man is mental concentration; that of woman, moral impulse. Woman is the representative of affection: man of thought. Woman carries her strength in her heart, man in his head. Neither one monopolizes the special department; but by eminence, he is intellect, - she is love."

Anna Sill probably disagreed with Chapin although she did accept the popular notion that women lacked the strength to keep up with college men. In later life she wrote that she believed in colleges for women, and if she were young she would try to have the "best college education" available,

"whether at Wellesley, Vassar, or Smith College, Mount  
 28  
 Holyoke Seminary, or Rockford Seminary."

The third principle governing the seminary was training "for domestic duties." To promote this training, students would be encouraged to live in the dormitory where they would perform "domestic service . . . under a regular system." At this time it was believed that women should never take leadership roles in society, with the possible exception of teaching small children. Men moved freely between home and society. Women were told to stay in their "appropriate sphere . . . in the midst of a quiet home." Women were never to command public attention; they were to remain in the background. In his 1852 Rockford Female Seminary Address, Joseph Emerson said,

And so we approach the question--what is the true idea of Female Liberal Education?

It must be the training & development [sic] of a noble-minded & true hearted woman. And what is the true model of womanly character? It we have defined as being Truthful Grace. A character having for its heart unfailing truth and for its manifestation full loveliness.

It is a fountain flowing from a deep-pure well of truth--yet not ostentatious of its truth--not lifting its abundant water aloft & dashing them mightily like Niagara--but letting there well up from the fullness of the heart. The bright waters meet the sun beams with a most sparkling smile but do not display themselves in the sun--& so they did in the outflowing of their spontaneous beneficence spread all around them over the earth a mantle of green herbage--and the fountain hides itself beneath a garland woven of many colored flowers --yet while it hides itself by the beauty it has called into being, it has not withdrawn the truthfulness it has covered--but is ready to meet the lips of the fainting one with such liquid refreshment as comes only from ever pure depths--true depths beyond the reach of summer droughts or winter frost. 29

Whether at home or in society, a woman was always to serve as a support to men. She was to help her brother: "her calm spirit represses his boisterous passion, & her cheerful confidence soothes & lifts him out of his despondency. . . ." She was "companion to her husband." She made it "her study to anticipate his wants and please him." She was a mother "shedding light & love thro' the channels wh.[ich] maternal instinct opens, on a little group of young immortals." Men were the movers and shakers of society; women made men "better fitted for all duty." Anna Sill believed that woman's contribution to society was crucial, not merely supportive. She said to the alumnae,

I have carefully studied the philosophy of the world's history, and I believe the primal elevation of the race lies largely in the power of the mother, and the teacher of children, and this thought has been the inspiration of my life work, in giving myself to the cause of the Christian education of young women. What matter if this power be behind the throne? The most potent forces of nature are silent forces. 30

The fourth principle governing the organization of the seminary was economic. To make the institution accessible even to the poor, expenses were to be reduced to the "lowest point compatible with the maintenance [sic] of its elevated character." This aim was more prominent at the seminary than at Beloit College. The college encouraged indigent young men to pursue collegiate education by providing scholarship money, but emphasis was placed on educating the few leaders whose "superior intellect" and "cultivated minds" would raise the general intelligence

of the people." In his Cornerstone Address, Chapin said,

The thorough education of the people is the only security of a well ordered state, essential to sound morality, indispensable to the interests of Christ's church--that in order to [sic] the general education of the masses, there must be some minds most thoroughly trained by the discipline & read in the researches of Literature & Science, to be their teachers & guides. 31

A college degree represented intelligence and authority, so-called masculine traits. This is why the 1854 student editors of The Beloit College Monthly considered it "extraordinary" that women at Lawrence University at Appleton, Wisconsin, received the L.B.A. [Lady Bachelor of Arts] degree when they graduated. The editors commented, "We commend the institution to all ladies wishing to extend the 'sphere' of their 'rights' into the balmy regions of Bachelordom." At Rockford Female Seminary, graduates  
32  
received a seminary certificate.

President Chapin said that the ideal age for beginning collegiate study was eighteen, although in the early years, fourteen-year-olds were admitted to Beloit College. Chapin explained that when a youth was around eighteen, "the capacities are well awake, quick to catch the inspiration of great thoughts and high aims." The age of admittance at the seminary was fifteen, for as Emerson explained to Banister, "this is because 14 is the age of  
33  
admission to college."

The fifth principle concerned administration. The college president was appointed by the Board of Trustees. His power over the institution was enhanced considerably by

his additional position as president of the board. He and his faculty were responsible for instruction and governance. The seminary charter provided for the appointment of a president. However, since Sill was a woman, she only have the title of principal. Neither she nor her teachers could sit on the board because they were females. They were to govern and instruct the seminary "subject to the regulations and approval of the Board of Trustees."<sup>34</sup>

#### President Aaron Lucius Chapin

The man who greatly influenced the principles of Rockford Female Seminary was a gifted administrator. He was neither over-bearing nor indecisive. Throughout his thirty-six-year term, he had few disagreements with the Beloit Board of Trustees or the faculty. Many religious colleges in the Midwest were torn by sectarian dissension and discord over the slavery issue. Although there were some flare-ups in Beloit, Chapin was unusually adept at soothing hot tempers and settling disputes. He was reserved with his students and strangers but warm toward his faculty and close friends. His commitment to the college was legendary. What impressed his colleagues most was his steadiness. Weighted down with heavy financial burdens and nagging administrative problems, he continued to teach classes, deal with student discipline, raise money, and prepare sermons.<sup>35</sup>

A graduate of Yale and Union Theological Seminary,

Chapin was a gifted writer and speaker. He was often called upon to address national societies and conventions and for several years served as an editor of The Congregational Review and associate editor of Johnson's Cyclopedia and New Englander. His influence went far beyond the Rock River region. Among other things, for he served as trustee of Chicago Theological Seminary, corporate member of the American Board of Foreign Missions, director of the American Home Missionary Society, and trustee of Wisconsin Institute for Deaf and Dumb. He was one of the founders of Wisconsin Academy of Science and served as its president for three years.

36

Chapin was deeply religious. He preached frequently and had an intense devotional life. Like Anna Sill he kept a journal in which he recorded his ideals: "Dec. 30, 1855. I engage in my work in its behalf with a predominant desire to do good." More often he wrote down his sins and failures: "Feb. 6th, 1854: pride & unbelief have combined to keep my soul away from God & true peace. The consequent depression has been at time almost insupportable." When deeply discouraged, he usually turned to Joseph Emerson,  
37  
whose buoyant faith greatly encouraged him.

President Chapin was not particularly drawn to Anna Sill. He was a year younger and shared the same ideals and religious sentiment, but he was suspicious of her evangelistic methods. A highly controlled man, he rarely revealed his feelings and was probably uncomfortable with

her occasional displays of warmth or rage. He allowed the Beloit faculty great latitude. When he discovered that Sill gave her faculty little decision-making power, he tried to curb her authority. He served twice on committees to find a male president to take leadership over Anna Sill. As president of Beloit College, Chapin knew perhaps more than anyone the amount of fund-raising needed to set the institution on a sound financial foundation. He also knew that the female seminary would need strong leadership, especially in its formative years. A woman would be handicapped, not only in fund-raising, but also in working with the Board of Trustees. Social conventions restricted her from extensive travel and public speaking, nor did scriptural injunction allow her to preside over a male board of trustees.

38

In 1858 Chapin returned from anniversary exercises at the seminary and wrote in his journal that "one or two strong minds [sic] exposed in this day to perversion by women's rights movement." He must have recoiled when Sill and her students began to clamor for collegiate status. His views about women were perhaps more conservative than those of any other prominent board member.

39

### Hostile Forces

In 1851 "Miss Sill's School" was formally adopted by the board as "the Preparatory Department of the Rockford Female Seminary." That September the first "collegiate

class" of fifteen young women was formally examined and allowed to begin their three-year course of mental and moral philosophy, ancient and modern languages, natural science, and ornamental subjects. The following April 1852 Joseph Emerson told Zilpah Banister that he much admired Anna Sill's "administrative faculty" and that he had never heard any complaint of her in Rockford on any score although she is as prominent a person as any in the place." Apparently Anna Sill's critics did not voice their complaints to Emerson. However, they must have shared them with Rev. Henry Goodwin.

40

The young minister knew that some trustees were uncertain about whether to retain Sill as head of the seminary. Apparently some people were accusing Sill of using the seminary as a money-making scheme. Others were afraid that the seminary was "intended for the poor and Foreigners [sic]." Several doubted Sill's professional expertise, and even Emerson said that she lacked "finish." Then, of course, there were those who said that a mere woman could not adequately serve as an administrator. The seminary's executive committee, under the leadership of Aratus Kent, had twice recommended Sill's appointment as principal, but so far the board had refused to make a final decision. Probably they would do so when they met on 15 July 1852, the same day the cornerstone of Chapel Hall was to be laid.

41

Rev. Henry Goodwin rose to Sill's defense against all



her opponents. In a long letter to President Chapin, he said that removal of Sill would be "fatal to the prosperity of the Seminary." He continued,

I will say nothing of the intellectual qualifications of Miss S. . . . her public Examinations & the proficiency of her pupils are a sufficient testimony in this respect. Doubtless a mere teacher of Science--if this were the main End of the institution--could be found equal or superior to her. But this I regard after all as a subordinate thing. . . . If the training of character be the main thing in a female seminary, as it should be and if character can be taught not in books, but only as inspired by the spirit & personal influence of the teacher, it were vain to look and folly to think of finding anyone more thoroughly and admirably adapted to this work. . . . She is in fact training up a band of Christian Mothers and Missionaries for the Evangelization of the West. I should feel that my hands were scarcely more weakened by the dissolution of my church, than by her removal from the sphere she occupies.

If She were to be removed, or a male principal appointed in her place, the Seminary might go on and prosper, as a school of learning, but it would not be the school it now is, & which is most desirable to perpetuate, as an institution for female Christian character. And in regard to the abstract question of a male or female principal, permit me to ask whether the head or Soul of a female Seminary can or should be any other than a female Soul?

In addition to these considerations I might mention the energy & perseverance which Miss S. has shown in her personal efforts in behalf of the Seminary, the enthusiasm & devotion with which she has given herself to it, & the sacrificis [sic] she has made for it, as another reason why she deserves to be continued in her present sphere. 42

### Laying the Cornerstone

July 15, 1852, was a warm and sunny day. From the old courthouse, the newly formed Rockford band marched down the street followed by a long procession of trustees, teachers, scholars, and friends. They gathered on the

bluffs overlooking the Rock River where the cellar had been dug for a four-story building. There they listened to prayers, a musical number, and a history of the seminary. President Chapin discussed education and the relationship of Beloit College with Rockford Female Seminary. Aratus Kent, president of the board, quoted a psalm which became the motto of the seminary, "That your daughters may be as corner stones polished after the similitude of a palace." Then with the help of the builder he laid the cornerstone, in which were placed the following items:

circular and charter of Rockford Female Seminary, charter of the City of Rockford; last week's Democrat and Forum; Chicago Dialy Journal and Tribune; a 12 cent, 1 cent and 3 cent piece; circular and order of commencement exercises of Beloit College for 1852; circular of the Wisconsin and Illinois Education Society.

To declare his faith in the permanence of the institution, Kent said as he placed a Bible in the stone, "There let it rest until 1952." Just before the stone was placed, a small boy stepped forward and handed Rev. Kent a temperance medal. This was added to the collection and the stone was put into place.<sup>43</sup>

Later that day the Board of Trustees held their annual meeting. They may have heard President Chapin read the letter written by Anna Sill's minister. They probably discussed her strengths and weaknesses. In the end, they unanimously elected Anna Sill principal of Rockford Female Seminary. In addition to room and board at the school, her salary was set at two hundred dollars a year.<sup>44</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1

The public examinations were described at length in the local newspapers. See "Rockford Female Seminary," in Sill Scrapbook (a collection of newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary from 1849 until after Sill's death), Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 2. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated History: R.C.A. See also "The Seminary Examination," Sill Scrapbook, 3; "Rockford Female Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 3; "Examination of the Rockford Female Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 4, etc. For a student's perspective see "Examinations," Rockford Seminary Magazine 3(March 1875), 112-14.

2

"Examination of the Rockford Female Seminary," Rockford Forum [14 April 1852], Sill Scrapbook, 4.

3

"Rockford Female Seminary," in Sill Scrapbook, 2.

4

Lansing Porter invited A. L. Chapin, but there is no evidence that Chapin attended. See his letter to Chapin, 30 January 1850, Chapin Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Chapin: B.C.A. Aratus Kent encouraged Joseph Emerson to attend, so presumably both were invited. See Kent's letter to Emerson, 29 January 1850, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Emerson: B.C.A. Both board members probably attended. See also "Report," in Sill Scrapbook, 2. At the end of a report published in the newspaper was the name A. Kent, along with the names of five other examiners. Chapin and Emerson were not named.

5

Letter of Aratus Kent to American Home Missionary Society, 11 October 1851, typescript of the letter taken by Marion Bonzi, Aratus Kent Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois.

6

See Robert K. Richardson, "A Beloit Professor in Rockford College," Rockford College Charter Day, 1944, History: R.C.A. See also "Professor Joseph Emerson," D.D., Ll.D. [Memorials], Emerson: B.C.A. See J. Emerson, typescript of fragment of a rough draft of an Address at Rockford Seminary and College Semicentennial, 14 June 1899), Emerson: R.C.A.

7

Letter of Joseph Emerson to his father, Ralph, 27 November 1848, Emerson: B.C.A.; letter of Eliza Rockwell Emerson to her son, Joseph, 19 September 1848, Emerson: B.C.A.

8

Letters of Joseph Emerson to Zilaph Grant Banister, 24 November 1849; 24 November 1848; 23 February 1850; 13 June 1850; 8 November 1850; 14 August 1851; 30 April 1852, Emerson: B.C.A.

9

Letter of Joseph Emerson to his brother, Samuel, 3 December 1849, Emerson: B.C.A.

10

Letter of 3 December 1847; Emerson's letter to Kent has been lost, but from Kent's reply, one can infer what Emerson must have written. See letter of Aratus Kent to Joseph Emerson, 29 January 1850, Emerson: B.C.A.

11

Report of the Committee of the Trustees of Beloit College, 7 February 1850, Emerson: B.C.A.

12

Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 97.

13

This article, in Sill's Scrapbook, 3, did not specify Rockton's total pledge. Thus, Sill probably did not realize until she read Emerson's letter that Rockton had actually raised more pledge money.

14

Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 43.

15

Ibid. For Aratus Kent's view of the importance of prayer in making these kinds of decisions, see Aratus Kent, "The Inaugurating Address" at the Inauguration of Rev. Aaron

L. Chapin as president of Beloit College, July 24, 1850 (Milwaukee: J. Hamilton, Printer, 1850), 7-10. See also Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 9 July 1859, Records of the Board of Trustees, Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, 19 September 1850 - 7 February 1884, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, for a statement of the importance of prayer in the founding and development of the seminary. All future references to the Records of the Board of Trustees of Rockford Female Seminary will be abbreviated: Trustees: R.C.A.

See also "Report of the Com. on Locating the Female Seminary 1850," Rockford Seminary Folder, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin.

16

Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 19 September 1850, Trustees: R.C.A. This board was kept officially separate from the Beloit Board of Trustees although several members served on both boards.

17

Aratus Kent letter to Aaron L. Chapin, 29 November 1849, 2. See also Edward Dwight Eaton, Historical Sketches of Beloit College (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1928), 42ff.; R. K. Richardson, "Making and Makers of Beloit College," in Book of Beloit (Beloit, Wisconsin: Daily News Publishing Company), 35; Murphy, Religion and Education, 110; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 19 September 1850, Trustees: R.C.A.

18

See Minutes of the Board of Trustees 11 July 1856, 14 October 1856, 22 June 1880; also Sill's letter of resignation in Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 7 February 1884, Trustees: R.C.A. See also letter of H.M. Goodwin to President Chapin, 20 June 1852, Emerson: B.C.A.; letters of Joseph Emerson to Mrs. Z.P.G. Banister, 23 February 1850 and 13 June 1850, Emerson: B.C.A.; see also letter of Anna Peck Sill to Rev. A.L. Chapin, 28 August 1856, and her letter to Professor J. Emerson, 9 April 1875, Emerson: B.C.A.

19

Ada Potter Lathrop, Alumnae Address in "The Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (February 1882), 42; "Examination of the Rockford Female Seminary," Rockford Forum [14 April 1852], in Sill Scrapbook, 4.

20

Cederborg, Thesis, 274.

21

"Examination," Sill Scrapbook, 4; Ada Potter Lathrop, Address in "Commencement Week," Rockford Seminary

Magazine, 7 (June 1879), 211. Since Goodwin was not listed among the seminary teachers, he probably taught temporarily.

22

Katherine Brown Kerr, "Decus et Veritas," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (July 1884), 265; Aline Bartholomew, "Our College Up the Steeps of Time," The Taper, 9 (1920), 18; Cederborg, Thesis, 302.

23

Cederborg, Thesis, 305.

24

Ibid, 98.

25

Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 25 December 1850, Trustees: R.C.A.; Eaton, Sketches, 31.

26

See Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 25 December 1850, Trustees: R.C.A.; "Report. Rockford Female Seminary," in Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, for the Academic Year 1860-61, with Appendix for Decade 1851-61 (Rockford: Register Steam Printing Establishment, 1861), 30-32;

27

Historical Sketch of Beloit College, report prepared for the U.S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Madison, Wisconsin: Atwood & Culver, 1876), 6; A.L. Chapin, "Self-Discipline, as Means and End of Education," Wisconsin Journal of Education, 4 (December 1874), 460-61; "Beloit College. Origin and Aims," 6-7.

28

Joseph Emerson wrote to Zilpah Banister, "equality to the college is our mark for the institution," 23 February 1850, Emerson: B.C.A.; see Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 24 December 1850, Board: R.C.A.; A.L. Chapin, "Anniversary Address at Rockford Female Seminary", (address delivered at the 1862 Anniversary of Rockford Female Seminary), Chapin: B.C.A., 9; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Joseph Emerson, 10 July 1879, Emerson: B.C.A.

29

Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 24 December 1850, Board: R.C.A.; A.L. Chapin, "Female Education," (address delivered at Rockford, 6 February 1850), Chapin: B.C.A., 15. Emerson, "Anniversary Address," (delivered at Rockford Female Seminary, 13 July 1852), Emerson: B.C.A., 7-8.

30  
Chapin, "Female Education," 10-12.

31  
Anna Peck Sill, "Woman in 1876," Address delivered at the 1876 Chicago Reunion, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 4 (January 1876), 61-62; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 24 December 1850, Trustees: R.C.A.

See Chapin's Corner Stone Speech, eds. Robert H. Irrman and Helen L.D. Richardson (Beloit College, 1967), 15. Chapin said, however, that the Beloit College graduates, the "aristocracy of influence," would be raised "directly from the ranks of the commoners whom it is to govern." See Robert H. Irrman, Introspection, The 1972 Commencement Address at Beloit College (Chapin Society, 1972), (n.p.).

32  
"Title Extraordinary," Beloit College Monthly (January 1854), 20. Certificates were awarded from 1854 until 1859, when the first diplomas were awarded. See Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 7 July 1859, Trustees: R.C.A.; Cederborg, Thesis, 129.

33  
Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Beloit College and Beloit Seminary, for the Academic Year 1849-50, (Beloit, Wisconsin: Journal Office Print, 1850), 15; A. L. Chapin, "The True Function of the College," Wisconsin Journal of Education, 5 (February 1875), 46; letter of Joseph Emerson to Zilpah Grant Banister, 23 February 1850, Emerson: B.C.A.

34  
Beloit College Catalogue, 1849-50, 14; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 24 December 1850, Trustees: R.C.A.

35  
Richardson, "Making of Beloit College," 34-36; "Address of Doctor Savage" in Memorial Service, Aaron Lucius Chapin, D.D., LL.D., July 20, 1893, Chapin: B.C.A., 9; J.J. Blaisdell, "Rev. Aaron Lucius Chapin, D.D., LL.D.," in The Codex, 3, 1893, Beloit College Archives, 19-23.

36  
Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Chapin, Aaron Lucius."

37  
In Chapin's papers are copies of numerous sermons with dates preached. See also Aaron Chapin, 6 February 1854, 30 December 1855, unpublished journals, 1854-55, Chapin: B.C.A.; see letter of Aaron L. Chapin to Br. Emerson,

16 September 1872; also letter of Joseph Emerson to Aaron L. Chapin, 21 May 1872, Chapin: B.C.A.

38

See George Bushnell, "To the President and Alumni of Beloit College," in Aaron Lucius Chapin, D.D., LL.D., Memorial Service Held by The Alumni of Beloit College, in the College Chapel, July 20, 1893,, Chapin: B.C.A., 19-22;

40

"Report. Rockford Female Seminary," in Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, for the Academic Year 1860-61, with Appendix for Decade 1851-61 (Rockford: Register Steam Printing Establishment, 1961), 30; see letter of Joseph Emerson to Mrs. Z. P. Banister, 30 April 1852, Emerson: B.C.A.

41

Typescript letter of Aratus Kent to D. Clary, 20 December 1851, History: R.C.A. See also Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill: Visible Saint," 15-16, for a vivid description of this controversy. See letter of Joseph Emerson to Mrs. Z.P. Banister, 30 April 1852, Emerson: B.C.A.; Minutes of Executive Committee, 23 December 1850, and 6 May 1851, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois.

42

Typescript letter of Rev. H. M. Goodwin to President Chapin, 20 June 1852, History: R.C.A.

43

See "Being a Boy in Old Rockford," typescript from Rockford Morning Star (n.d.), 5-6; Anna Peck Sill, Alumnae Address, in "Alumnae Reunion, Rockford Seminary Magazine," 15 (June 1887), 182; Cederborg, Thesis, 109-10.

44

Minutes of Board of Trustees, 15 July 1852, Trustees: R.C.A.



## CHAPTER V

### A COLLEGE IN THE MAKING

#### A Frontier Teacher

In October of 1852 a young teacher named Harriet Stewart set out from New York on a westward journey. She traveled by steamer up the St. Lawrence Seaway to Chicago and from there by rail to Rockford, Illinois. At nine o'clock in the evening she arrived at the end of the line. Rain was falling when she stepped off the train, but she found no carriages waiting. The driver of a wagon warned "not to let them trunks fall on the woman's head," as her baggage was loaded from the platform to his conveyance. The road Stewart travelled to Rockford Female Seminary was unlighted, so a man with a lantern walked ahead of the wagon. Branches from trees had been cut and laid in the mud to keep ox carts and wagons from sticking fast.

At last Stewart arrived at the temporary seminary, where her old friend, Anna Sill, greeted her warmly. It had been several months since the women had seen each other. Two weeks after her election as principal of the seminary, Sill had traveled east to raise money and recruit teachers.

she had visited Mount Holyoke, where she met Zilpah Grant Banister and learned more about the principles and plan of Mary Lyon's female seminary. She had visited Eliza and Ralph Emerson in Andover, Massachusetts. She had also traveled to New York, and while staying in Harriet Stewart's home, had convinced the younger woman to take a teaching post at the seminary.

Stewart was escorted to the room she would share with another teacher. Later she wrote,

My heart sunk within me for a little time, as visions of the room I might have occupied came to me with its elegant furnishings and beautiful outlook. This was a low room with a low, old fashioned bedstead at the side, a board screwed to the back posts formed our bookcase, and no little care was needed to keep the books from falling down as one turned over in bed. Two chairs, a little table, a companion wash stand and a box stove completed our furniture, save a strip of rag carpet in front of our bed. There was but one dark clothes closet for several of us and we all did our own room work, even to carrying up the wood for our stove and for weeks in the winter, melting ice for our wash water.

It probably wasn't long before Anna Sill took her friend on the customary walk to the half-finished building called Chapel Hall. It was forty-four by sixty-eight feet, of Greek Revival design, and would soon have dormitories, recitation rooms, dining room, and an observatory, where students and visitors could look out over the broad Rock River valley. Estimated to cost eight thousand dollars, construction expenses would eventually total fifteen thousand.

That year Harriet Stewart experienced frontier teaching with all its challenges and hardships. The rising bell rang at

five o'clock, and a half hour later the bell rang again for exercise. One alumna recalled,

How we used to shiver and shrink before starting out. And some would ignominiously sit on the steps, with a book surreptitiously concealed under a shawl and call that--exercise.

From the parlor came the sounds of the school's only piano, which was in use from early morning until late into the evening.<sup>3</sup>

The same food was served for the same meal on each day of the week, and for Sunday lunch crackers and cold water were served. The students were told to bring no expensive or elegant clothing,--"needless advice in most cases," and, as one eastern visitor said, they looked "as if they had been accustomed to work in the kitchen." One alumna recalled the day a student arrived in "trailing blue silk and much jewelry." When she saw that even the seniors had "plain, print dresses" and hair "parted in the middle," she decided that Rockford Female Seminary was beneath her status.<sup>4</sup>

These frontier students, many of whom had borrowed money to attend the seminary, worked diligently. After a visit Ralph Emerson said that "there was an earnestness for and an appreciation of knowledge that delighted him and made him feel as if he should should like to teach such pupils himself." The students' scholastic attainments were the pride of Rockford, and after attending an exhibition, a Chicago newspaperman wrote that he was "agreeably surprised" at the students' "high degree of mental culture."<sup>5</sup>

In the spring of 1853 the boarding house had to be vacated even though the new seminary building was not yet completed. Students and teachers carted their belongings to two separate dwellings further from the old courthouse. Added to the other hardships, this dislocation became too much for Harriet Stewart. Her health began to fail, and as the year came to a close, Dr. Clark, the trustee who served as the seminary's physician, warned that she should return home. Thus, in spite of Anna Sill's inspiration, "the noblest women" she ever knew, "a choice band of teachers," and "the grandest set of boarders and pupils" she had ever met, Stewart packed her bags and returned to the East. Later she wrote, "I left Rockford with many regrets, and although the year had been by far the most laborious of my life, yet it had always been recalled as perhaps the most useful of my  
 6  
 'Teacher Life.'"

The frequent turnover of teachers at the seminary was a nagging problem. In an age before antibiotics, sickness and premature death were frequent consequences of teaching or administering such institutions. Mary Lyon died suddenly in 1849 at age fifty-two. Her friend, Zilpah Grant Banister, was habitually ill. Catherine Beecher's poor health forced her to give up her post at Hartford Seminary. Numerous administrative and domestic responsibilities, scanty food, crowded classrooms, meagre salaries, community service--these factors combined to sap the energy of even the hardest woman. For several years Anna Sill seemed

invincible. One observer noted that the more responsibilities she took on, the "greater" her "facility and success" in performing them.

### Moving to Chapel Hall

In fall 1853 school opened in Chapel Hall. The new building was a decided improvement, but it was far from lavish. When the students arrived, they found carpenters' benches in the hall and a parlor without furniture. The rooms were uncarpeted. The windows lacked blinds or shades and were "neatly draped with newspapers or shawls." Each room had two double beds, which were shared by four students and sometimes a teacher. Kitchen dishes were "browned and nicked." In winter the halls were always cold. The little cast iron box stoves in each room barely kept them warm, and for fear of fire, no wood could be added after eight in the evening. There was frequent smoke, if not from the chimneys, then from the oil lamps that provided light for study.

Chapel Hall was also crowded. As news of the seminary spread, letters of inquiry poured in. These were often read aloud at faculty meetings. One teacher recalled,

More than once we [the faculty] went with the strong resolution that we would not say yes to one more. But a letter would be read from a father saying his motherless daughter was under bad influences and he could see no other way to save her. . . . It always ended in our saying--"we will take this one," for we know [sic] her [Sill's] whole heart was pleading for that motherless or fatherless child.

At this time there were eighty boarders in the building, and a hundred others had been turned away. In some cases, as many as seven people shared a room, and the smallest child slept in a trundle bed. There was so little privacy that Lucy Jones, a teacher who shared a room with Anna Sill and two others, used to hide in a closet under the stairs. Many years later she said,

This was my plan of retirement, my refuge in joy, and in sorrow, and some times my resting place when I was so tired that even the faces of the dear souls about me wearied me. Though light was shut out, sound was not, and I recalled many of those resting times when I sat still, without compunction, and heard the question, "Can you tell me where Miss Jones is?" 9

The debt on the seminary was another heavy burden. Newspaper articles urged Rockford residents to visit the seminary and help pay off the debt. A donation party was given in March 1853, but money was still urgently needed. In August the six trustees on the executive committee "agreed to call on certain individuals" to aid them in the emergency. When that attempt failed, Aratus Kent traveled east to solicit money. He returned with 205 dollars and a one thousand dollar subscription. Henry Goodwin also traveled back to the East to solicit money, and the Emerson family continued to appeal to their friends. The pressure intensified when creditors appeared at executive committee meetings to demand immediate payment. Because money was not available, the board was authorized to borrow money on the homes of the trustees. According to tradition, three board members mortgaged their homes to borrow the necessary funds.

In spite of the intense struggle for financial survival, Anna Sill continued to teach as many classes as her teachers, make ends meet, work in the church, plan the curriculum, discipline students, and lead chapel services every morning and evening. When she was exhausted or half-sick, she would spend a day or so at her sister's (Amelia Hollister), but she always took along her unanswered correspondence. Eventually such responsibilities would  
11  
begin to take their toll.

#### A Second Trip East

In 1852 Joseph Emerson's brother, Ralph, who was twenty-one, became a partner in a Rockford hardware store. Like his older brother, Ralph was a devout Christian. He was also vitally interested in education. He had taught school in the East, then in Bloomington and Beloit. For awhile he studied law but gave it up because of the advice of his  
12  
friend, Abraham Lincoln.

One day Anna Sill fainted in Ralph Emerson's hardware store. He wrote to his mother that Sill "has more care and anxiety than she can endure." When Emerson discovered that Sill desperately needed two hundred to three hundred dollars, he took a subscription paper and collected the amount from his friends. Later he wrote that Sill was sick again. "I am afraid she will not live many years." Emerson went on to say that if the hardware business were prosperous that year, he would donate "\$100 to the enterprise." No

one could have foreseen that in time Ralph Emerson would become one of the leading industrialists of the Midwest. He would also become a generous benefactor of the seminary. <sup>13</sup>

Sill's friends encouraged her to return to the East for a long rest. Sill had asked Zilpah Banister whether an agent might be successful in raising funds in the East, and the older woman had answered that "Sill would herself be the most successful agent." Thus, Anna Sill travelled east in December 1853 to regain her strength and to raise money. Under the sponsorship of the Emersons and Banister, she visited New England towns and cities, where she appealed to numerous sewing societies and private citizens. The money came in slowly. From societies Sill collected amounts like \$12.50, \$30.00, \$54.34, and \$75.00. A few individuals gave more than one hundred dollars. Many gave five dollars or less. Apparently easterners were beginning to wonder why their western neighbors couldn't raise their own support. One Boston woman indicated that

she was interested in Miss Sill's school and thought it more like Miss Lyon's plan than any other, . . .there was just now rather a disposition to feel as if it was best to withhold from the West and let them do for themselves.

Nevertheless, Sill persisted until she had raised twelve hundred dollars in Boston alone. <sup>14</sup>

Anna Sill did not spend all her time raising funds. For some time she stayed in Newburyport with Zilpah Banister and her friends. She wrote long letters back home to Lucy Jones, giving her detailed advice on how to keep the seminary



running smoothly. The institution was always on her mind, but she also enjoyed her solitude. She wrote,

I seem to be a "lady of leisure" just now, as I am not allowed to proceed to action, but I am advised on all hands to make myself as much an oyster as may be, but I am inclined to think I should act if I was in danger of being eaten alive or made into soup. I am glad I am not on the ocean today, for the wind has been blowing the last twelve hours--almost a hurricane. . . .

She chided herself for "using up vital energies" and said that she was on the "borderland" of a permanent lung disease. After more than three months, she wrote that she seemed "to be waking up from a long dream fresh and vigorous." Her cough was gone, and she was gaining weight. 15

Sill wanted to back in Rockford for the beginning of spring term in April. Banister cautioned her to remain in the East, or other western schools would benefit from the groundwork she had been laying:

Better than the pupils should be sent away from Rockford until next winter and spring even, than that you forego your present opportunity to raise means. . . . These means are to benefit one class of youth after another for many generations.

Sill took Banister's advice. By letter she informed her teachers of how to open the session without her and continued to solicit funds. That spring she returned to Rockford with five thousand dollars. 16

#### The Graduates of 1854

For Rockford Female Seminary 13 July 1854 was a momentous occasion. On this day the seminary awarded its first "collegiate" diplomas and sent out its first

missionary. The customs of this graduation would continue for many years. In the morning, dignitaries, students and visitors climbed three flights of stairs in Chapel Hall to a large room that had been scrubbed and decorated with paintings and evergreen mottos:

That your daughters may be as corner stones polished  
after the similitude of a palace;  
The liberal deviseth liberal things;  
One field, the world;  
Science and Religion; and the class motto,  
Altus etiam Alterior [Higher and higher]. 17

Every student wore a cheap white muslin or tarletan dress, "with full double skirts, finished with a broad hem." To indicate their class standing, graduates wore white sashes, the normal class wore rose scarves, the middle class blue, the junior class a myrtle wreath, and the preparatory students pink sashes. The seminary students opened the festivities by repeating in unison Psalm 121 and then reciting a chant. After prayer, the seniors read original compositions that probably sounded like sermons. Sample topics included "Duty Has But One Voice, That Is, Persevere" and "Character Is a Secret No One Can Keep." 18

At three o'clock in the afternoon, a long procession headed by the Rockford band, the marshall, the trustees, the orator of the day, seminary teachers and students made its way across the Rock River to the "old church." There the report of the examining committee was read. Professor Joseph Emerson delivered the anniversary address, and Miss Adeline Potter read the Valedictory. Her parting words

echoed the commonplaces of the day:

Woman's lot is on us now, and 'tis hers to scatter richest flowers in the pathway to Heaven, to remove the hidden thorn and place a wreath of roses in its stead; and we must leave you to perform her silent mission.

19

Last the certificates were awarded to the seven graduates.

For Sill this day was one of special triumph. Having given up her dream of becoming a foreign missionary, she hoped to inspire a student to go into the field. Among the first graduates was Anna Allen, an older student who decided to make missionary work her career. That evening in the chapel she married Rev. F. Arthur Douglas of the Baptist Missionary Union of Boston. They planned to sail for India in October. The same day a teacher found a group of seminary girls weeping in a corner because Anna Allen was going so far from home. "There, there, girls," she said. "Stop crying. You know she's so frail that when the Board in Boston sees her, they'll never let her go to India." In spite of the teacher's prediction, the board accepted Anna Allen Douglas. In India she reared nine children, taught and helped her husband with missionary work for fifteen years. She returned to the United States in 1869.

20

### Tending to the Business of the Seminary

For the Executive Committee 1854 was a productive year. So great were the demands of the fledgling institution that meetings were held every Tuesday evening "precisely at seven oclock [sic]." At one meeting alone the committee

seven oclock [sic]." At one meeting alone the committee revised a circular advertising the seminary and appointed a member to have it printed, took measures to insure Chapel Hall, agreed to have banisters and railings installed, and told the agent to collect more subscriptions.

21

During the early part of the year they audited accounts, appropriated funds "to purchase a case of shells presented by Mrs. Bannister [sic] to the institution," and made provisions for a possible small pox epidemic at the seminary (which never materialized). In the spring they decided not to rehire a teacher, appointed several agents to raise funds, and hired a laborer to work on the grounds. In the summer they provided for a garden and a pen full of pigs, planned a fence to encircle the property, had book shelves installed and agreed to adopt a diploma "similar to that used at South Hadley."

22

During fall and winter they asked Anna Sill's childhood friend and newly elected board member, Hiram Foote, to raise funds for the seminary, bought a piano, installed ladders for protection against fire, set the amount of tuition scholarships, and requested Anna Sill "to correspond with her brother in relation to a loan of \$5000" (apparently he did not make the loan). They also began construction on another building to serve mainly as a dormitory. It would be named "Linden Hall" after the home of Zilpah Grant Banister and would cost around fifteen thousand dollars.

23

In her first years in Rockford, Anna Sill had realized something of the importance of a board of trustees. She probably knew that as early as 1819 Emma Willard had pointed out that academies without such boards could not "afford suitable accommodations, nor sufficient apparatus and libraries; neither do they, or can they, provide a sufficiency of instructors." Now Sill was learning firsthand what a dedicated board of trustees could do. The seminary was no longer simply "Miss Sill's School" or the Beloit Board of Trustees' dream. Through their combined efforts, it had become a vital seminary of higher learning for the middle states.

24

At this time the "college germ" began "unfolding" at the seminary, as Sill explained many years later. The older type of academy was usually owned and operated by one individual who determined the curriculum, hired and fired, and usually closed down the school at his/her retirement. In a college, however, the board of trustees performed these functions. An institution with a board had a greater probability of lasting because the trustees could appoint another principal to replace the one who had retired. Colleges had buildings, libraries, scientific "cabinets," and permanent endowments, and Rockford Female Seminary was beginning to acquire these things. By 1854 its library, begun with the proceeds of a fair, numbered over one thousand volumes. Illinois Conference Female College in Jacksonville had around the same number. Beloit College had

During the nineteenth century, colleges gradually began to offer select courses in science. They soon realized that textbook teaching simply did not equal a laboratory experience. Thus, they slowly began to acquire "scientific apparatus" and "cabinets." Included in these were microscopes, telescopes and chemicals as well as botanical, geological, and zoological specimens. A set of minerals delivered in a candlebox from Beloit College became the nucleus of the seminary's scientific "cabinet." Shells contributed by Banister and philosophical apparatus by Eliza Emerson added to the school's scientific equipment, which gradually increased over the years. In 1848 Joseph Emerson wrote,

I do not know whether a Female Seminary would need any endowment beyond the erection of the buildings, and I suppose the pressing want of this region for a few years to come will be for the endowment of the college.

This statement reflected a basic difference between a college and the usual female seminary: the former was endowed, the latter was not. Leading female educators wanted seminaries to have the financial stability that endowments engendered. Catherine Beecher explained that if Hartford Seminary had had "half the funds bestowed on our poorest colleges for men" and the responsibilities divided among the faculty, her seminary would not have declined.

26

In 1849 the Emersons told their son, Joseph, that a gift from the Banister estate would "probably be for the support of teachers," or student scholarships, "not for the

erection of buildings." Catherine Beecher was also interested in helping to raise a twenty thousand dollar endowment for "instruction" or scholarships at Rockford, not in putting up buildings. Evidently Banister and Beecher knew that Rockford residents would be more apt to raise money for seminary buildings than for scholarships and professorships. In 1853 although the trustees were inundated with building expenses, they set the endowment of professorships at five thousand dollars. Two years later they set endowments of one and four hundred dollars for tuition scholarships. In doing so, they were laying the legal groundwork for these kinds of endowments. They might have received large gifts from Banister or Beecher except for one thing--Anna Sill's "indomitable will."<sup>27</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1

See typescript of Harriet Stewart Safford, Autobiography, Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 1-3. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated History: R.C.A. See also letter of Anna Sill to Joseph Emerson, 21 July 1852, and letter of Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Deac. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be labeled Emerson: B.C.A.

2

Lucy Jones Herrick, Founder's Day Address, in "Home Happenings," Rockford Female Seminary, 14 (June 1891), 146. Kathleen Bessel, "Through These Halls," (student paper, 17 January 1945), History: R.C.A. See also Historical Sketch of Rockford Seminary, report prepared for the U. S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Rockford, Illinois: Register Company Printers and Binders, 1876), 7.

3

Kate Brown Kerr, "Decus et Veritas," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (July 1884), 265; Sarah Hall Pratt, "The Honorableness of Our Past," in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (January 1887), 11.

4

Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 299; Pratt, "Our Past," 10; letter of Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Deac. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson: B.C.A.

5

Letter of Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Deac. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson: B.C.A.; Cederborg, Thesis, 114.

6

Judd, Autobiography, 4.



7

[Henry M. Goodwin], Memorials, 1849-1889 (Rockford, Illinois: Daily Electric Print, 1889), 23.

8

Herrick, Founder's Day Address, 146; Mrs. Sabin, Founder's Day Address, in "Home Happenings," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 14 (June 1891), 145; Aline Bartholomew, "Our College Up the Steeps of Time," The Taper, 9 (1920), 14; Herrick, Founder's Day Address, 147.

9

Herrick, Founder's Day Address, 147-149. See also Bartholomew, "Our College," 14; Cederborg, Thesis, 116.

10

Typescript letter of Reverend H.M. Goodwin to President A.L. Chapin, 21 February [1853], History: R.C.A. See Minutes of the Executive Committee, 1 (22 October 1850 - 7 June 1858), 21 December 1852, 22 February 1853, 11 July 1853, 16 August 1853, Records of the Board of Trustees of Rockford Female Seminary, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to these records will be abbreviated Trustees: R.C.A.

See letter of Anna Sill to Mrs. R. Emerson, 13 May 1853; letter of Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Deac. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson: B.C.A.; Charles A. Church, History of Rockford and Winnebago County (Rockford, Illinois: W.P. Lane, Book and Job Printer, 1900), 290-291. See also Cederborg, Thesis, 112-13.

11

Herrick, Founder's Day Address, 148-49.

12

Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Emerson, Ralph."

13

Letter of Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Deac. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson: B.C.A. See Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, 29-32, for a record of giving to the seminary until 1876.

14

"Miss Sill and Her Administration," Unpublished paper (n.d.), Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 8. For amounts of eastern giving, see Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, 29-32; [Goodwin], Memorials, 22; Maggie Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 44-45.

- 15  
Letters of Anna Peck Sill to Lucy Jones, 18, 20 March  
and 11 April 1854.
- 16  
Letter of Zilpah Polly Banister to Miss Sill, 10 April  
1854, Emerson: B.C.A.
- 17  
Anna Peck Sill, Alumnae Address in "Alumnae Reunion,"  
Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (June 1887), 182; see also  
Cederborg, Thesis, 122;
- 18  
Kerr, "Decus et Veritas," 265; Sill, Alumnae Address,  
1887, 182.
- 19  
Student readings described and quoted by A. [Beloit  
student], in "Anniversary of the Rockford Female Seminary,"  
Sill Scrapbook, 6. Actually it is difficult to know whether  
five or seven young women graduated in 1854. The newspaper  
article above did not state the number of graduates. The  
Jubilee Book of the Alumnae Association of Rockford College  
(Chicago: Binner Wells Company, 1904), 8, listed seven. But  
"Report. Rockford Female Seminary," in Tenth Annual  
Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female  
Seminary, for the Academic Year 1860-61 (Rockford: Register  
Steam Printing Establishment, 1861), 30, listed only five.
- 20  
Cederborg, Thesis, 121. See also Jubilee Book, 28.
- 21  
Minutes of the Executive Committee, 6 January 1854,  
Trustees: R.C.A.
- 22  
Minutes of the Executive Committee, 24 January, 5  
February 14 March, 20 March, 30 March, 9 May, 8 June, 8 July  
1854, Trustees: R.C.A.
- 23  
See Minutes of the Executive Committee, 1 September, 10  
November 1854, Trustees: R.C.A.; Historical Sketch of  
Rockford Female Seminary, 7.
- 24  
Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the  
United States, 1 (New York: The Science Press, 1924), 308.

25

Anna P. Sill, "Rockford Seminary, Its Ideal," Address at the Sixth Annual Banquet and Reunion of Rockford Seminary, Chicago, 1879, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 7 (March 1879), 77. See Pratt, "Our Past," 11; Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, for the Academic Year 1854-5 (Rockford: E.C. Daughterty, Printer, 1855), 19.

26

Pratt, "Our Past," 11; letter of Prof. Joseph Emerson to his Father, 27 November 1848, Emerson: B.C.A. Woody, History of Women's Education, 1, 355.

27

Letter of Father and Mother to Prof. Joseph Emerson, 19 September 1849,; letter of Anna P. Sill to Mrs. E. R. Emerson, 18 March 1854; letter of E.R. Emerson to Mrs. Banister, 16 March 1854, Emerson: B.C.A. See Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 15 July 1853, 13 July 1855, Trustees: R.C.A.

## CHAPTER VI

### CURRICULUM IN THE MAKING

#### Carving out an Identity

It was September 1854 when thirty-eight-year-old Anna Sill stood before a student body of over two hundred young women. "Young ladies, we are happy to greet you. Now young ladies, we expect and have a right to expect that all will commence right and . . . many will receive certificates at the close." Sill was more hopeful of her students' perseverance than other ante-bellum female principals. It was common for students to attend seminary with no real urgency to complete the program. Of the sixteen hundred young women who entered Zilpah Grant's Derry and Ipswich seminaries, fewer than ten percent received certificates. At Mount Holyoke sixteen percent of the first twelve thousand five hundred students graduated. During the first decade of Rockford's existence, however, thirty-eight percent of the 206 who entered the collegiate program completed the program. Of those who never finished, some married or dropped out to teach. Others lost interest or wouldn't submit to the strict discipline. And few were forced to

withdraw because of illness.

Most female educators struggled to keep their students from flitting from school to school. Quarters or terms were practically independent entities, and pupils would enter or leave spasmodically. To encourage continuous attendance, many leading seminaries allowed students to enter only at the beginning of a term. However, as late as 1854 Mount Holyoke's catalogue told students to plan only one year of study at a time. Rockford Female Seminary's policy was not rigid. In 1854 Rockford students could enter at any time<sup>2</sup> but had to remain for at least one term.

At many early seminaries students had no definite course of study. They merely took the subjects they or their parents wanted. Joseph Emerson and other educators persuasively argued for prescribing the number and order of courses to be pursued. Even the length of seminary education varied from two to five years. The most popular length of study was three years. Rockford Female Seminary's collegiate program lasted three years with an additional<sup>3</sup> fourth year of study for "resident graduates."

Before publishing the first catalogue, Anna Sill experimented with course arrangements and content. While absent from the seminary, she instructed Lucy Jones to

Condense your classes this term as much as possible. I think I would not form a Math. class, but [sic] the small Botany in its place and either not an United States His. [history] or Ancient Geog. [geography].

At times Mary Lyon had also felt free to alter the regular

program. While at Wheaton Female Seminary in 1836, she realized that her students did not have a thorough grasp of basic arithmetic, so she drilled them only in arithmetic the first week, added composition the next, and again drilled in arithmetic the third.<sup>4</sup>

Lyon's free-wheeling administrative style might be appropriate for a small school, but as the number of students and teachers increased, it would doubtlessly prove inefficient. Teachers would surely object to rapid changes in course offerings and sudden shifts of classrooms. While less flexible, a stable curriculum published in a school catalogue would have certain advantages: it would necessitate careful long-range planning, it would inform parents and students of academic standards and program content, and it would publicize the institution's philosophy and goals.

In June 1854 the Board of Trustees resolved that the Executive Committee and the faculty "prepare and publish a catalogue of the Institution from time to time." As principal Anna Sill would play the leading role in this effort. She had many valuable resources to draw from, the most important being her years of experience in teaching and administrative work. In the last several years, her friend, Joseph Emerson, had given her Zilpah Banister's instructive letters, and during her 1852 trip east, she had studied Mount Holyoke's plan.<sup>5</sup> In 1854 while staying in Newburyport, Massachusetts, she attended the State Institute, where

she undoubtedly became acquainted with popular teaching methods and textbooks. Another rich source of knowledge was only eighteen miles away at Beloit College. President Chapin and his faculty were articulate, knowledgeable educators. They frequently lectured at the seminary, and their circulars, catalogues, and other publications were readily available. From Beloit Anna Sill could learn much about a college curriculum.

6

Rockford's first catalogue reflected many aspects of Mary Lyon's plan. In other ways it resembled the organization of Beloit College. Mary Lyon's seminary offered only one course of study which essentially prepared women to teach. Like Beloit College, Rockford offered three programs: preparatory; normal and English; and collegiate. Mount Holyoke followed the organizational plan of the New England academies. The principal (or preceptress) and his or her assistant expedited the rules and directed all instruction. Rockford, however, followed the college plan. Subjects were grouped under departments and each teacher was assigned to one of them. Sill never had an assistant principal; instead, the heads of departments helped her with administration and instruction. The 1839-49 catalogue of Monticello Female Seminary explained the advantages of this system:

Each [teacher] is independent as to her modes of teaching, and has a particular department, and that so limited as to its number of branches, that she can extend her investigations beyond the mere text book and bring into the recitation room materials gathered from all

accessible sources of information. Thus competent instruction and a perfect division of labor are secured. 7

Rockford's departments of study included "Mental and Moral Philosophy, History and Belles Lettres, Mathematics, Natural Science and the Languages together with a Preparatory Department and a Normal and English Department."<sup>8</sup>

### The Preparatory Department

Most incipient frontier colleges and seminaries had preparatory departments because of the lack of good schools. The preparatory students' tuition money would also help sustain the institution. Usually collegiate classes were poorly attended, especially in the male institutions. In 1853-4, for example, of the 107 students enrolled at Beloit College, thirty were collegiate, thirty-four in the normal and English department, and fifty-six in the preparatory department. In 1854-55, Rockford Female Seminary enrolled 253 students, sixty-two of whom were collegiate, 131 in the normal and English department, and sixty in the preparatory department.<sup>9</sup>

Preparatory studies often indicated the academic level of the institution, for its graduates had to pass an examination over the contents before advancing to the collegiate program. The curriculum of the preparatory department of Rockford Female Seminary included no Greek and only basic courses in Latin plus:



Mental Arithmetic, Colburn  
 Written Arithmetic, Adams (improved ed.)  
 Ancient Geography, Mitchell  
 Modern Geography, Mitchell  
 English Grammar, Clark  
 History of the United States, Willard  
 Watts on the Mind  
 Algebra (through Simple Equations,) Davies

For Latin Andrews' and Stoddard's grammar and reader were used. Before entering the collegiate course, students were examined orally by a "board of visitors" on the above subjects. Rockford's entrance requirements were equivalent to those of Mount Holyoke.<sup>10</sup>

At Beloit College the curriculum of the preparatory department resembled the classical course of the Latin grammar school. At this time, the core of a college education was still the study of the ancient languages, moral philosophy, and mathematics. The Beloit catalogue of 1853-54 explained that the preparatory course would provide young men with the necessary preparation for college so that "the College itself may sustain its proper rank, and accomplish its proper work." They used:

Latin--Andrews & Stoddard's Latin Grammar,  
 Andrews's Latin Reader,  
 " Caesar,  
 Gould's Virgil,  
 Lincoln's Cicero.

Greek--Bullions's Greek Lessons,  
 Crosby's Greek Grammar,  
 Colton's Greek Reader,  
 Greek Testament. 11

Preparatory students were promised additional training in English preparatory studies, elocution and composition. They were also permitted to attend without charge any classes in

the normal and English department. Before entering the collegiate department, they were examined orally in English, Greek and Latin grammar, geography, arithmetic, algebra through simple equations, Cicero's Select Orations, Sallust or Caesar's Gallic War, Virgil, the four Gospels in the Greek Testament and the Greek Reader. The main difference between the admissions requirements of the two institutions was in the mastery of the ancient languages. Study of Latin and Greek was thought to foster the greatest mental discipline; thus, the women's preparatory course was considered less rigorous. Since most educators no longer hold to the faculty psychology theory of learning, they would question whether language study in the Beloit preparatory course actually made it more advanced or just more selective.

#### Normal and English Department

In the early years the largest student enrollment at Rockford Female Seminary was in the "normal and English department." The 1854 catalogue did not state the specific subjects to be pursued, simply that the course was designed for students who wanted to study "only the English branches" and those who planned to teach. As preparation for common school teaching, normal classes were offered fall and winter terms. The content included teaching methods and "Government" as well as a critical examination of "the Elementary Branches." Preparation of teachers was not one of

Anna Sill's main goals. She probably included the department to capitalize on the critical need for common school teachers.

Beloit's normal department was established to provide young men who did not wish to "pursue the complete Collegiate course" an opportunity to study "the higher branches of English education." It was not considered "equivalent for the Collegiate and Classical Course," but would train its graduates to teach in schools and academies, as well as prepare them for "high positions" in agriculture and mechanic arts.<sup>13</sup> The course of study included:

#### First Class

1st Term--Wells's Grammar, Morse's Geography, Thomson's Higher Arithmetic.

2nd Term--Wells's Grammar, Robbins's History, Loomis's Algebra.

3rd Term--Analysis of Prose, Wilson's U. S. History, Loomis's Algebra.

#### Second Class

1st Term--Analysis of Poets, Edwards's Physiology, Agassiz & Gould's Zoology, Loomis's Geometry.

2nd Term--Day's Art of Rhetoric, Silliman's Chemistry, Loomis's Geometry.

3rd Term--Wood's Botany, Book-Keeping, Trigonometry, Mental Philosophy.

#### Third Class

1st Term--Whately's Logic, Dana's Mineralogy, Surveying and Conic Sections.

2nd Term--Olmsted's Philosophy, St. John's Geology, Wayland's Moral Science.

3rd Term--Olmsted's Astronomy, Evidences of Christianity, Political Economy. 14

Collegiate Course

Like students at Mount Holyoke and the traditional men's colleges, Rockford pupils attended courses with the same class throughout their stay in the institution. At most seminaries, there were junior, middle, and senior classes. At Rockford those who elected to study a fourth year were classified as resident graduates. The 1854-55 collegiate curriculum of Rockford Female Seminary remained essentially unchanged for several years:

Junior Class

First Term	Analysis of Prose and Poetry, Goldsmith. History of England and France, Pin. Goldsmith. Algebra, Davies. Latin, Cornelius Nepos.
Second Term	Hist. of Greece and Rome, Pin. Goldsmith. Algebra, Davies. Latin, Virgil.
Third Term	Geometry, Davies' Legendre. Botany, Wood. Latin, Virgil.

Middle Class

First Term	Anatomy and Physiology, Cutler. Geometry, Davies' Legendre. Latin, Horace.
Second Term	Rhetoric, Jamieson. Astronomy, Olms. & Mattison. Trigonometry, Davies' Legendre.
Third Term	Natural Philosophy, Olmsted. Natural Theology, Paley. Botany, Wood.

## Senior Class

First Term	Political Economy, Wayland. Evidences of Christianity, Alexander. Mental Philosophy, Upham.
Second Term	Moral Philosophy, Wayland. Criticism, Kame. Chemistry, Silliman.
Third Term	Geology, Hitchcock. Logic, Whateley. Analogy, Butler.

An additional year of studies for resident graduates included:

First Term	Greek, French or German (or McCosh on Divine Government); Cleveland's English Literature; Natural History, Ruschenberg.
Second Term	Greek, &c., continued; Fowler on English Language; Mental Philosophy.
Third Term	Greek, &c., completed; Logic, Tappan. Church History; History of Civilization.

In addition to the above courses, all students took penmanship, composition, select reading of prose and poetry, "Biographical and Historical Rehearsals," vocal music and  
15  
"Biblical Science."

At both men's and women's institutions, such additional subjects were required of all students, regardless of class. Illinois Convergence Female College added to its 1854 collegiate curriculum vocal music, penmanship, orthography, reading, and composition. Mount Holyoke added linear and perspective drawing, reading, composition, and calisthenics. Beloit students took "a full system of Rhetorical training, designed to exercise the students in

elocution, composition and debate." The men of Illinois College joined the "Rhetorical Society," whose exhibitions included delivery of declamations and criticism of compositions. Some classes at Yale received additional instruction in specific scientific courses; others in rhetoric, poetry and prose.

The collegiate curriculum of Beloit College covered the same disciplines, but the men had more mathematics and ancient literature than the women. To ensure that all faculties of the students' minds were developed in balanced proportion, Beloit men were required to take from five to seven courses in each area except mental and moral science (ethics).<sup>17</sup> In addition to the two required ethics courses, students were required to attend prayers twice daily and two Sunday services, the second of which contained "a lecture on some religious topic. . . given by the President." Their curriculum contained the following subjects and textbooks:

#### Freshman Year

First Term	Lincoln's Livy. Loomis's Algebra. Homer's Iliad--Felton's or Owen's edition.
Second Term	Livy continued. Algebra finished, Loomis's Geometry begun. Iliad continued.
Third Term	Gould's Horace--Odes. Geometry finished. Wheeler's Herodotus.

#### Sophomore Year

First Term	Horace--Satires and Epistles. Loomis's Plane and Spherical Trigonometry. Herodotus continued, Xenophon's Memorab.
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Second Term Cicero de Senectute and de Amicitia.  
Loomis's Navigation, Surveying, & Conic  
Sections.  
The Alcestis of Euripides--Woolsey's  
edition.  
Whately's Rhetoric.

Third Term The Prometheus of Aeschylus.  
Cicero de Oratore.  
Ancient History.

#### Junior Year

First Term Medieval and Modern History.  
Olmsted's Natural Philosophy.  
Plato's Gorgias.

Second Term Tacitus  
Natural Philosophy finished.  
Silliman's Chemistry.

Third Term Tacitus continued.  
Differential and Integral Calculus.  
Gray's Botanical Text Book.

#### Senior Year

First Term Demosthenes de Corona.  
Whately's Logic, Wayland's Political  
Economy.  
Edward's Physiology, Agassiz's & Gould's  
Zoology.

Second Term Olmsted's Astronomy, Mason's Supplement.  
Upham's Mental Philosophy.  
Select Latin or Greek

Third Term Dana's Mineralogy, St. John's Geology.  
Wayland's Moral Philosophy, Evidences of  
Christianity.  
Story on the Constitution.18

#### Language and Literature

As was customary in the leading eastern colleges, the men translated and analyzed a number of ancient Latin and Greek classics in their freshman and sophomore years.

Homer's Iliad, Horace's Odes, Xenophon's Memorabilia and the other ancient works required advanced language and analytical skills. Because study of the ancient languages prepared one for the professions, ancient literature was considered masculine property. However, Joseph Emerson and Almira Phelps, two leading theorists of female education, argued that some study of Latin should be required of women. In her popular book, The Female Student, Phelps wrote that when parents could provide their daughters with advanced education, the study of languages should be foundational. For the development of the mind, translation "calls up the power of comparison and abstraction, quickens the imagination, matures the judgment, and gives enlarged views of the general principles of language." Latin was her first choice because the modern languages were derived from it, and it was "forcible and majestic." Although neither Emerson nor Phelps advocated that women study Latin literature extensively, Phelps commented that "a knowledge of the principles on which this noble language is constructed, and a limited acquaintance with its beauties are invaluable."<sup>19</sup>

In spite of opposition, Latin gradually crept into the curriculum of women's seminaries. At Mount Holyoke it was a special study for several years. The 1840-41 catalogue said that although the community would probably be against it, Latin might become part of the regular curriculum. By 1846 Latin was studied in the senior year, and by 1848 a basic



knowledge of the language was required of entering students. Rockford women were required to have a basic knowledge of Latin before entering the collegiate program. In their first four terms they ventured as far as Cornelius Nepos, Virgil and Horace. The women at Illinois Conference Female College also had four terms of ancient language and literature, including Cicero's Orations and Virgil.<sup>20</sup>

German, Italian, and particularly French were considered desirable ornamental studies for women. The Rockford student might take French, German or Greek for an extra two dollars a term. Resident graduates could select one of the above languages as part of the course. At this time many educators assumed that English literature could be read by students on their own because English was their native language. At Mount Holyoke only Milton's Paradise Lost was included in the curriculum. Rockford pupils studied English prose and poetry from Goldsmith's celebrated text, Kame's Elements of Criticism and in the graduate year both Cleveland's English literature and Fowler's English language. Shakespeare, still viewed with suspicion by many Puritans because he wrote plays, was not introduced at Harvard until 1863. Both Beloit men and Rockford women studied Whately's Rhetoric, a text required at Harvard, Yale<sup>21</sup> and the best female seminaries.

In addition to fixed class time at Rockford, literary activities filled unscheduled hours. In 1854 Anna Sill told Lucy Jones:

Make reading a general exercise instead of Grammar, on Tuesdays and Fridays. Discussions once in two weeks--alternating with compositions. Topic exercise weekly. Select a valuable piece of poetry or prose, and give each one a small portion, not to tax them, and keep them upon it until they speak it well, beautifully. Let them rehearse it over and over again and week after week if need be. The object is to teach them to speak distinctly, beautifully--Commence the same way in the reading. Our young ladies do not know how to read or speak well.

Composition was not considered a class, but regular themes were assigned the entire student body. At Mount Holyoke, a certain day of the week was designated "Composition Day." First it was Monday, then Wednesday, then Friday night, and finally Saturday. Students were expected to spend a great deal of time on the weekly theme, up to ten hours, if necessary. At Rockford a composition was assigned every other week. In the 1860s this exercise was squeezed into Saturday's activities. This is how one student remembered it:

Saturday! I wonder sometimes how we would ever have caught up the odds and ends of our weekly life without it. There was the room to clean, the individual hour allotted every inmate for the weekly bath (bathrooms were then as unknown as the automobile or airplane), the mending (this must be reported), the home letter, and then the ever-pursuing two week's essay. If shopping was desired, a teacher was assigned to accompany such girls to the commercial center and back again. 22

### Mathematics

Isaac Watts, John Locke, and other leading philosophers had long been convinced of the importance of studying mathematics. Not only was it practical, but it was thought

to be an important aid in disciplining the mind. Watts argued that mathematics taught one to focus the attention. Mathematical subjects kept the mind from wandering "because they deal much in lines, figures, and numbers, which affect and please the sense and imagination." Educators argued that mathematics was the best means "of controlling the imagination, perfecting reason and judgment, and inducing a habit of method and love of order."<sup>23</sup>

The study of mathematics was prominent at Beloit as well as Harvard, Yale, and other eastern colleges. Beloit freshmen began with algebra and geometry; sophomores continued with plane and spherical trigonometry; navigation, surveying and conic sections. Juniors capped off their studies with differential and integral calculus. Nearly the same subjects were required of freshmen and sophomores at Illinois College, but calculus was omitted.<sup>24</sup>

Early in the nineteenth century the popular author, Hannah More, had written that most women neither reasoned closely nor examined ideas from various viewpoints; thus, their judgments were often incorrect. Almira Phelps was convinced that serious study of mathematics would correct this defect. Her views were accepted by many female educators. Arithmetic appeared in the curricula of most female seminaries until 1870. Geometry and algebra were very popular. Plane trigonometry, bookkeeping, conic sections, solid geometry, and spherical trigonometry were offered less frequently. Rockford students of 1854 took

algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, the last subject added to Mount Holyoke's curriculum in 1855. Rockford's resident graduates went on to conic sections.<sup>25</sup>

### Science

Throughout the nineteenth century science was gradually making inroads into the curriculum of the men's colleges. From the beginning, it had held a prominent place in the curriculum of most leading female seminaries. As one historian said,

There were plenty of arguments against women's entering public life, toward which the study of the classics led; but it was difficult to propound reasons why the scientific wonders of the universe should be masculine property. The stars could be observed by all; why should males alone know the marvels of their course?

Rockford women and Beloit men took seven courses in science. Both studied Olmsted's Natural Philosophy, a physics book originally written for the students of Yale, and his astronomy text. In 1802 Yale College had sent Benjamin Silliman to Philadelphia and Europe to study science and gather laboratory equipment. His celebrated Chemistry text was studied at both Rockford and Beloit. Botany, generally considered a polite science for young ladies, was taught to both Beloit men and Rockford women. Wood's Botany was used at Mount Holyoke, Rockford (two terms), Illinois Conference Female College, and Beloit's English department.<sup>26</sup> Gray's text was used by the collegiate men.

In 1833 William Alcott wrote in Annals of American

Education that physiology was a neglected subject. Five years later he published a small book called The House I Live In. On the frontpiece was a skeleton knocking on a door and saying, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Another popular writer, Catherine Beecher, urged women to study physiology because as mothers and teachers they needed to understand the human body. By the 1840s physiology was gaining popularity. Both Rockford women and Beloit men studied physiology but used different textbooks. Rockford students used Cutter's Physiology, a text also studied at Mount Holyoke and Amhurst. Beloit men used Edwards' text. During the same term the men studied Agassiz's & Gould's Zoology. Both Rockford women and Beloit men studied geology, the women using Hitchcock's popular college text (used at both Mount Holyoke and Amhurst), and the men using St. John's text. Along with geology, the men also studied Dana's Mineralogy.<sup>27</sup>

After having tutored at Harvard, the female educator, Joseph Emerson, commented that although Harvard had the best scientific equipment, Yale had better science students because they were "allowed to use the instruments themselves, but not at Cambridge." A report in 1859 stated that only two academies out of fifty had good scientific equipment, the wealthy Exeter, and Zilpah Grant's [later Banister] seminary at Derry. Banister probably encouraged Anna Sill to build up Rockford's scientific laboratory. She donated both books and shells to the seminary. In 1858 the

trustees designated two hundred dollars for apparatus, and donations to the collection were accepted enthusiastically. Following the example of Yale, the Beloit faculty quickly collected an impressive array of "minerals and rock formations," "fossils from the Silurian rocks," "marine and fresh water shells," and over fifteen hundred plants. To carry out laboratory experiments, there were also chemical and physics "apparatus."<sup>28</sup>

During the 1800s lyceums were established in cities, towns, and even villages. In the East and South many downtown buildings still stand with the name "Lyceum" over the door. One of the most famous of these was the Lowell Institute, established in Boston in the 1830s. It was at the lyceums that visiting scholars often presented lectures on science, history, travel, and literature. Sometimes noted scientists like Amos Eaton also lectured on colleges campuses. It became a common practice for female seminaries to invite a noted scholar to give a series of lectures to which the student body and the community were invited.<sup>29</sup>

Rockford frequently used lecturers to augment its course offerings. One of the first was Professor S.P. Lathrop, M.D., from Beloit College, who delivered five lectures "on Natural Science, chiefly in the departments of Pneumatology and Electricity, accompanied by experiments with a new and costly apparatus." His lectures were given at the First Congregational Church, and each ticket cost fifty cents. In 1856 Anna Sill asked President Chapin to

arrange ten chemistry and natural philosophy lectures from a Dr. Richards. In 1858 the trustees designated one hundred dollars to defray expenses for scientific lectures. In later years, lecturers were annually invited to the  
 30  
 seminary.

### Social Sciences

Some of the first experiments in the teaching of history may have taken place in female seminaries where the ancient languages did not crowd the curriculum. Sarah Pierce of the noted school in Litchfield, Connecticut, found no excellent history books, so she compiled her own and had successive volumes published in 1811, 1816, 1817, and 1818. One of Pierce's students, Harriet Beecher (Stowe) wrote, "Litchfield Academy was the only school I have ever known which really carried out a thorough course of ancient and  
 31  
 modern history."

Mary Lyon believed that history was beneficial because it supplied "an almost boundless field for the exercise of the inventive powers." She recommended that students gain an overall knowledge of a historical period and then pick a list of topics or subjects to be recited in a "connected narrative." Lyon's method sounds similar to what Sill's students did in public examinations. Zilpah Grant Banister in Directions To Teachers, suggested that teachers help their students understand cause and effect, "the reciprocal influence of the governor and the governed," and the

progress of art and science.

Only two history texts were studied by Rockford seminarians, Goldsmith's histories of England and France, Greece and Rome. These texts were also required at Mount Holyoke. Rockford's resident graduates studied church history and history of civilization, but neither text was specified. Only two history courses were required at Beloit. Sophomores studied ancient history, and juniors studied medieval and modern history.

33

Wayland's Political Economy was a text required of Rockford and Beloit seniors. President Chapin, who was also professor of history and civil polity, published a revision of Wayland's text which was used by later classes. Beloit seniors also studied Story's On the Constitution of the United States, a text required at Harvard.

34

### Mental and Moral Science

A young woman who took the three-year collegiate course at Rockford Female Seminary would sit through three or more years of Sill's daily chapel sermons, whose quality impressed even the teachers. The student would memorize daily Scripture verses, attend two Sunday services and hear Sill's often quoted mottos: "Do your duty. Young ladies, do right though the sky falls" or "The very best place in which to be, is where God would have us." Then like countless college men, she would cap off her studies with a



year of ethical and theological study with the principal.

Like many college presidents and seminary principals, Anna Sill taught mental and moral philosophy to the senior class. Her textbooks, Alexander's Evidences of Christianity, Upham's Mental Philosophy, Wayland's Moral Philosophy, Butler's Analogy, and Whateley's Logic, were used at Mount Holyoke and Wheaton. Several of these were standard texts at Harvard, Yale, Amhurst, and Beloit. Butler's Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature, published in 1756, was one of the most widely studied texts for fifty years down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The most dominant characteristic of this book was its careful reasoning. Writing the book when Deism was at its height, Butler set out to disprove all arguments against orthodox Protestantism. In the second part of the book, he presented the importance of the Christian faith and its evidences. The text had other merits as well:

Any student who conscientiously applied himself or herself to the closely printed text, following argument after argument, examining the neatly balanced and carefully based statements, received a training in exactness and in logic that could scarcely be paralleled. 36

Rockford's senior class was usually small, so they met in Sill's rooms. One student recalled the pattern of the carpet on the floor and daily recitations. "We trembled, I remember, while wondering which end of the class Miss Sill would begin, . . . in which direction the recitation would

turn." Another student remembered "those abstracts on Butler's Analogy, . . . as though the great Analogy was not abstract enough in itself."<sup>37</sup>

Anna Sill must have delighted in teaching the ponderous texts of the senior year, for this was her final and perhaps greatest opportunity to shape the characters of her students. Her students were influenced more by her personality than by class lectures or recitations. One alumna's remembrance of the principal perhaps best expressed what many others said of her:

No one could come under the influence of her teaching and living from day to day and not be conscious of her strong personality, her nobility of character, and her high ideals. I should say first of all she was a Christian woman of the fine, strong New England type, of indomitable courage and will. 38

### Domestic Training

In an age when all women were expected to marry and devote themselves to the home, it was assumed that seminary education should prepare them for this role. All Rockford students were expected to board at the seminary which the first catalogue promised was "modeled after the well regulated family." The seminary did not offer a class in domestic economy as was the case at Illinois Conference Female College and Milwaukee Female College. But, following the plan at Mount Holyoke, all students were required to share "in the responsibilities of the household--such as every wise parent would appoint and every dutiful daughter

cheerfully perform." These household chores were not to exceed one hour a day and were said to have "an invigorating influence." One alumna recalled that several "large fleshy women" cooked and did the heavy cleaning.<sup>39</sup>

In his history of women's education, Thomas Woody examined Rockford's 1854 catalogue and those of over 160 American female seminaries and colleges. He concluded that Rockford Female Seminary was one of the two women's institutions in the West of collegiate rank (the other being Illinois Conference Female College). Anna Sill realized that although her "ideal was collegiate," she still had much work to do before she could offer western women "the best ideal then existing of the liberal education of young women."<sup>40</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1

See letter of Anna Peck Sill to Misses Jones and Richards, 7 April 1854, Anna Peck Sill Papers, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be labeled Sill: R.C.A.; see also Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, 1 (New York: The Science Press, 1924), 361; "Report. Rockford Female Seminary," in Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, for the Academic Year 1860-61 (Rockford: Register Steam Printing Establishment, 1861), 30-31. In 1883 student editors reported in "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine 11 (November 1883), 266, that only one out of ten students who entered American colleges graduated.

2

Louise Boas, Women's Education Begins: The Rise of the Women's Colleges (Norton, Massachusetts: Wheaton College Press, 1935), 181-83; Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, for the Academic Year 1854-55 (Rockford: E.C. Daughterty, Printer, 1855), 16.

3

See Woody, History of Women's Education, 1, 409, 414; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 17-18.

4

See letter of Anna Peck Sill to Misses Jones and Richards, 7 April 1854, Sill: R.C.A.; Boas, Women's Education Begins, 196.

5

See Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 21 June 1854, Records of the Board of Trustees, Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, 19 September 1850 - 7 February 1884, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to Records of the Rockford Board of Trustees will be abbreviated Trustees: R.C.A.; see letter of Joseph Emerson to Mrs. Banister, 8 November 1850; Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Deac. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be labeled Emerson: B.C.A.

6

See letter of Zilpah Polly Banister to Miss Sill, 10 April 1854, Sill: R.C.A. President Chapin frequently lectured and wrote on education. See Chapin Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be labeled Chapin: B.C.A. Other knowledgeable educators at Beloit were Professor Joseph Emerson, whose lectures and addresses are stored at Beloit College Archives, and Professor S. P. Lathrop, M.D. See especially Lathrop's "Address on Female Education" (delivered at the Anniversary Exercises of Rockford Female Seminary, [1851]), Lathrop Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin.

7

See Seventeenth Annual Catalogue of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, in South Hadley, Mass., 1853-54 (Northampton: Hopkins, Bridgman & Co., 1854), 4, 11; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1848-49, 16; Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Beloit College, for the Academical Year 1853-4 (Beloit: Journal Office Print, 1853), 13. Although Rockford Female Seminary followed the college plan, Anna Sill actually allowed her teachers and department heads little decision-making power. See also First and Second Catalogues of the Teachers and Members of Monticello Female Seminary, 1838-40, (Alton, Illinois: Parks' Book and Job Office, 1840), 15.

8

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 16.

9

Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 11; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 13.

10

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 17; Eleventh Annual Catalogue of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, in South Hadley, Mass., 1847-8 (Amhurst, Massachusetts: Press of J. S. & C. Adams, 1848), 11.

11

Curricula published in catalogues of the middle and late nineteenth century included authors and textbooks, thus indicating the heavy reliance on textbook learning. See Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 13, 16; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Missions of the College Curriculum (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 1979, 24.

12

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 18.

13

Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 17.

14

Ibid., 17-18.

15

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 17-18.

16

Mary Watters, The First Hundred Years of MacMurray College (Springfield, Illinois: Williamson Printing & Publishing Co., 1947), 53; Mount Holyoke Catalogue, 1853-54, 12; Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 15; Charles H. Rammelkamp, Illinois College, A Centennial History, 1829-1929 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1928), 55; Catalogue of the Officers and Students in Yale College, 1844-45 (New Haven, Connecticut: H. L. Hamlen, 1844), 30.

17

Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 18.

18

Ibid.

19

Yale students continued to study ancient literature in the junior year. See Catalogue of the Officers and Students in Yale College, 1844-45 (New Haven: B.L. Hamlen, 1844), 29. Almira Phelps, The Female Student, or Lectures to Young Ladies on Female Education (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836), 133-35.

20

Arthur C. Cole, A Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1940), 56; Mount Holyoke Catalogue, 1840-41, 8; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 16-17; Watters, MacMurray College, 51.

21

Cole, Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke, 56; Harriet Webster Marr, The Old New England Academies (New York: Comet Press Books, 1959), 188; Boas, Women's Education Begins, 198; Yale College Catalogue, 1844-45, 29.

22

Letter of Anna Peck Sill to Misses Jones and Richards, 7 April 1854, Sill: R.C.A.; Cole, Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke, 59; Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College," (M.A. thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 311.

23

Phelps, The Female Student, 305, 308.

24

Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 14-15; Rammelkamp, Illinois College, 54.

25

Phelps, The Female Student, 306-7; Woody, History of Women's Education, 1, 441; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 17-18; Cole, Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke, 65-66.

26

Boas, Women's Education Begins, 185; Watters, MacMurray College, 53; Marr, Old New England Academies, 203, 209.

27

Marr., Old New England Academies, 210; Elizabeth A. Green, Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1979), 221.

28

Marr, Old New England Academies, 203-4; Historical Sketch of Rockford Seminary, report prepared for the U.S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Rockford, Illinois: Register Company Printers and Binders 1876), 30; Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 18-19.

29

Boas, Women's Education Begins, 180.

30

An advertisement titled "Rockford Female Seminary" in Sill Scrapbook, a collection of local newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary dating from 1849 until after Sill's death, Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 3; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Rev. A. L. Chapin, 27 March 1856, Chapin: B.C.A.; see Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 15 July 1858, Trustees: R.C.A.

31

Marr, Old New England Academies, 196-97.

32

Mary Lyon, "Mount Holyoke Female Seminary," in Pioneers of Women's Education, ed. Willystine Goodsell (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1931), 272-73; Banister's statement is quoted from Marr, Old New England Academies, 198.

33

Mount Holyoke Catalogue, 1853-54, 11, lists Goldsmith's Greece, Rome and England; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 17-18; Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 14-15.

34

Beloit College Catalogue, 1853-54, 14-15; Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Chapin, Aaron Lucius." Boas, Women's Education Begins, 195.

35

See Maggie Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Finds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 47; Cederborg, Thesis, 83.

36

See Boas, Women's Education Begins, 198-204.

37

Mary Greenlead Plant, Alumnae Address, in "Rockford Seminary Association," Rockford Seminary Magazine 12 (December 1884), 324; Eliza Thomas Caswell, Alumnae Address, in "Alumnae Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (June 1887), 180-81.

38

Cederborg, Thesis, 83.

39

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1854-55, 18-19; Watters, MacMurray College, 51; Grace Norton Kieckhefer, The History of Milwaukee-Downer College, 1851-1951 (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Centennial Publication of Milwaukee-Downer College, 1951), 15; Cederborg, Thesis, 67.

40

Watters, MacMurray College, 52; Sill, "Rockford Seminary, Its Ideal," Address at the Sixth Annual Banquet and Reunion of Rockford Seminary, Chicago, 1879, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 7 (March 1879), 76.



## CHAPTER 7

### STORM CLOUDS GATHERING

#### Making Steady Progress

Rockford Female Seminary's 1855 school year began on a note of triumph. The examining committees consistently commended the institution for its scholastic excellence, and newspapers predicted that it would become "the first school of the kind in the West." This fall's senior class was seven members larger than last year's ten, and three graduates were taking the fourth year of study. There were other signs of prosperity as well. Plans had been made to buy more land, and a new building named after the Banister mansion, Linden Hall, was slowly taking shape.

Then the news arrived that Zilpah Grant Banister was planning a visit of inspection. In September she wrote to Eliza Emerson that she was wondering whether the provisions of the Banister will were disposing of "too large a sum to be judiciously appropriated to beneficiaries in the Rockford Female Seminary." Perhaps she should visit Rockford and see for herself.<sup>2</sup> For the next several weeks, the seminary must have bustled with activity. Surely Anna Sill told the

student body that Banister was the school's patroness and one of the leading female educators in the East. Every speck of dust must have been swept from under beds, every window polished, every table, desk, and book placed in perfect order. What would Banister think of it all?

### Zilpah Grant Banister

On November 6 the august benefactor arrived. Tall, regal, and erect, she was described as "comely with the expression of kindness, dignity, and power." The sixty-one-year-old educator had been born in Connecticut and had grown up under conditions strikingly similar to those of Sill. Both women had been reared in large farm families, and both had lost their fathers at an early age. Zilpah Grant began teaching school when she was fourteen. After much serious soul-searching, she joined the Congregational church at age eighteen. Like Sill she considered going into missionary work but turned down an offer to accompany a man to the field. Her pastor, Rev. Ralph Emerson, instructed her along with several other youths in grammar, history, and English literature. Later he encouraged her to spend her fifty dollars in savings to study at his brother Joseph's seminary at Byfield. This decision was to profoundly affect Banister's life, for Joseph Emerson offered her intellectual and administrative opportunities open to few women of her day. The relationship was mutually beneficial. Later Emerson

wrote that Banister "had done more than any other young lady to raise my seminary, one whom my pupils are prepared to receive with respect, with affection, with the utmost confidence."<sup>3</sup>

Zilpah Grant founded one of the leading female seminaries in the East, Ipswich, where her lifelong friend, Mary Lyon, assisted her. In time Mary Lyon would model Mount Holyoke after Ipswich. Because of their high academic standards, these institutions would set the standard for many other female schools. In 1839 Zilpah Grant gave up her seminary because of poor health. Two years later she married William Banister, a former member of the Massachusetts Senate. After her husband died, she used the Banister estate to support the educational advancement of women. Her social prominence and academic reputation brought her much adulation. She was often approached for advice on matters of female education. Like Joseph Emerson, she was intensively religious and self-disciplined. She was also said to have had an "uncommon force of will."<sup>4</sup>

Banister met Anna Sill when the Rockford principal visited the East in 1852. Later she told her close friend, Eliza Emerson, "Miss Sill is a jewel. So much dignity and energy and decision combined with so much docility and piety."<sup>5</sup> The female educator had guided Sill in fund raising; now she would evaluate her educational work.

### The Visit

Banister stayed in Rockford for ten days, spending some time with a relative of her former mentor, Joseph Emerson, who served as a local minister and Rockford trustee. Anna Sill consulted with Banister about "everything as it came along" so that the patroness would understand the entire program. Banister spoke one hour to the senior class and three hours to the entire school, including the teachers. She gave hearty commendation for much that she saw. She stated educational principles "sometimes in the abstract," sometimes as applied "to the development, the discipline, and the furnishing of their own minds," as well as in the training of children and youth. Finally she left to visit Professor Joseph Emerson at the men's college. During her visit in Beloit she had a "most free expression" of her "opinions and thoughts" with President A.L. Chapin, who, according to Banister, shared her estimate of the principal. From Beloit she traveled to Chicago.

### Written in Love?

In Chicago Zilpah Banister wrote a long letter to Eliza and Ralph Emerson. In essence, what she had seen in Rockford she had not liked. Explaining that she was acting on the principle, "Where there is love in the heart, we may say anything," she wrote a scathing denunciation of Sill's personality and practices. Although she conceded that Sill

had "performed a great work," "done nobly," and had "uncommon qualifications," and although she felt that Sill should be "sustained by the Trustees," and should continue to "stand in their approval higher than any other one," she predicted that unless Sill's administration were "essentially modified" Rockford Female Seminary would "in five or ten years from this time tottle to its base." There was more at stake than the seminary, however. Banister said that the graduates of such a school would seriously impair the future of the "cause of Christian education for females" in the West and possibly the entire nation:

To have ladies go out from such a school, as having completed the course, so defective as some of them must be in school education, cannot fail to lead some discerning minds to take the ground, that Hon. Wm. Reed & Lady of Marblehead always took, viz. that they did not approve of having many young ladies in a boarding house together, & therefore they could not bestow funds on such institutions. Others will come to the conclusion, which a good mother in Illinois expressed to me, viz., "If I had a thousand daughters I would never send another to a boarding school."

In a more detailed analysis of Sill's character, Banister said that the principal had indispensable qualifications for establishing and maintaining a "literary institution," but that "somewhere in the structure of her mind, there are a pin or two loose; & the effects are, & must be disastrous, unless counteracted." To support these charges, Banister pointed out several major flaws of the seminary:

1. Academically the students were pushed through too much content and had too little time for rest and relaxa-

tion. So many subjects were studied so quickly that only the brightest comprehended them:

Some had lost Geometry by sickness or absence; and some had never had recitations in Nat. Theol. & those branches also were indispensable to the course, therefore they must be crowded in now;--it was almost impossible for her [Sill] to see, that this class was overwhelmed.

Banister cited the instance of a student being permitted to take eleven subjects simply because she wanted to finish the course quickly:

With all her [Sill's] power of will, & her tenacity in carrying specific school rules, she does not know how to deny a request from her pupils to take more studies, & advance in the course far beyond their power.

Banister felt that Sill's methods could only result in injury to the students' minds "for studying, reading, or thinking, to the best advantage in future life."

2. The school rules were so strict and minute that no one could follow them, including the faculty. Instead of forming mature Christian character, they would only "blunt the conscience; to the basis of the law of right, of general justice, of the great unalterable law of love."

3. Anna Sill was so autocratic that although she spent many hours discussing innumerable school matters with her faculty, she insisted on making all decisions. The feeling she conveyed to everyone was, "the school is mine, I have founded & built it up, it is my province to decide."

In conclusion, Banister said that some students under Sill's care would be zealous and would make good missionaries.

others might do well "here & there." But the young women of the seminary needed a better influence. The august educator offered her assistance in reforming the principal, "hoping that with Heaven's blessing the school might be improved 100 per cent." Banister said she wanted both Sill and the trustees to invite her back to Rockford so that she could influence Sill without Sill's knowledge.

### The Evaluation Analyzed

There was much truth to Banister's criticisms. Anna Sill was highly disciplined and had great intellectual curiosity. She delighted in mastering difficulties, whether ponderous theological tomes or over-crowded dormitory rooms. Famished for intellectual nourishment in her youth, she would find it difficult to slow down any student who wanted to take on a heavy load of studies. Nor was she overwhelmed by a large number of demanding intellectual tasks. She would have difficulty understanding why her students could not work long hours to master studies only partially covered in class. After all, she had been teaching herself that way for years. She believed that hard work, in itself, strengthened one's character. She also knew that she and all women were on trial at the seminary. She probably felt that she had to prove that women could excel academically. Thus, she worked all the harder to advance her students scholastically.

Joseph Emerson had taught his students, "Endeavor to

understand every word and phrase of an author. One book well read may give more instruction than a hundred read hastily." Emerson also felt that students who crammed in too many subjects and read many books rapidly were "injuring their minds." Like her mentor Banister recommended that students learn no more than two or three subjects at a time. These were studied slowly, carefully, thoughtfully.

Banister "could not skim; she loved to delve," wrote a biographer. She stressed the fundamentals because female seminaries often glossed over many books without thoroughly grounding students in the basics.<sup>7</sup> She was appalled by Sill's rapid pace.

The seminary's meticulous rules were onerous, and the principal could be harsh in enforcing them. One alumna remembered that she had broken a school law by letting a young man walk "to the stile" with her. Her punishment was to explain her misbehavior, have a chaperone accompany her wherever she went, and put a "big zero" in her report book. Then her chaperone was taken away from her. Another alumna recalled,

When in school, I in common with many others thought of her [Sill] as a dignified, austere, but very just woman. The rustle of her long black silken skirt or the slight bronchial cough, heard drawing near, sent many a mischievous scholar scurrying out of sight.

Another said that the mild loving reproof of the teacher and nurse, Lucy Smith, "was often more effective than Sill's sternness." In those days it was common for the principal or president to assume an austere pose, especially since he



or she was the official disciplinarian. Sill was doing more than playing a role, however. She set a high standard for herself. She expected the same of her students. Henry Goodwin explained her legalism this way:

If sometimes she [Sill] was more tenacious of forms and precise technical rules of conduct than some would deem necessary, it was the tenacity of a conscience wholly set in the way of right, and fearing to let down the high standard of duty to which she clung. If her method of discipline sometimes was more of a legal than a spiritual order, . . . it was because the law of duty was supreme, and must be enforced outwardly by precept and commandment until it becomes an inward law of the heart. 8

Following the Mount Holyoke plan Sill saw that all students copied the rules into a little book and kept track of their misdemeanors. They were also required to record and balance their "personal expenditures." She insisted on silent study hours with no whispering even in halls; perfect punctuality at meals, chapels, and meetings; weekly attendance at church services; and no visits off campus without permission. In 1854 she asked Lucy Jones to post the following rules for students boarding in town:

1. No absence from church and Bible class of the Sabbath.
2. No receiving calls in study hours.
3. No absence from study hours.
4. Not to interfere with family regulations.
5. Are to retire at ten o'clock.
6. Are not to leave boarding place without permission.

One student recalled that if she had been tardy for classes or meals, or if she had broken a rule, she was supposed to confess and be excused. If the excuse was not accepted, then she received a demerit. Another wrote,

Oh! all this discipline! At times it was terribly hard, and even some of the "Good Girls" rebelled, broke rules, and did not report, put "Sundries" in their report books when they could not balance their accounts. They stole into chums' rooms in study hours, whispered, and abused the faculty, especially Miss Sill. But at heart they were good girls, were only tired out with months of wearing work and never-ending restraint. 9

Actually Rockford's rules seemed much like those of other ante-bellum institutions. In 1829 Yale published a list titled "Of Crimes and Misdemeanors" which included thirty-three rules. Students were prohibited from throwing things out of windows, speaking above a whisper in the halls, leaving their rooms during study hours, visiting without permission, etc. A student at Mount Holyoke wrote, "There are seventy rules." Another wrote,

Miss Lyon keeps making new rules cutting off our privileges one after another. O I shall be so glad to get home where I can speak above a whisper and not have to move by a line and plummet."

In 1859 Illinois Conference Female College published a list of twenty-three rules which were much like those of the  
10  
above institutions.

In terms of discipline Zilpah Grant Banister was ahead of her times. The 1839 Ipswich catalogue stated that her aim was to "govern the pupils as much as possible, by leading them to govern themselves." Before instituting a rule, she proposed it to the student body and explained how it would benefit the whole group. Then she appealed to everyone for its adoption. Once the rule was instituted, students kept track of their performance. If some discipline problem pervaded the school, she drew aside several leaders,

discussed the matter with them, asked for their support for a small amount of time, and commended them for their help. In this way, she gained much student support. The 1839 catalogue stated her belief that the faculty should have confidence in their students' desire for harmony: "It is not taken for granted under any circumstances that they intend doing wrong."<sup>11</sup> With such a philosophy, Banister would not approve of Sill who "made the rounds daily of 'everywhere' even to inspecting whether the girls were pairing [sic] the potatoes thinly."<sup>12</sup>

Probably what irked Banister the most was Sill's stubborn refusal to give up any authority. Although Sill seemed eager to discuss many educational matters in detail, she always insisted on deciding everything. Here was probably the real reason behind Banister's bitter denunciation. As a recognized educational authority and patroness of Rockford Female Seminary, Banister probably expected Sill to allow her to mold the seminary into another Ipswich. Instead, she found that the Rockford principal was as indomitable as she.

Anna Sill had a life's purpose for which she had made great sacrifices. If she gave up that dream for the security of a sizable endowment from the Banister estate, she would have lost her reason to continue striving for the institution. Rockford Female Seminary would have become Banister's. In 1885 Sill described the vision that still inspired her:

You will rejoice with me in all of the modern improvements of the Seminary tending to prosperity as a stepping stone toward the high ideal so long and ardently desired; but the end is not yet attained, and very much remains to be done to place the institution on a material basis among the first colleges of our land. 13

Perhaps without realizing it, Sill was also resisting the possibility of long-term discord. In 1849 Milwaukee Female Seminary had received a similar offer of financial and educational assistance. Thomas Kilpatrick of the Board of National Popular Education told a Milwaukee audience that Catherine Beecher would endow a school for \$1000 if the community would provide a "suitable building." As a result of his promise, a group of Milwaukee residents sent an invitation to the famous educator asking her to help mold and support an institution for women, which in 1953 was named Milwaukee Female College. A college historian wrote later,

And a stormy relationship it proved to be, for Miss Beecher was not only a person of extreme independence of mind but, as she grew older, of considerable stubbornness and single-mindedness in carrying out her ideas. But that could not be foreseen in 1850.

Eventually dissension became so great that Beecher threatened to bring suit against the Milwaukee Female College Board of Trustees. Only after Beecher finally withdrew in partial victory did the college gain a measure of stability.<sup>14</sup>

Catherine Beecher also made overtures to provide an endowment for Rockford Female Seminary. She even spent some time on campus, probably in the 1850s. An alumna recalled that Beecher "gave us our first ideals of gymnastics, and

said many things to the students on the necessity of physical exercise." <sup>15</sup> As a former trustee of Milwaukee Female College, President Chapin may have heard of the discord <sup>16</sup> between Catherine Beecher and her board of trustees. However, there is no mention of Beecher's visit in the minutes of the Executive Committee or the Board of Trustees. The trustees were probably wary of allowing a "strong minded" female like Beecher to shape the seminary, especially if it might mean a bitter struggle for power.

#### Aftermath

After her visit to Illinois, Banister corresponded with the Chapins, and the president may have visited her home when he traveled east. The following spring, Professor Joseph Emerson invited her to return to the seminary that summer. However, he did not say whether he agreed with her assessment of Anna Sill. Banister had suffered a bout of poor health the winter after her trip to the West. She did not return to Rockford the next summer. She did, however, procure one teacher, whose "character is needed in the Faculty [sic]," <sup>17</sup> but the woman remained only one year in Rockford.

At their next annual July meeting, the Board of Trustees passed several important resolutions to diminish Anna Sill's power. President Chapin recommended that the course of instruction be divided into four departments to be headed by permanently appointed faculty: Mental and Moral Science, to

which Anna Sill was appointed; Mathematics and Natural Science, to which Mary White was appointed; History and English Literature; and Ancient Languages. Other permanent appointments would be made as soon as possible. In addition, "regular courses of lectures in science and experimental philosophy" would be secured from Beloit College professors with expertise in those fields. Chapin's recommendations were passed.

The division of instruction into departments had already been put on paper, but as Zilpah Banister had so pointedly demonstrated, it had not been practiced. To assure an actual division of labor as well as collective faculty decision-making, the trustees resolved that all teachers would be assigned to the departments which would "constitute the faculty, to whose joint counsels the interior arrangements of domestic matters, instruction and discipline be referred." Their responsibilities would be determined by a "Code of Bye Laws" drawn up by a special committee.

Zilpah Banister's castigation of Anna Sill had doubtlessly called into question whether any woman could properly govern a seminary. Faced with heavy construction costs and the uncertainty of Banister's continued financial support, the trustees were probably wondering whether a woman could raise the money so desperately needed to complete the building program. At the same board meeting, a committee was appointed to "inquire into the expediency [sic]" of appointing "a gentleman of competent

abilities to take the general charge of the affairs of this institution." President Chapin, Rev. Hope Brown and Thomas Robertson agreed to conduct the search. In addition, a steward would be hired to manage household affairs.

After the trustee meeting Professor Joseph Emerson wrote again to Zilpah Banister, asking her advice in formulating a seminary code of laws. He repeated his invitation that she visit the seminary in the near future. He also asked her opinions on two points:

One is, the expediency of appointing a president to take charge of the business affairs of the seminary, to get the endowment now and perhaps to be pastor and to some extent teacher by and by. On this, however, I presume President Chapin has written you. . .

The other question concerns the course of study. Is it best that the course be more extended than it now is? In order to be honestly a seminary of the highest order?

What Banister answered is not known. She never returned to Rockford, and apparently she gave no more money to the seminary. Some years later her estate declined considerably, thus forcing her to spend the last years of her life in relative poverty.

### In Search of a President

By the end of July the trustees' special committee had decided that Aratus Kent would make an excellent seminary president. Thus, they sent Anna Sill to Galena to offer him the position. The following month Sill reported to Chapin that although Kent looked "at the whole subject in a more

favorable light" than she had expected, she doubted that he would accept the position. "I would suggest that you write him," she told Chapin, "bringing forth your strong reasons,<sup>21</sup> ere he makes a final decision."

In the end Kent declined the offer. Among other reasons, he stated that he regarded fund-raising "with especial abhorrence." By September the committee had decided that it would be "risking too much to have a collision in the management of the institution," especially since the seminary was so popular that in addition to its enrollment of well over two hundred students, fifty applicants had been turned away. At the October meeting of the trustees, President Chapin reported that the committee had been unable to make a permanent appointment to the office of president. However,

this Committee agreed . . . that the subject be still held under consideration, in the hope that Providence will ere long direct the minds of the Board to some person qualified for such an office.

Hope Brown was appointed "Financial Agent," a position he held until 1870. In addition to soliciting funds "as far as he may find it practicable," he was charged "to exercise a general stewardship of the grounds, building and family." His yearly salary was set at seven hundred dollars. At this time Sill's yearly salary totaled three hundred dollars and<sup>22</sup> board; her teachers, two hundred.

If the trustees hoped that Brown would exercise some control over Anna Sill, they were mistaken. "Father Brown"



was a kindly, solicitous minister in his late fifties, who served more as handy-man than administrator. Here is how one student remembered him:

Do you not all see him ["Father Brown"] now, as he comes in and out three times a day? Do you not hear his pleasant response to your requisitions of him to do this errand, and that, in town? Do you not remember how welcome you were to a seat in his carriage, if, either for lameness or laziness, you wished a ride to town or elsewhere, near by? 23

#### By-Laws

In July 1857 the Board of Trustees adopted "The Constitution of the Rockford Female Seminary" which included the official title of the institution, its object, the definition and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees and faculty, the admission and dismissal of students, the deportment of students, and the course of instruction. Only a few faculty duties were added which had not been practiced previously.

No longer would it be acceptable for Anna Sill to meet with individual faculty members and then make all decisions. Like the president and professors of Beloit College, the Rockford faculty were to "hold stated meetings" for consultation presided over by the principal. The by-laws stated, "No decision of the faculty shall be deemed valid unless made by vote and accorded." Although Anna Sill had been reporting on the condition of the seminary, the by-laws specified that "the faculty shall present to the Trustees an annual report in writing," indicating the "general state of

the Seminary" and making suggestions for improvements. No more could a student appeal to Sill for an accelerated course of study. All pupils entering the collegiate course had to be fifteen years of age; "nor to an advance standing without a proportionate increase of age." Each student also had to sustain "an approved examination" by at least one faculty "in the studies pursued in the academical department."<sup>24</sup>

### Course of Instruction

The by-laws retained three courses of instruction: preparatory (now called "academic"); normal or English; and collegiate. The curriculum was to include the following branches of study:

history	logic
ancient geography	intellectual philosophy
modern geography	moral philosophy
mathematics	natural theology
natural philosophy	evidences of Christianity
physiology	English language
chemistry	Latin language
botany	orthography (spelling)
geology	criticism
astronomy	rhetoric

The only study added to those in 1854-55 catalogue was orthography (spelling). Optional studies "as the interests of the Seminary and the good of the pupil may require" included:

Greek language	music
French language	drawing
German language	painting

Under the general supervision of the trustees, the faculty

were to select the course of study, methods of instruction, etc. Public examinations were to be held at the close of the second and third terms, presided over by an examining committee of at least five persons appointed by the trustees or Executive Committee.

25

### Academic Course

Before undetermined, the length of the academic (preparatory) course was now set at two years. The 1857 catalogue also revealed an expansion of courses in the curriculum. The preparatory course had previously listed ten subjects (or textbooks). The academic course now offered thirteen each year as well as "one Recitation weekly" in "Nevins' Biblical Antiquities." Several subjects from the previous collegiate course were now included in the second year of the academic course: Cornelius Nepos, Cutter's Anatomy and Physiology, Analysis of Prose and Poetry (presumably by Goldsmith), composition, penmanship, and vocal music. Courses added were bookkeeping, Bible history, general history, drawing, and Worcester's Elements, and Smaller's Natural History.

26

### Collegiate Course

The three-year collegiate course had consisted of twenty-eight subjects (or textbooks) in addition to the six courses tacked to the end. Now there were thirty-

three courses as well as the same extras. Somerville's Physical Geography and Boyd's Rhetoric and Criticism were added to the junior year. Chemistry and geology were moved back from the senior to the middle year. In addition to previous subjects, middlers studied Cicero in Latin, Wilson's History of the Middle Ages, and (along with seniors) chose between two terms of French or German. The senior courses were redistributed so that students did not have such a heavy concentration of mental and moral philosophy. Wayland's Political Economy was dropped altogether from the curriculum, and seniors concluded their studies by reviewing the year's work. There was no change in the course for resident  
27  
graduates.

### Long-term Implications

The Resolutions of 1855 and the By-Laws of 1857 may have diminished Anna Sill's power considerably, but at the same time they forced her to administer more as college president than academy preceptress. Given her personality Sill would always tend to dictate, whatever the organizational plan of the institution. Yet she did follow the by-laws. She held regular faculty meetings, recorded the decisions reached by the group, and presented a summary report to the trustees each year. It was probably many years before she and the Board of Trustees realized that in curbing her excessive power they had been laying the necessary foundation for a truly collegiate institution.

## FOOTNOTES

1

See reports of the examinations of Rockford Female Seminary pasted in Sill Scrapbook, a collection of newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary from 1849 until after Sill's death, Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 1-7. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated History: R.C.A. See also Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, for the Academical Year 1855-56 (Rockford, Illinois: E.C. Daugherty, Printer, 1856), 13.

See 14 July 1854 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Records of the Board of Trustees, Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, 19 September 1850 - 7 February 1884, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to the records will be abbreviated Trustees: R.C.A. The Executive Committee was authorized to buy the land lying west of the seminary "between the Said [sic] ground and the river if practicable"; see also A.L. Chapin, "Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary," [Extract from the Decade Address of Chapin at the Commencement Exercises of 1861], newspaper article in Sill Scrapbook, 16.

2

Letter of Zilpah Grant Banister to Eliza Emerson, 25 September 1855, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Emerson: B.C.A; see also "Miss Sill and Her Administration," Unpublished paper (n.d.), History: R.C.A., 9-10.

3

See Elizabeth A. Green, Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1979), 38-43; Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Banister, Zilpah Polly Grant"; quotation from L. T. Guilford, The Use of a Life: Memorials of Mrs. Z. P. Grant Banister (New York: American Tract Society, 1885), 50.

4

John P. Cowles, "Miss Z. P. Grant--Mrs. William B. Banister Barnard's American Journal of Education, 30 (September 1880); quotation from Guilford, The Use of a Life, 32.

5

Actually this is not a quotation from Banister but is Eliza Emerson's recollection of what Banister had said of Sill. See letter of Eliza Emerson to Mrs. Safford, 9 February 1854, Emerson: B.C.A.

6

The account of Banister's visit to Rockford and Beloit is taken entirely from the letter of Zilpah Grant Banister to Ralph and Eliza Emerson, afterwards forwarded to Professor Joseph Emerson, November 1855, Emerson: B.C.A. Apparently there are no other extant accounts of this visit.

Rev. Joseph Emerson of Rockford (son of Rev. Daniel Emerson, a cousin of Ralph Emerson, of Rockford), was a trustee of the seminary from 1854-60. See Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 273; "Catalogue of the Officers and Members of the Board of Trustees," in The Twenty-Fifth Annual and Quarter Centennial Catalogue of Rockford Seminary (Rockford, Illinois: Journal Book and Job Printing House, 1876), 3-4. According to Banister, Rev. Joseph Emerson wanted her to remain in Rockford a week to influence Sill "he having seen & deplored some of the defects I have mentioned."

Although Banister reported that Chapin agreed with her, I have found no letters or journal entries in Chapin's papers to indicate his reaction to Banister or his opinion of Anna Sill.

7

See Guilford, Use of a Life, 38-41; 50; 98-100; Green, Mary Lyon, 41. See also "Miss Sill and Her Administration," 7-15, for an insightful analysis of Banister's evaluation.

8

See Cederborg, Thesis, 305, 256, 284, 289; letter of Mabel Walker Herrick to Helen Drew Richardson (n.d.), History: R.C.A.

9

See Cederborg, 300; also letter of Anna Peck Sill to Lucy Jones, 11 April 1854, Sill: R.C.A.

10

Arthur C. Cole, A Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1940), 74-78; Mary Watters, The First Hundred Years of MacMurray College (Springfield, Illinois: Williamson Printing & Publishing Co., 1947), 83-85.

11

Harriet Webster Marr, The Old New England Academies Founded Before 1826 (New York: Comet Press Books, 1959), 120-26; Guilford, Use of a Life, 105-107.

12

Letter of Mrs. A.D. Adams to Hazel Cederborg [around 1925], Cederborg File, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois.

13

Anna Peck Sill, Alumnae Address, in "Contributors' Department," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 13 (October 1885), 277.

14

Grace N. Kieckhefer, The History of Milwaukee-Downer College, 1851-1951 (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Centennial Publication of Milwaukee-Downer College), 8-21.

15

Sarah Hall Pratt, "The Honorableness of Our Past," in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (January 1887), 12.

16

Kieckhefer, Milwaukee-Downer College, 3-12. When it was founded in 1848, the school was called "Milwaukee Female Seminary." Beecher renamed it "Milwaukee Normal Institute and High School" in 1850. It was authorized to grant collegiate and secondary diplomas in 1851 and its name was changed to "Milwaukee Female College" in 1853.

17

See letter of Joseph Emerson to Zilpah Grant Banister, 5 May 1856, in which he said, "I have been to Rockford where I saw several members of the Board of Trustees (my cousin, Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Potter, & Dr. Clark) all of whom expressed a strong desire to have you spend the summer there; and those who have most knowledge & thoughts respecting the Seminary consider it an object of most importance." See also "Miss Sill and Her Administration," 13.

18

Actually these departments had been established by the trustees the previous summer, but Mary White received her permanent appointment at this time. In July 1857, Caroline A. Bodge, who had served as assistant teacher for two years, was elected to chair the Department of Ancient Languages. At the same time, Mary L. Crowell was appointed to the department of History and English Literature. See Chapin, "Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 16; see also Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 13 July 1855, 11 July 1856, Trustees: R.C.A.

19

The committee consisted of Professor Joseph Emerson, Henry M. Goodwin, Anna Sill, and Mary White.

20

11 July 1856 Board of Trustee Minutes, Trustees, R.C.A.; see also Emerson's letter to Banister, 14 July 1856. He closed with, "Can you not come here after your term at Hartford so as to help in councils preparatory to our meeting in October?" See Guilford, Use of a Life, 322, 337-38; "Historical Sketch of Rockford Seminary, 1876, 30. When Banister died, a short notice stated that "this woman in her last years was burdened with the anxiety and trial of personal dependence upon her friends," in "Second Annual Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3(February 1875), 71.

21

See typescript letter of Anna Peck Sill to President A. L. Chapin, 16 August 1856, Sill: R.C.A.

22

See typescript letter of Anna Peck Sill to President A.L. Chapin, 23 August 1856, Sill: R.C.A. ; see also 14 October 1856 Board of Trustee Minutes; typescript letter of Thomas D. Robertson to President Chapin, 11 July 1856, Chapin File, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois; Sedeen, Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary, 46.

23

"Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 9(May, 1881), 138-39.

24

See a typescript of "The Constitution of the Rockford Female Seminary" and "By-Laws" in Cederborg, Thesis, 335-41; see also 8 July 1858 Board of Trustee Minutes.

25

Cederborg, Thesis, 340.

26

Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary for the Academical Year 1857-58, (Rockford: E.C. Daughterty, Printer, 1858), 15.

27

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1857-58, 17-18.



## CHAPTER VIII

### NOT TO GROW IS TO DIE

#### A New Era in Education

The year 1870 was a significant measuring point in the history of American higher education. For the first time the United States Commissioner of Education published fairly comprehensive statistics of the educational landscape. The report revealed that roughly eleven thousand women (or one in four students) were attending institutions of higher learning. Eight thousand were in normal schools, academies, and seminaries which usually offered work beyond the secondary school level but did not grant B.A. degrees. Some twenty-two hundred were attending forty to fifty women's colleges, many of which had been established since the Civil War. The remaining eight hundred were enrolled in the forty private colleges and eight state universities that had recently opened their doors to women.

Many factors were influencing American women to seek higher education. Public high schools which could prepare students for college admission were sprouting up in countless towns and villages across America. The explosion in

the number of public elementary schools accelerated the trend to hire women teachers, who needed training for their new profession. By 1870 three out of five teachers were women. Other occupations were opening up to women as well. When men returned home from the Civil War, many women who had taken over their jobs did not return to the hearth. The 1870 census showed that at least one woman was represented in the 338 occupations listed. There were 525 women physicians, 67 clergy women, and 5 lawyers. At the same time, leaders of the women's rights movement like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott were urging women to end male domination by educating themselves.<sup>2</sup> Illinois was not immune from these forces. The first public high school was established in Jacksonville in 1851. The school law of 1855 encouraged more schools to extend their courses of study beyond eighth grade, and by 1873 there were 106 high schools listed in the state. The first Rockford district school was dedicated in 1857. That same year two free high schools were built on the east and west sides of Rock River.<sup>3</sup>

### Seminary in Bloom

In 1870 female seminaries seemed so popular that only a prophet could have foretold their imminent decline. Like countless other women's institutions, Rockford Female Seminary had blossomed throughout the 1850s and 1860s. It had earned an enviable reputation in northern Illinois and

had drawn students from many other states as well. This is how one student described her arrival on an autumn day in the early 1860s:

In the country school life of earlier years my ambitions had been fired to attend this wonderful school for girls, the only one of its kind in all the surrounding New West. Its spacious grounds were adorned only by Nature's groves of fine trees, but the location on the high banks of Rock river was much to be desired, commanding a fine view of city and country. And then we reached the school building--Others besides ourselves were arriving, each girl with her trunk on top of which was strapped a piece of carpet to help furnish her room. Miss Sill seemed omnipresent; a real general to direct and manage her recruits, with a smile of welcome to each one of us.

Another student wrote, "Oh, the grounds to the Seminary are beautiful, the trees are Nature's own planting. This Seminary dont [sic] look much like that Prison (Sem.) at your place." She went on to say that although she had heard that students at Rockford were "half starved," "so far, we have very good meals."<sup>4</sup>

#### The Burdensome Debt

Throughout the 1860s applications had poured into the seminary. In 1864, 157 young women squeezed into dormitory space built to house eighty, and one hundred more were forced to find rooms in Rockford. The following year 126 students boarded on campus and fifty spilled over into the community. An article in a local newspaper indicated that "a hundred applications per year" were being denied at the<sup>5</sup> seminary.

As early as 1862 Anna Sill challenged the Executive

Committee to begin plans for a "new building or hall for anniversary occasions, including also a Daily Chapel or School Room and rooms for music and painting." Three years later the Board of Trustees resolved to lay the foundation of a new building four stories tall, with a connecting corridor forty-five feet by twenty-four. However, the debt from the erection of Linden Hall still hovered menacingly over the institution. Mortgaged several times during the 1850s, the seminary carried such a heavy debt in 1865 that the interest paid equalled half the principal. The trustees estimated that around twenty-five thousand dollars would erase the nagging financial burden and support the construction of a new building.<sup>6</sup>

Sill did not try to raise this amount alone. Instead, she turned to her childhood friend and trustee, Rev. Hiram Foote. Since the 1840s Foote had supported Sill's effort to raise up a female seminary. Now he willingly took a leave of absence from his Congregational ministry to devote himself entirely to her dream. Called "an energetic worker--accomplishing great results," he joined with Sill in soliciting \$13,711 (including land valued at \$800) in the Rockford vicinity. Another \$12,000 or so was still needed, so Sill took a leave of absence from the seminary to travel east during fall of 1865. To help her in this effort, Eliza Emerson introduced her by mail to a possible eastern donor. In the letter she described the sacrifices made by the faculty:

The teachers of the seminary have felt so much the importance of a new building that they have contributed \$1,000 from their scanty salary toward its erection. Our daughter Elizabeth from her salary of \$300 gave \$100 and other teachers did the same. By these efforts \$1500 have been pledged. . . . Miss Sill feels so anxious about it [the financial burden] that our daughter Charlotte who is associated with her as teacher, says she weeps every time she speaks of the funds. She says she shrinks from going alone into a strange city to try to make herself heard among the crowd and din and conflicting claim and interest.

Sill might have shrunk from the onerous task of asking strangers for money, but once she arrived in Boston she wrote to a friend,

Just fancy me in the 'Hub of the Universe,' the center of all right motion, the sun of civilization, enlightenment and refinement--and one of the 'Western Beggars.' Do you envy me, or do you pity me?' [sic]. . . One thing I am resolved to do, that is, to make just as much happiness and refreshment out of the effort as may be. God has given me the safety-valve in my temperament of susceptibility to the ludicrous, and has also made me hopeful. I find occasion for the exercise of these faculties, sometimes quite to my relief, like rays of sunshine coming through misty clouds. 7

In January of 1866 the Executive Committee appointed Rev. M.P. Kenney to travel east and help Sill raise funds. By April Sill reported that \$10,173 had been raised. She returned to Rockford that spring. In 1866 the trustees hired a traveling agent who seemed quite successful in raising funds. To cut costs on the proposed building, a trustee came out of retirement to superintend construction. In spite of all these efforts, the seminary was mortgaged  
8  
for ten thousand dollars in 1869.

Poverty plagued most fledgling collegiate institutions. It has been estimated that between 1790 and 1860 over five

hundred colleges had been founded, many along the "railroad belt." Oppressed by heavy financial burdens, some changed location in hopes of finding more community support. Others struggled for awhile and then merged with other institutions. Four out of five eventually closed their doors. Perhaps the key factor in the survival of a collegiate institution was its president. Educational historian Brubaker has said, "Only a really capable leader would be able to attract effective support from the local community or from denominational headquarters."<sup>9</sup>

Women's institutions usually suffered more acute poverty than the men's colleges. People might support male higher education, but they had grave reservations about educating women. The popular notion was that "man loves a learned scholar, but not a learned wife." George Pierce often heard the following argument when he tried to raise funds for the Georgia Female College in 1836:

No, I will not give you a dollar; all that a woman needs to know is how to read the new [sic] Testament, and to spin and weave clothing for her family. . . . I would not have one of your graduates for a wife, and I will not give you a cent for any such object.

That sentiment may have changed somewhat by 1870, but not the financial picture.<sup>10</sup>

In 1869 the Rockford trustees set the endowment for the Principal's chair at \$10,000, and for teachers \$8,000. Seven years later Anna Sill prepared a historical sketch of the seminary for the United States Commissioner of

Education. In it she reported that the campus was valued at \$100,000. Of that amount Illinois had contributed \$53,000; New York and New England \$20,000; Wisconsin, close to \$3,000. The seminary still had no endowment funds. At that time Beloit College was valued at \$225,600. It had \$130,600 in endowment funds, \$76,000 of which was designated for six professorships. The difference in the funding of the two institutions was not unusual. In a 1917 study, Sykes compared gifts to eight outstanding colleges, four male and four female. The ratio of gifts to male and female institutions was found to be: 1910-11, 21 to 1; 1911-12, 13 to 1; 1912-13, 13 to 1; 1913-14, 5-1.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Emerging Campus

At this time land was gradually being added to the Rockford's rustic campus overlooking the Rock River. An 1867 newspaper article indicated that the original eight acres had increased to fifteen, with "croquet grounds" so that students might combine "pleasure with exercise." Another strip of land around sixty-six feet wide was donated one year later.<sup>12</sup>

Rockford's new building was completed in 1867. It was called "Chapel Hall" because its assembly room completely took up the first two stories and seated around five hundred people. This room replaced the smaller chapel in the first seminary building, now called "Middle Hall." The new building also contained dormitory rooms and one "classical

recitation-room." It had a French roof and dormer windows and cost twenty-one thousand dollars. At this time the old chapel was divided into four rooms. The library of two thousand volumes and "philosophical apparatus" (made in Germany and costing nearly one thousand dollars) occupied one room. Included were maps and charts in astronomy, a French manikin, "and other costly models . . . to further illustrate the science of anatomy and physiology."<sup>13</sup>

Another room, designated the scientific cabinet, was described this way:

A special donation has been received from the State, fully illustrating the geology and paleontology of Illinois. A valuable donation of shells was made by Mrs. Z. P. Banister; also a fine collection of shells and corals from Micronesia was made by a Mrs. Clara H. Doane, one of the graduates of the institution. The collections in natural history are constantly increased. The geological and zoological specimens number about 900. A valuable herbarium is established, representing the flora of our own and foreign countries, through exchange. The botanical collections number nearly 1,000 species.

Anna Sill took special delight in the cabinet and proudly showed it to visitors. A recitation room and tiny "chemical laboratory" valued at around one thousand dollars filled the remaining space. In 1871 a brick corridor was built between Middle and Linden Hall at a cost of four thousand dollars. Thus, by the early 1870s three substantial buildings and their closed corridors extended 220 feet across the campus. In the new connections were music halls and a few dormitory rooms. One large room on the upper floor served as a studio for painting and another as a reading room. The basement



housed the gymnasium.

### Executive Projections

By 1870 Anna Sill might have viewed the Rockford campus with its towering trees and substantial brick buildings as the apex of her educational career. She had led the institution through twenty-one strenuous years. She was fifty-four years old, and her health had suffered so much in the last fund-raising effort that she had twice considered taking temporary leaves of absence. But Sill could not rest on her laurels. "I want to finish the work [God has] given me to do in the cause of education," she wrote in 1872. What this meant was that she could only stop striving when the seminary was a permanently established college for women. Sill knew that she had much work to do before that goal could be reached. Although she was no longer a young and vigorous woman, she had before her the greatest struggle of her life. <sup>15</sup>

Aratus Kent had died in 1869, and the other frontier missionaries on the board were gradually being replaced by younger businessmen and lawyers. Under Kent's leadership, the board had valued Sill's intense evangelism and benevolent zeal. The new board, under the leadership of Professor Joseph Emerson, was neither so fervid nor legalistic. Second, Sill was aware that the educational environment had changed radically since the Civil War. She carefully watched the proliferation of public high schools and the growing popularity of the coeducational state universities. She

realized that she might have more difficulty attracting students than before. Third, she became aware of the birth of a wealthy eastern women's college whose standards were higher than those of Mount Holyoke--Vassar. Sill knew that in order to claim to offer the best in women's education, she had to study Vassar and upgrade her academic programs and facilities accordingly.

As early as 1864 a Rockford newspaper reporter had recognized the direction in which the seminary was moving. Along with a description of the "Thirteenth Anniversary," was the following:

There is connected with the Seminary a Library, Cabinet, and Philosophical Apparatus, as in Colleges for young men. Its plans, scope and purposes are similar to those Colleges, and it is the design of the Teachers and Trustees to limit the age of those entering, and elevate the standard of scholarship to College rule. 16

Sill couldn't be certain that her Board of Trustees would sanction the direction she wanted to take the institution, nor did she know whether the Rockford community would donate the large gifts needed for a collegiate institution.

### The Railroad Affair

Sill's faith in the Executive Committee came into serious question about this time. In 1871 the Rockford Central Railroad petitioned the seminary to allow its tracks to be built along the edge of the campus. Against the wishes of the faculty and students, the Executive Committee voted to let the railroad proceed as planned, provided

the R.C.R. would construct culverts so that the banks would not wash away, maintain the slopes, and built and maintain a "close board fence six feet high" not above "any part of the Seminary grounds." Although Sill knew that the railroad could exercise its power of "eminent domain" to force its way across the campus, she was angry with way the trustees handled this matter. Instead of fighting for the seminary, they had quickly done what was best for Rockford's business interests. Following their decision, Sill wrote a stinging letter to three businessmen on the committee, two of whom were the seminary's leading financial supporters:

I accept the situation, with its marked significance. I beg leave to ask one question.

Has Rockford done more for the Seminary, than the Seminary for Rockford?

Will the Ex. Com. [Executive Committee] please accept two facts for prayerful consideration.

1st The rising dissatisfaction of our young ladies before the close of the year, at the thought of the Rail Road crossing our grounds is an index, and unless there shall be more marked improvements in our Halls and on our grounds, during the vacation, than I have dared to suggest, we may as well close our doors in this Hall.

2nd The present Faculty is an unit, and we have too great interest in the Seminary to stay and see it die, "for not to grow is to die"--

I will defer publishing the circular for the present.

This Institution has a history which is sacred.

Whether or not appreciated, or whatever may be its future.

Your Principal claims to have done her duty and therefore leaves events with God. 17

Sill's letter sharply challenged the priorities of the Executive Committee. She implied that although she had done her "duty" to God in carrying forth the work of the institution, the committee had not. In the past Sill had always

sent out circulars to promote the seminary. In protest she would put off issuing a circular. After all, why should prospective students want to attend a seminary whose campus was marred by the noise and rattle of passing trains? Sill's letter was certain to arouse anger, but apathetic trustees would hardly carry forward the institution she envisioned. Sill wanted only trustees who were dedicated to the seminary's sacredness.

One of the recipients of Sill's letter was Ralph Emerson, now the leading industrialist in Rockford. Since his first gifts in the early 1850s, he had become the seminary's second largest donor. Emerson's reaction to Sill's outburst is reflected in the following:

Dear Wife:

. . . Miss Sill has got mad and the way she goes for us trustees is a caution. Well, I like to get mad once in a while--it does me good. But it would make you laugh to see her get Tom Robertson, G. A. Sanford and me up in a row like a lot of naughty boys and go at us.

Emerson might have smiled at Sill's rebuke, but he was the kind of man who would weigh her words carefully. Years later when he was raising the funds to provide a seminary building in honor of his deceased son, he wrote to his daughter,

This working hard to get money, all looks mean enough, and lots of it feels mean, too, but how else is the thing to go on, I would like to know? What other offering am I to bring to the Christ Child than the fruit of my toil? And it is a pleasure to bring it. . . . We [Ralph and his wife] hope that in time, hundreds of good but poor girls will get a lift towards a good education. 18

That summer the Executive Committee made some needed

improvements at the seminary and postponed others. What remained from this dispute was a question that would nag the trustees for the next two decades: Would they be content to maintain the female seminary as it now was, or would they expend even more time and money to raise it to full collegiate status? In all probability a college would be a greater financial asset to Rockford. However, there was also a risk. A college might be so far above the aspirations and means of midwestern women that it would fail to draw their patronage.

A year later Sill brought up the collegiate question again in her annual faculty report to the Board of Trustees. As was customary, she called certain needs to their attention. She asked for better heating and lighting as well as a more efficient way of conveying water into the buildings. She requested the addition of porches to the Middle and West Hall, new fences and better driveways. She said that although there were certain problems with students performing the domestic work of the seminary, the patrons were of the opinion, "I approve of the system and think it the grand feature of the institution." Thus, the system would continue as before.

At the close of her report, she added "one more suggestion--"

To the faculty, the problem becomes more and more complicated from year to year how to secure and keep a sufficient number of first-class teachers in each department of study and of family kind without an endowment according to the original design of the

founders of the institution. We have tried to solve this problem carefully and prayerfully and we invariably come to this result minus strength in teachers and minus funds, a debt at the close of the year.

Two questions that followed this request: "Shall we lower our standard or drop the burden? Shall we cherish the college idea or not?"<sup>19</sup> Only a substantial amount of money would allow the institution to compete for competent faculty.

Although the trustees took action on many of her requests, they took no immediate steps to raise endowment funds. After the fall semester began, Sill wrote a long letter to Professor Joseph Emerson. She desperately needed teachers, and she didn't have the salaries to pay them. She said that the problem "of carrying forward a college plan without endowments" was no nearer being solved than before. The seminary was certain to lose patronage in the near future:

We are too expensive for a certain class. We have not all of the modern improvements for a class which go to more expensive institutions, the popularity of mixed [coeducational] schools draws away some. Now what shall we do? . . . Where shall come endowments? The country is pledged to surrounding institutions. Will aid come from Rockford?

Rockford's salaries were very low. Following Mary Lyon's example Sill had accepted low pay as a way to keep down the cost of tuition. In 1852, Sill had received, in addition to board at the seminary, a salary of \$200 a year; her teachers probably received from \$100 to \$160, or about half the usual rate. In 1866 Charlotte Emerson earned \$350 a year (without board) for teaching at the seminary. Her mother wrote that

Charlotte had been offered a salary of \$500 for teaching at the local high school. As it turned out, Charlotte remained at the seminary where she spent on books and supplies one hundred dollars more than her salary.<sup>20</sup>

In 1867 the board set Sill's salary at \$600 a year, heads of departments from \$400 to \$500, teachers \$250 to \$275, and assistants as little as \$100. As was customary with music teachers, Professor Hood of the music department prorated his salary by the number of his pupils. By 1870 he was earning \$1400 a year (probably without board), but the teachers were still being paid the same wage as in 1867. Sill was willing to continue receiving low pay; her faculty were not. In her letter to Emerson, she indicated that one prospective teacher requested a salary of \$600 a year in addition to board. Sill couldn't pay that sum and she didn't know how to find someone who would take less.<sup>21</sup>

Rapid teacher turnover had been a persistent problem at the seminary as it was in most women's institutions. Salaries were low, classes large, and living conditions crowded and uncomfortable. Rockford teachers usually shared rooms. Lack of adequate classroom space forced some to hold recitations in their sleeping quarters. Jane Addams never forgot how she read the Latin New Testament in her teacher's room on Sunday mornings. Sill herself never had more than two rooms. At one time she shared a room with three teachers "next door to a room where piano practice began at six o'clock in the morning." Such

conditions were bound to affect the morale and strength of the faculty. Marriage drained off many women, who were usually forbidden to teach after they had said their vows. Fatigue and illness forced others to quit.

22

By the end of the first decade the seminary had employed forty-seven teachers. After twenty-five years that number had risen to one hundred twenty, almost half of whom were educated there. During the same period Beloit College had employed forty-four faculty members, many of whom had built up a department for ten or more years. The president and heads of departments lived in large New England style homes near campus. Like most college faculty, they struggled continually to make ends meet and were often forced to supplement their meager salaries by investing in business ventures. Nevertheless, their pay was undoubtedly better than the salaries of the seminary teachers.

23

### Quality Education?

At this time there may have been little Anna Sill could do about raising large endowments, but she could continue to improve the academic program. In spite of Banister's assessment in 1855, the seminary had consistently won laurels for academic excellence. Every year lengthy articles on the seminary's examinations and anniversary exercises appeared in the local newspapers. Sometimes the flaws of a class were mentioned: "The pupils of this class [Higher Arithmetic], generally, did not grade high." Other



times a specific performance was criticized:

The article on "Mutual Admiration," a very feeble attempt to be sarcastic at the expense of such people as Margaret Fuller, T. Wentworth Higginson. . . struck us as being in very bad taste. As the fair writer grows older she will doubtless have occasion to modify her present estimate of her own mental powers as compared with those of the royal intellects above mentioned.

Usually, however, the students' academic presentations were lavishly praised. For example, a "cultured Doctor of Divinity" said that he had listened to many recitations in seminaries and colleges for men, he had also taught on the collegiate level "and I must say this is the best recitation I have ever heard."<sup>24</sup>

There were those, however, who agreed with Zilpah Grant Banister that public examinations did not always demonstrate students' academic attainments. This viewpoint was expressed in a satirical article called "Is John Smarter Than I?" published in the seminary's literary magazine. According to this article a "Professor Spectacles" made the following assessment of women's intellectual ability:

Girls learn largely by the faculty of memory; they never grasp a subject in its various relations, and so make it thoroughly their own; they make a brilliant recitation, but a few months after, and the greater part has evaporated.

President Chapin of Beloit College may not have agreed with "Professor Spectacles," but he wanted more evidence of the seminary's academic quality than public examinations could provide. Ten years after Banister's visit Martha Goodwin wrote the following to him:

I regret that I have not sooner been able to comply with your request for information concerning the Seminary. . . . I only knew in a general way that the reputation of the institution was materially improved and improveing [sic]; also that the class graduated last year was much more creditable, both scholastically and morally than those of the two preceding years.

My informant of yesterday tells me that she believes she is as well bestowed in the Seminary as she could be anywhere in the Northwest in a boarding school of this kind and probably as well as anywhere in the United States. She has doubts whether an institution dependent entirely upon the management and skill of ladies alone ever is as successful in all its aims as though under the combined administration of ladies and gentlemen. The same query has often been raised doubtless in the minds of all friends of the Seminary; yet if the alternative must be the gigantic farce of the Vassar College in New York, we surely would be content. 25

As if to squelch such word-of-mouth appraisals, Sill's 1869 faculty report requested that a visiting committee "who will thoroughly acquaint themselves with the exact conditions of the Seminary" be appointed by the Board of Trustees. The following year A. L. Chapin, Henry Goodwin, and William Curtis were appointed a committee of three to "visit the Seminary from time to time, to examine the practical working of the Institution, and report to the Executive Committee." The 1871 seminary catalogue listed these trustees followed by the names of eight women who apparently served in the same capacity. The women's evaluations were presented at the annual board meetings but were not included in the minutes. The male trustees continued to inspect the seminary until 1876 when only the names of the women were listed.

Expanding the Curriculum

Throughout its early history the seminary offered many of the same courses repeatedly; however, the curriculum committee continued to experiment with different courses and programs. The committee probably realized that the establishment of free high schools would probably drain students from the seminary's preparatory and normal departments. In 1863 six years after the Rockford high schools were built, these departments were united under one head. Two years later the normal program was altered to include only those courses required for certification in Illinois and Wisconsin. After taking the two-year course, a student was entitled to receive a state certificate. As a distinct course, the normal program was discontinued in 1871. Those who wished to teach were told they could form a normal class which would review the "primary branches" and take the collegiate courses required for "different grades of certificates given by County and State Superintendents."<sup>27</sup>

Midwesterners were acquiring material wealth so quickly that the years after the Civil War have been called the "Gilded Age." Along with fine homes and ready cash came a desire for cultural refinement. Many families began to buy expensive musical instruments, and they wanted their daughters to play them. Catering to this demand, the seminary announced in the 1860-61 catalogue a department of fine arts consisting of instruction in both music and art.

The following year separate departments of music and art were formed, and the trustees authorized the faculty to receive "pupils for that department alone, on condition of their attendance on the general exercises of the school." Those who were preparing to teach were promised "special attention."<sup>28</sup>

Under the leadership of Professor Daniel Hood, an accomplished musician who taught at the seminary for thirty-seven years, the music department became an immensely popular cultural center. In its third year of operation Eliza Emerson wrote,

The Female Seminary is very full--230 in all. A notice in the catalog that special facilities would be afforded to those who wish to fit themselves for music teachers has brought an unexpected number of this class and Elizabeth says they feel as if they had "drawn the elephant." There are 115 music scholars.

Courses were offered in theory, piano, organ and voice. A student who completed the program was qualified to receive a certificate. Professor Hood contributed to the music of the entire community. He frequently directed concerts and operettas. He played the organ in a Chicago church and taught vocalists there. An amiable man, he was highly respected and liked. The newspapers usually said that "the standard of music played at Mr. Hood's concerts" was "raised higher" every year. One editor commented,

We believe in educating the people more and more into a taste for the best classical music, and there is no one in the Northwest who can do this better, or who stands so high in our estimation as a thorough and earnest teacher, of the finest classical taste, and all-absorbed in his work, as Mr. Hood. 29

The 1875 seminary catalogue announced the institution of a Conservatory of Music, "the system of instruction pursued by the best institutions in Europe, and lately introduced with the highest success in this country." At the Conservatory a student could take both group and individual instruction, thus reducing expenses. The course included organ, piano, voice cultivation, "Thorough Bass," musical theory and composition. Classrooms were located at the seminary and in downtown Rockford, where both women and men could "become members of this Department only." The names of those who completed the three to four year course were listed in the catalogue and upon completion of the requirements received a "Diploma signed by the Officers of the Institution." The Conservatory became a valuable addition to the seminary.

30

An "ornamental" subject not quite so popular as music was art. Although art instruction had been offered since 1849 a separate department of drawing and painting was established in 1862. Under the direction of George J. Robertson, courses were offered in drawing, landscape painting in and oil, and designing or sketching from nature. Those who planned to teach were given special instruction.

31

### The Collegiate Course

During this time the central program of the seminary, the collegiate course, continued to evolve. In 1864 the

second year of the preparatory course was added to the collegiate course, lengthening it to four years. The course for resident graduates remained the same for several years although no students took the program. With a four-year course like that of the men's colleges, the seminary faced the problem of what to call its classes. The word "freshman" was not considered appropriate for women. Elmira College called its first year students "protomathian"; Ingham University and Rutgers Female College called theirs "novian." For a time Rockford classes were designated "junior, junior middle, senior middle, and senior."<sup>32</sup>

After 1870 the seminary catalogue became more overtly collegiate. Until this time the one-page summary of the seminary's founding and purpose had stated that the institution was "of highest order, bearing the same relation to the education of Young Ladies as the College to the education of Young Men." In 1871, however, the catalogue boldly asserted the seminary's legal right to call itself a college:

The Seminary originated in connection with Beloit College, and its founders designed to make liberal provisions for the thorough Collegiate education of young women. To this end its charter gives full college powers, and teachers of established reputation are permanently employed. <sup>33</sup>

The next year there were many changes in the collegiate curriculum. In speaking of the course, a local newspaper pointed out that it resembled the curriculum at Vassar College. There was some truth to this statement, but

Rockford lacked the wealth that allowed the newly established women's college to open with an advanced course of study. Rockford's 1871 catalogue listed many of the old course offerings, but their distribution into departments reflected the growing specialization of the modern American university. The additional subjects so prevalent in ante-bellum colleges were dropped except English composition. The two-year preparatory course was re-established.

Probably the biggest difference between Vassar and Rockford was their entrance requirements. Both institutions required collegiates to be fifteen years of age, but Vassar's language and mathematics requirements were equivalent to those of the men's colleges. Vassar's 1867-68 catalogue stated that students entering either the "Classical" or "Scientific and Modern Language" course were expected to have mastered four books of Caesar, four orations of Cicero, six books of Virgil, and Latin grammar. Entering students were also examined in university algebra through equations to the second degree, Quackenbos and Boyd's Rhetoric, and outlines of general history. However, in the first years of its operation Vassar had few applicants who could meet these standards.

Rockford could not afford to be so selective. The seminary continued to examine its entering students only in elementary algebra and "Latin grammar and reader" as well as basic branches. Those who had no knowledge of Latin could substitute "advanced English studies." However, Rockford

applicants were advised "to review, before entering the Institution, those branches in which they expect to be examined." The qualifying examinations would thoroughly test scholarship, and they [students] would be on probation the first few weeks "that no one deficient in requisite qualifications, may remain to her own disadvantage, and to the injury of others."

35

Rockford's four-year collegiate course included:

- Junior Year
- Latin--Caesar.
  - Mathematics--Higher Arithmetic.
  - Natural Science--Physiology and Hygiene with Lectures.
  - French and German--(optional).
  - Grammatical Analysis and Ancient History.
  - Bible History--Genesis, Exodus, Gospels, with reference to Biblical Antiquities, (one lesson per week), through the Course.
- Latin--Virgil.
- Mathematics--University Algebra.
  - Civil Government.
  - French and German--(optional).
  - English Literature--Literary Biography, Critical Reading of Cowper and other Modern Poets.
  - Bible History--Genesis, &c., continued.
- Junior Middle Year
- Latin--Virgil.
  - Mathematics--Geometry.
  - Natural Science--Zoology with Lectures and Higher Physiology, (optional).
  - French.
  - Rhetoric and Critical Reading of Shakespeare.
  - Bible History--Joshua, Judges, Monarchy to the death of Solomon, Acts of the Apostles, with reference to Ecclesiastical History.
- Latin--Cicero with Selections.
- Mathematics--Trigonometry and Natural Philosophy.
  - French.
  - Modern History with Lectures on History of Greek and Roman Civilization.
  - Elocution and Critical Reading of



Shakespeare.  
Bible History, continued.

Senior Middle Year

Greek--Introductory Grammar and Exercises.  
Natural Science--Chemistry with Lectures.  
Mathematics--Astronomy.  
German.  
English Literature--with Critical Reading of  
Milton's Paradise Lost.  
Bible History--Monarchy from the death of  
Solomon to the dispersion of the Jews.  
Reference, Josephus. Romans.  
  
Greek--Greek Testament and exercises.  
Natural Science--Botany with excursions,  
Mineralogy, Lithology with laboratory  
practice and excursions.  
Mathematics--Astronomy, (optional).  
German.  
English Literature with Reading of Milton  
continued.  
Bible History--Monarchy, etc., continued.

Senior Year

Mental Philosophy with Lectures.  
Greek and Evidences of Christianity.  
French or German and Lectures on Art.  
Ancient Literature with Critical Reading of  
Young's Night Thoughts.  
Bible--Major and Minor Prophets; Revelation  
with reference to Evidences of  
Christianity and Church History.  
  
Moral Philosophy with Lectures.  
Natural Science--Geology with excursions.  
Butler's Analogy and French or German.  
Exercises in Elocution and Themes.  
Ancient Literature and Bible Prophecy,  
continued.  
Exercise in English Composition extends  
throughout the Course.

Both Rockford and Vassar offered many courses in

languages including Latin, Greek, French, and German.

English literature did not have a prominent place in the curriculum of Vassar, but it did at both Rockford Seminary and Beloit College. Students at both women's institutions took six science courses although the wealthy eastern

institution had far more laboratory equipment. In mathematics Vassar students progressed to analytical geometry and calculus. Rockford students stopped with trigonometry. Only at Rockford did students take a full array of courses in Biblical literature, a practice which had not flourished generally until this time. <sup>36</sup>

A partial elective system, which was gaining popularity throughout the country, was also inaugurated at Rockford. The catalogue explained that all students were required to take the courses "in regular order in the Preparatory" and first year of the collegiate program. Their second year, however, students could pursue the Scientific Course, that is, "with the approval of the Faculty," elect courses in modern languages, mathematics, or natural science in place of Latin or Greek. The course for resident graduates was dropped entirely, but graduates of the seminary or other schools could attend "select branches--Music, Drawing, Painting, or the Modern Languages." A system similar to this had been tried in the late 1860s at Vassar but was abandoned in 1870. John Raymond, president of the institution, explained that few entering students were prepared to make use of the elective system. <sup>37</sup> With these changes in curriculum, Rockford Female Seminary might attract some women who would otherwise go to a women's college. The changes might also convince the Board of Trustees that it was time to change the name of the institution.

### Loosening the Reins

Anna Sill was willing to make many changes if the seminary would profit from them, even if it meant the loss of some of her cherished control. Sill had always held on tightly to her authority. Although some of it had been wrenched away from her after Zilpah Banister's visit, she had continued to rule almost as firmly as before. Her stringent regulations for the student body might have been appropriate for a rugged frontier settlement but not for a bustling city of the 1870s.

Of the hundreds of settlements on the midwestern frontier, Rockford was one that quickly blossomed into a teeming industrial center. Some forty years after Germanicus Kent put up a sawmill on Kent Creek, thirteen thousand people lived in twenty-four hundred homes along 133 streets. Once the village had consisted mainly of New Englanders, but now it teemed with immigrants from northern Europe. Once scores of covered wagons had splashed across the granite slab that had given Rockford its name. Now iron and steel bridges spanned the Rock River, the streets were "properly lighted by night," and the Holly Water Works protected the city from fires.

Rockford was outstripping most Illinois communities mainly because of its industry. In 1875 there were around thirty manufacturing firms producing reapers, mowers, seeders, marsh harvesters, plows, tire

setters, cultivators, corn planters, castings, fine and coarse paper, water-wheel governors, railroad wrenches, all kinds of force, suction and lift pumps, building board, watch-factory machinery, gloves and mittens, from the finest kid to the coarsest buck and calf, all kinds of furniture.

There were also four flour mills, three wholesale grain firms, and large stock yards dealing in live hogs and cattle. <sup>38</sup> Had Rockford remained a sleepy inland town like

Beloit, it might have lacked the financial resources to support a new and untried sort of institution. But this increasingly wealthy city was the ideal spot for the development of a progressive institution for women.

Rockford's leading citizens had eagerly sent their children to the straight-laced, religious seminary, but the daughters of the Gilded Age wanted the comforts of home while pursuing higher education. When they began to wear fine clothes and jewelry, Sill sent out a letter saying,

As to clothing, very few dresses are needed by the students, and they should be plain and unexpensive, and so made as to require but little labor in repairing. . . .

We would earnestly request that all expensive evening dresses, opera cloaks, jewelry and the like, be left at home.

In spite of this admonition, the new breed of students continued to dress more fashionably. Gone were the severe icicle-shaped hairstyles and gingham gowns of the 1850s.

"Sems" now fringed their bangs and pulled back their hair into loose curls. Their expensive gowns had full puffed sleeves. Gradually Sill began to go along with these changes. Her hairstyle remained the same, but she dressed

in "velvet" waisted gowns "with a heavy gold chain." She also wore "purple silk with fine white lace caps and black silk for dress up occasions." In 1874 the trustees voted to allow students to pay thirty dollars above tuition instead of performing "the stated domestic labor."<sup>39</sup>

Dress standards and domestic requirements might have changed a bit, but the seminary still had a puritanical image, as depicted in this scene from Rockford Seminary Magazine:

Scene--dry goods store in R. [Rockford]. Dramatis personae:--Two young ladies down town shopping. Clerk, filled with pity for their hard (?) lot--"They don't give you many privileges up there at the Seminary, do they?" [sic]

Young lady, with great dignity--"We allow the young ladies as many privileges as we think best." Ladies exeunt. Clerk staggers forward and falls, murmuring "a teacher." Curtain is dropped to slow music and blue lights. 40

One restriction imposed in the early 1860s had caused a good deal of tension between the seminary and Beloit College. Throughout the years the men of the community and nearby college were allowed to make calls at the seminary on Friday evenings. On two other occasions Beloit students visited the campus as a class: the Beloit sophomores had an evening of games and refreshments at the seminary, and the seniors visited each others' campuses during anniversary exercises. One seminary teacher remembered the annual sophomore visit this way:

It was the outstanding social event of the season, and was greatly anticipated by both schools. For days before

the girls worked to make the bare walls more attractive; there were committees appointed to make refreshments, and other committees for entertainment worked in secret session. The boys rented great sleighs, and spent the day decorating them so that they might arrive in state. 41

The class visits began to have "evil effects," as President Chapin wrote to Joseph Emerson, and the sophomores of 1861 were not invited to the seminary. When the faculty of Beloit College heard that their students were planning to go to Rockford anyway, they unanimously voted against the visit. Later that month, Anna Sill wrote a letter to President Chapin complaining that the Beloit sophomore class had visited the campus without invitations. Fifteen young men had appeared at the seminary asking to see "acquaintances and relatives and also our Middle Class," and had stayed in the reception rooms until "about midnight to the discomfort of both Teachers and Pupils." The defiance of the fifteen sophomores resulted in fourteen suspensions and one dismissal. Although all of the sophomores were restored to their classes and had resumed their studies by spring, this incident continued to rankle the students for several years. In 1863 the Beloit College Monthly triumphantly reported that the sophomores of 1862 had gone skating with the Rockford women, and during the vacation of 1863 they had revived "this custom as prescribed by the laws of the College" of visiting Rockford Seminary. 42

Ten years later the threat of declining enrollments finally forced Anna Sill to loosen up a bit in her courting

restrictions. In 1873 she wrote to Professor Joseph Emerson:

I have [sic], no doubt, the subject of coeducation of the sexes as now discussed will make a far greater disturbing element in the Seminary than in the College. I think more social intercourse of students of one institution with that of the other might now under proper limitations do good to both institutions. May there not be class visitations to listen to recitations and to become acquainted with the institutions in general, going and returning in the same day or some things of this nature.

Thus, in 1875 the following item appeared in the seminary literary magazine: "On the evening of Jan. 27, the Junior Middle class was most agreeably surprised with a call from six of the Sophomores of Beloit." In 1876 the seminary women thanked "the Seniors of Beloit College for the agreeable serenade." Joseph Emerson's sister, who taught at the seminary, held several social entertainments for Beloit men and Rockford women in the late 1870s. One of these included a trip by steamer up the Rock River.

43

These changes may warded off declining enrollments, but the number of women in the collegiate program continued about as before. Although the preparatory and normal departments lost students, the ornamental branches drew many others. Throughout this period the seminary continued to enroll around two hundred women. Because many students combined studies in two or more programs, the following enrollment figures do not reveal the total number taking classes in music and painting.

44

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Rockford Female Seminary Enrollment

1860-1875

Year	Prep	Normal	Collegiate	Music-Paint	Total
1860-61	102	26	53		181
1862-63	97	57	65	14 (only)	233
1864-65	100	39	72	42 (only)	253
1866-67	78	34	76	24 (only)	212
1868-69	98	19	60	32 (only)	209
1870-71	84	14	59	44 (only)	191
1872-73	65	0	57	50 (only)	172
1874-75	77	23	61	31 (only)	194

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A College in Name?

Between 1870 and 1876 Anna Sill continued to press for full collegiate status. In 1874 she told Professor Emerson that the seminary had reached a crisis. Invested funds to meet current expenses were desperately needed, or the seminary would surely decline. "The burden is too heavy for the faculty," she wrote, "and there is a strong temptation to lay it down." The following year she sent Emerson a circular from newly established Wellesley College and said that it was nearer her "ideal" than any other women's institution. She wanted to know specifically if the Board would explore the best way to meet the ideal of the seminary:

Shall there be any changes in the faculty, in the departments, in the course of study, in the name, any



limitations of admission except age, of indifferent classification in order to get means to meet current expenses, any farther internal improvements that may secure those who go to better furnished institutions and any change of terms regarding expenses. . . .45

Emerson responded to Sill's letters by saying that a man, possibly Henry Goodwin, would be asked to assume the heavy burdens of raising the seminary to collegiate status. Goodwin's relation to the board would be much like that of A. L. Chapin to the Board of Beloit College. The whole matter would be taken up at the next board meeting. Sill must have thought long and hard about Emerson's words, for he was implying that if she kept pushing for collegiate status, she would lose her power. After all, in that day only a male qualified for the auspicious office of college president.

That June the seminary celebrated its Quarter Centennial Commencement. During the grand ceremonies Professor Emerson delivered the main address which was later published and widely circulated. Emerson recounted the birth and development of the seminary. He told of the contributions of the founding trustees; Anna Sill, "who opened an excellent school in 1849"; and several teachers. His greatest tribute, however, went to Aratus Kent, "the man to whom, more than to any other man, the enterprise owed its inceptions and all its developments." This erroneous statement, which attributed Sill's life work to Kent, would invariably be repeated whenever the history of the seminary was told. It was also certain to raise the ire of Sill's loyal supporters.

Emerson went on to say that the names of the two institutions founded by Congregational and Presbyterian ministers were "in compliance with the usage of the time, but both were intended to give education of like grade." He could see no reason, except usage, that a woman's institution should not be called a college since the word "college" meant "the collecting of students in a community by themselves." In addition he saw no reason why a woman who bore "worthily the Bacca Lauri--the garland of Laurel berries and leaves" shouldn't be honored with a Baccalaureate, "or why she should not, if she wanted it, to be called a Bachelor. Emerson said that the seminary had offered four years of study superior to many and perhaps inferior to no other courses offered in women's colleges. He concluded, "Whatever appellations, then, the Institution may assume or give, it should be know that its training is and is to be in the first rank of American female education." 48

Later that day the Board of Trustees met. As was customary they invited Sill to join them. Three trustees were appointed to a committee "to examine and report upon the legality and expediency of changing the name `Seminary` to `College`." Another committee consisting of President Chapin, Anna Sill and Rev. Wilder Smith was told to examine the present course of study and "make such changes as they may deem advisable." The Board of Trustee minutes did not mention appointing Henry Goodwin or any other man as 49  
President of the institution.

## FOOTNOTES

1

See Mabel Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education for American Women (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers), 19-20.

2

Ibid., 17-18.

3

John Williston Cook, Educational History of Illinois (Chicago: The Henry O. Shepard Company, 1912), 505-06; Charles Church, Past and Present of Winnebago County (The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1905), 118-19.

4

Quoted from Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (M.A. thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 153; Sill Scrapbook, 45; letter of Etta Dales to Allie Hitchcock, 11 April 1860, Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated History: R.C.A.

5

See Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 6 July 1864 and 5 July 1865, Records of the Board of Trustees, Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, 19 September 1850 - 7 February 1884, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to these records will be abbreviated Trustees: R.C.A.; see also "Rockford Female Seminary" in Sill Scrapbook, a collection of news-paper articles about Rockford Female Seminary from 1849 until after Sill's death, History: R.C.A., 23.

6

Cederborg, Thesis, 167f.; 5 July 1865 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A. There are conflicting reports of the amount of money needed by the board. According to 12 July 1866, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, they wanted twenty-five thousand dollars. A report of the meeting in Sill Scrapbook, 28, indicates the same amount. However, an article by Rockford Female Seminary trustee, M. P. Kinney, "Rockford Female Seminary," in Sill Scrapbook, 23, says that "from

\$15,000 to \$20,000 added to means at the control of the Board of Trustees, would erect the desired building and put the whole in good order, equipped for its noble mission." Another article in Sill Scrapbook, 28, says that twelve thousand dollars had been collected in the East. "The same amount is pledged at the West, besides \$10,000 for paying former indebtedness."

7

See Cederborg, Thesis, 168f.; see also letter of Elizabeth Emerson to Professor Joseph Emerson, 11 February 1865, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Emerson: B.C.A. Elizabeth wrote, "That new building that is not is very heavy. It is pressing hard upon Miss Sill. I wonder that she can survive so much labor. A meeting of Rockford citizens was called last Monday a.m. About twenty were present. It was resolved to canvass the town, and Miss Sill is at work." See letter of Mrs. E.R. Emerson to John Smith, Esq., 6 November 1865, Emerson: B.C.A. However, see another article in the Sill Scrapbook, 23, which says that Sill was trying to raise fifteen thousand dollars in the East.

8

See Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, report prepared for the U.S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Rockford, Illinois: Register Company Printers and Binders, 1876), 8; Cederborg, 169-172; 6 July 1864 and 25 June 1867, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; see letter of M. P. Kinney to Rev. A. L. Chapin, 26 January 1866, Chapin Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Chapin: B.C.A.; see also "Death of Mr. Wm. H. Townsend," and "A Melancholy Affair" in Sill Scrapbook, 32, indicating that the trustee who directed the building of Chapel Hall had suffered a sunstroke. Some time later he apparently committed suicide. See 29 June 1869, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A., concerning the mortgage.

9

John Brubaker and Willis Rudy, Higher Education in Transition (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 59, 71; Donald G. Tewksbury, The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War (Reprint, Archon Books, 1965), 16-17, 27, 28.

10

Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, 2 (New York: The Science Press, 1924), 151-52; Newcomer, Century of Higher Education, 23-25.

11

See 25 June 1867, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, 8; "Appendix A: The Financial Development," in Exercises at the Quarter-Centennial Anniversary of Beloit College (Beloit, Garret Verder, Printer, 1872), 60; Woody, History of Women's Education, 2, 188.

12

Cederborg, Thesis, 175-77; "Rockford Female Seminary" in Sill Scrapbook, 30.

13

Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, 8-10; see also "Anniversary Exercises of Rockford Female Seminary" in Sill Scrapbook, 29.

14

Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, 8-10; Cederborg, Thesis, 140-41.

15

See 26 June 1868 and 30 June 1869 Minutes of the Board of Trustee Minutes, Trustees: R.C.A., for Sill's requests to take temporary leaves of absence. She recovered her health enough during vacations so that she did not have to take leaves of absence; see also letter of Anna Sill to Professor J. Emerson, 3 October 1872, Emerson: B.C.A.

16

See Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education, 21; quotation taken from "Rockford Female Seminary" in Sill Scrapbook, 22.

17

Cederborg, Thesis, 180-81; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Messrs. Emerson, Robertson & Sanford, 8 July 1871, Trustee Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, IL; Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 49.

18

Typescript letter of Ralph Emerson to his wife, 13 July 1871, Trustees: R.C.A.; according to Historical Sketch of Rockford Female Seminary, Emerson had given \$3000 to the seminary by 1876. Only T.D. Robertson, who gave \$4,062, was a larger donor. See typescript letter of Ralph Emerson to his daughter, Belle, 2 November 1890, Trustees: R.C.A.

19

See "Faculty Report, 1871-72," 25 June 1872, Emerson: B.C.A.

20

See letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor J. Emerson, 2 October 1872, Emerson: B.C.A.; Cole, Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke, 70; for Sill's salary, see 15 July 1852, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A. No specific salaries for teachers were mentioned in the 20 July 1852 Executive Committee Minutes, Trustees: R.C.A., when Sill was directed to hire teachers "on a salary about the range of what we give other teachers."

In the 29 July 1853 Executive Committee Minutes, Adelia Walker and Mary Walker were voted to receive a salary of \$160 a year. At Illinois Conference Female College, President Jaquess (male) was paid \$400 plus board in 1852. The teachers were paid \$200 a year. According to Mary Watters, The First Hundred Years of MacMurray College (Springfield, Illinois: Williamson Printing & Publishing Co., 1947), 40, this salary was comparable to what was paid at other seminaries and colleges. For Charlotte Emerson's salary see letter of Mrs. E. R. Emerson to Mrs. Zilpah Grant Banister, 1 July 1867, Emerson: B.C.A.

21

See 25 June 1867 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor Joseph Emerson, 2 October 1872, Emerson: B.C.A. According to U.S. Congress, Department of Interior, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education, H. exdoc. 1 (41-3), 1870, 137, in 1870 the monthly wages paid to female teachers in Illinois public schools ranged from \$6.34 to \$120. Male teachers received from \$12 to \$120 a month.

22

Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 45-46, 48.

23

"Report. Rockford Female Seminary," Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Female Seminary, 1860-61, (Rockford, Illinois: Register Steam Printing Establishment, 1861), 31; Joseph Emerson, "Quarter Centennial Address," in Sill Scrapbook, 84-86; Historical Sketch of Beloit College, report prepared for the U.S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Madison, Wisconsin: Atwood & Culver, 1876), 28; Robert K. Richardson, "Making and Makers of Beloit College," in Book of Beloit (Beloit, Wisconsin: Daily News Publishing Company, 1936), 37-40.

24

See "Examination of Classes" in Sill Scrapbook, 18; "Rockford Female Seminary," in Sill Scrapbook, 39; "Seminary Examinations," in Sill Scrapbook, 46. The scrapbook is full of newspaper articles praising the seminary.

25

In "Hints on Education, Written in reply to inquiries made by gentlemen engaged in establishing a seminary for young ladies," printed in Guilford, Use of a Life, 270, Banister said, "The studying at school of seven branches properly will do more to aid pupils in self-education, to the age of threescore, than simply learning to recite at a public examination seven times seven studies."

The article printed in the student magazine was signed by a pseudonym, Jerusha Jane Jones, who addressed many issues the seminary women were facing. It is difficult to know who she really was. She published several clever articles in the early issues and then was silent. See Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (October 1875), 303; typescript letter of Martha French Goodwin to Rev. A. L. Chapin, 29 December 1865, Chapin: R.C.A.

26

See 29 June 1869 and 28 June 1870, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogues from 1871-76.

27

See 1 July 1863, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1860-61, 17; see 2 July 1862, Minutes of the Board of Trustees; Cederborg, Thesis, 158-59; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1862-63, 23-24. Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1871-72, 17.

28

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1860-61, 17.

29

Cederborg, Thesis, 230; see letter of Mrs. E.R. Emerson to Mrs. Zilpah Banister, 22 July 1868, Emerson: B.C.A.; quoted from "Rockford Seminary," in Sill Scrapbook, 89.

30

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1875-76, 24-25; Cederborg, Thesis, 159-60.

31

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1862-63, 25; Cederborg, Thesis, 160-162.

32

See 6 July 1864, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education, 20. Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1864-65, 20-21.

33

See Rockford Female Seminary Catalogues, from 1854 to 1876; Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1871-72, 16.

34

Cederborg, Thesis, 190. There were other entrance requirements for entering the Scientific or Classical Course, Third Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 1867-68 (New York: John A. Gray & Green, Printers, 1868), 16, 20-21. See John H. Raymond, Vassar College, A College for Women, in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: A Sketch (New York: S.W. Green, Printer and Stereotyper, 1873), 24-25.

35

Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1871-72, 16-17.

36

See Rockford Female Seminary Catalogue, 1871-72, 18-19 for the collegiate course of study; Watters, MacMurray College, 55.

37

Mabel Louise Robinson, The Curriculum of the Woman's College, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 6 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 13-14.

38

This description of Rockford is extracted from the "Register's" Annual Review in an article called "Rockford in 1874," Rockford Female Seminary, 3(February 1875), 75-77.

39

Anna Peck Sill, "To Our Patrons and Friends," 15 July 1868, History: R.C.A. See photographs of the classes from 1865--, Student Activities Files, Rockford College Archives; Cederborg, Thesis, 73; 24 June 1874, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.

40

"Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 8 November 1880), 270-71.

41

Cederborg, Thesis, 305-306.

42

See typescript of 9, 10 January 1861 Faculty Records; 6, 18 February 1861, Faculty Records, Book A, Beloit College; letter of President Chapin to Professor Joseph Emerson, 24 January 1861; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Rev. A.L. Chapin, 11 January 1861; letter of A. L. Chapin to Professor J.



Emerson, 4 March 1861, Chapin: B.C.A.

For the students' reaction to this restriction, see Helen Drew Richardson's typescripts of "To the Editors of the Beloit College Monthly," Beloit College Monthly (March 1861), 119-20; "Collegiana," Beloit College Monthly (February 1863), 95-96; "Editors' Sanctum," Beloit College Monthly (October 1862), 22; "Collegiana," Beloit College Monthly (February 1863), 95-96; "Editors' Sanctum," Beloit College Monthly, (March 1863), 119; "The Way We Have at Beloit," Beloit College Monthly, (June 1863), 180-84.

43

See typescript letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor J. Emerson, 31 July 1873, Sill: R.C.A.; a thank-you note tacked to the end of the magazine signed "The Class," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (February 1875), 80; "Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 4 (July 1876); see "The Graduates' Gathering" in Sill Scrapbook, 95; "Senior Picnic" in Sill Scrapbook, 104.

44

Although Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 50, says that enrollments ranged from 75 to 125 in the 1860s and by 1877 had declined to 34, I have found no evidence to support these statistics. In 1877 the total enrollment was 186 with 42 in the collegiate department. Perhaps Sedeen found evidence that only 34 students were boarding at the seminary. In 1880 the trustees reported that the "seminary was shown to be in a healthy and flourishing condition" in "The Trustee Meeting," Sill Scrapbook, 115. At that time, the catalogue stated that 201 women were enrolled at the seminary. For enrollment figures, see Rockford Female Seminary Catalogues, 1860-1880.

45

See letters of Anna Peck Sill to Professor Joseph Emerson, 5 March 1874 and 3 March 1875, Emerson: B.C.A.

46

Emerson's letter is no longer extant, but Sill's response reveals their conversation. See letter of Anna Peck Sill to Joseph Emerson, 9 April 1875, Emerson: B.C.A.

47

Joseph Emerson, "Quarter Centennial Address," in Sill Scrapbook, 84-85.

48

Ibid.

49

See 21 June 1876, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BEST HELPERS OF ONE ANOTHER

#### A Seminarian of the 1870s

In September 1877 a seventeen-year-old girl named Jane Addams packed her trunks and left Cedarville, Illinois, for her first year of study at Rockford Female Seminary. She had been dreaming of going away to Smith College, but the newly founded women's college was far away in Massachusetts, Addams' father was a trustee at the seminary, and her three older sisters had all attended Rockford. So Jane went there too.<sup>1</sup>

Jane Addams had attended the village school in Cedarville. She thought her preparation in Latin and algebra "meager," but she and six other Rockford students knew enough quadratics and Latin to pass the qualifying examinations. They were thus admitted into the first year class. Nine entering students must have failed, for they were classified as "partial collegiates." Addams quickly became immersed in the life of the seminary. By this time the principal, Anna Sill, was fifty-nine years old. Addams

said that Sill had about her "the glamour of frontier privations" in founding a "Mount Holyoke of the West," but the trustees' daughter from Cedarville wasn't much drawn to the older woman. Addams liked her teachers, however, especially Miss Sarah Anderson, the gymnastic teacher, and Miss Sarah Blaisdell, head of the department of ancient languages.<sup>2</sup>

Still the seminary not a college, like Smith. It was "conservative," as one student put it. The rules were about as strict as they had always been. Each student was required to copy a long list of rules into her copybook and report on her failures each week. Here is part what Addams wrote:

Respectful and courteous deportment towards teachers and employees of the institution at all times is expected of every young lady also lady-like behavior in every relation & position.

Group attendance is expected at every duty viz: recitations, practice hours, study hours, meals, domestic work, room-work, family devotions, chapel exercises, church and all special appointments by teachers; punctuality in retiring at night and rising in the morning.

All day long school bells jangled. They woke the campus at 6:30 a.m., called the boarders to breakfast, hurried them to chapel, swooshed them to recitations, and back to their rooms for study. The last bell of the day, the retiring bell, rang at ten o'clock p.m. The seminary's clanging bells were supposed to inculcate self-discipline. Many years later an alumna recalled how the "three little strokes" of the tardy bell "caused a quickening of pulses, a hurrying of feet, and made many a heart throb faster." As

the catalogue said, "it was expected that every pupil will be in her place at the appointed time, even at the expense of personal sacrifice and inconvenience." The weariness of the clanging bells was reflected in this poem published in the seminary's literary magazine:

Oh! girls, do pity have,  
 For one day let me rest,  
 Oh! teachers, lenient be,  
 This routine I detest,  
 Ring! ring! ring!  
 Morning, noon, and night,  
 Calling at first in class to meet,  
 And then to silence quite. 3

To train students to be responsible wives and mothers, the seminary required that all boarders make their own fires and keep their rooms tidy. They rented or brought carpets for their rooms, furnished their own bedding and table service. Except for those who paid extra, every girl was expected to spend one hour in domestic duties. She might be assigned to sweep halls, ring the bells, wash dishes, care for the silver, make bread, cakes, or pies. Sometimes students joked about their home duties, as in this item in the literary magazine:

Old Girl--"If you do domestic work, you will have to pare potatoes."

New Girl--"Pare potatoes! What do you mean? I never heard of such a thing in my life."

Old Girl--(in disgust)--"Well, I should like to know where you have lived all your life! I mean, you will have to take the skins off, of course."

New Girl, in horror at the dire prospect, forbears to question further. This is only one instance out of many that might be cited, showing the lamentable ignorance which prevails among young ladies with regard to household duties. Whether the ignorance be genuine, or assumed, deponent saith not. 4

Then, of course, there were religious activities which occupied a large portion of the students' lives. In addition to voluntary prayer meetings and a daily half hour of devotional time, students attended daily chapel services, where they were required to recite a Bible verse each day. They attended Sunday school and church services, observed monthly fast days and a prayer week in January and listened to sermons by traveling missionaries and other church luminaries. After a stirring missionary sermon Addams enthusiastically wrote to a friend that she had been impressed with the "expansiveness of soul" that praying for a "barbarous" South African implied. "You will be great," she wrote, "cultured in a free sense, it sort of opens up to me a possibility that I never thought of before."<sup>5</sup>

#### What About All This Religion?

In addition to scheduled religious observances, the collegiates studied biblical literature, ecclesiastical history, extra-biblical sources, and moral philosophy. Then, of course, there were the revivals which had always been Anna Sill's crowning achievement. Every year she totaled the number of conversions. After ten years, Sill reported that three hundred pupils had hopefully "experienced renewing grace" while at the seminary. After twenty-five years, Professor Joseph Emerson said that hundreds had "commenced the Christian life" at the seminary, and eighteen

students or teachers had gone out as missionaries. The seminary's religious influence was usually mentioned in fund-raising drives. For example, Eliza Emerson wrote the following in 1865:

Bible instruction, and the duty and privilege of living to do good, are constantly impressed on the pupils. . . . This religious influence bears on them [pupils] through the whole course and it is seldom that a class is graduated without the entire number being hopefully Christians. 6

Pressure to make a profession of faith was intense. In 1865 a teacher wrote that although one pupil had been the subject of considerable prayer, she remained the "only one in the three upper classes" who resisted a declaration of faith. "To resist the influences of the last four weeks," wrote the teacher, "means a terrible power of opposition. She [the unconverted student] braces herself here for the expected assault." Apparently the same sort of pressure was applied in the 1870s when Ralph Emerson's daughter, Adeline, attended the seminary. Both Emerson and his daughter balked at Anna Sill's revival tactics. To his wife, Emerson reported the following conversation:

This morning Adaline fires off the following at the breakfast table. "I think it is just wicked the way they go on at the seminary. They are having a revival over there and all the girls are very much excited and some of them are sick of nervous diseases and lots of the others so nervous they don't know what to do. I think it is just wicked. . . ." As for me what shall I say to all that. I did not, I do not know what to say for some way a very grave suspicion croses [sic] up in my mind that the girl is full half right. 7

Like many of her Puritan forebears, Anna Sill believed that orthodox Protestantism was not a debatable subject.

Inevitably some students would feel stifled by her absolutism. Ralph Emerson observed that his daughter found the "traditions of the past" to have very little weight when they contradicted "common sense." Another student, Julia Lathrop, whose mother had graduated from the first seminary class and whose father was a prominent trustee, said she didn't believe in Sabbath rest, nor did she think people would know each other after death. Every afternoon she and her friend, Adeline Emerson, read Plato and discussed religion and philosophy. Their unorthodox conjectures would hardly be tolerated in Sill's Bible classes. From their fathers, however, they received permission to explore new options. Ralph Emerson also wrote to his wife about this incident:

They [Adaline and Julia] like to be "liberal," both of them in their views. So the liberal and unitarian people have a sort of convention here. They have some big gun to preach. I have forgot his name. Adaline asked to go and after deliberating on it, I told her yes. So she went, but the man was not half as smart as she expected-- was bald headed and parted his hair in the middle at that. An Englishman and anyway not much to see. All that did not quite satisfy the girls so the next day they went to hear the discussions of the convention. Before they got through Jule was up enough. She concluded these "liberal" christians were about the most illiberal set she had ever seen. Adaline was pleased enough with her conclusions. . . .

Neither Adaline Emerson nor Julia Lathrop completed Rockford's course of study. Instead, Adaline transferred to Wellesley and graduated in 1879. Julia Lathrop graduated from Vassar in 1880. Other Rockford students continued to think outside the bounds of orthodox Puritanism. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr debated at great length the

meaning of salvation, the true meaning of religion, the identity of Christ, and Thomas Carlyle's brand of Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

The religious probing of these students reflected the new spirit of inquiry that was sweeping the nation. The critical approach was being applied to all of life, including biblical literature. To Anna Sill and many other puritans, the Scriptures were above such investigation. Thus, Sill was probably surprised when the 1877 Examining Committee suggested that the critical method be used at Rockford Female Seminary:

While they [the examining committee] commend the practice of learning the Biblical narrative, they suggest more study, if possible of the results of modern critical research, with a view to training the pupils how to distinguish those general laws and causes of political, ethical and religious movements which are illustrated in the Bible. 9

In the past examining committees had heaped praise on the recitations of Rockford's students. The committee of 1877, however, pointed out several other academic weaknesses. They suggested that written examinations be given as well as orals and that the papers be inspected by the committee. They said that instead of covering so much ground, students would profit more from concentrated questioning. They suggested that at least some work be done "minutely and thoroughly, combined with the work of acquiring a summary of facts and opinions." They recommended that composition topics be "restricted to the subjects of study or real life with which they come into contact in the course of instruction."



Anna Sill sent the published report of the Examining Committee to Professor Joseph Emerson. She explained that some biblical questions the committee had asked of students required "extensive research in a much more extensive library that we have." In addition, Sill was not certain that "young minds" could understand the results of modern critical research or the causes of movements in politics, ethics, and religion. Sill might defend her practices, but she was perceptive enough to realize that a new age had dawned in religious education--one which she neither appreciated nor cared to explore.

10

### Better Than a High School?

A few days after Rockford's public examinations, Sill suffered a major setback. At the June 1877 Board of Trustees meeting, the committee assigned to looking into the legality of changing the seminary's name to Rockford College made their report. One sentence in the minutes of the trustee meeting dismissed all Sill's cherished hopes: "The adverse report of the special committee on change of name was adopted." For Anna Sill this must have been a crushing defeat.<sup>11</sup> The next day Sill attended the commencement exercises of Rockford's East High School. There were decorations, a band, a greeting, a valedictory address, a class motto--all like the ceremonies of the college and seminary. She noted, however, that the high school

addresses mentioned neither higher education nor advancement in knowledge, for after commencement the graduates were planning to take up their life work. The following day Sill wrote a long letter to Professor Joseph Emerson. She noted the similarities of the three commencement exercises she had attended and pointed out that although the seminary students gave "two years more time (and that before our advance)," they graduated with diplomas like those the high school students received:

I fell to wondering what a diploma meant, what the term college meant, and I almost felt like saying, I will ask our trustees to give no more diplomas until the word has a definite college meaning for I hate all sham or pretense. . . .

What distressed Sill even more was the way in which the the Rockford community perceived the seminary:

The larger part of these so-called graduates [of the high school] are young girls who are made to think their course is better than that of the Seminary. Young ladies come here from abroad and are made to feel this state of things in the community and at times hear the taunt "Seminary girls" and sometimes are made to feel that there is an unwillingness to be even classed with them in Sabbath School in the same Bible class. . . . Whatever has been the cause, I see no remedy now but that the Seminary takes a college rank in form as soon as practicable and give degrees as such, asserting full college powers. I care nothing for the name college or seminary. I only want the fact. I believe the advance made now is well and all I ask. Please let what I have now stated show why I have been anxious, at times very anxious, to advance. Were we as Mount Holyoke and other similar schools, isolated, I should not feel as I do upon the subject for it must be far better than to be in a large town unless upon an acknowledged higher basis than the public schools.

As if to prove that Sill placed the needs of the institution above her own, she asked whether perhaps the "remedy" for

the problem was a change in administration. Of course, to give up her authority would be a monumental sacrifice, but she was willing if it meant saving the institution from decline. She concluded, "All personal considerations should yield to public good."<sup>12</sup>

How Joseph Emerson responded to this letter is not known. Anna Sill was certain to have shared her feelings with her faculty. She also may have told the students that their academic performance would determine the future of the seminary. Looking back over her education at Rockford, Jane Addams later decided that the earliest students had zealously tackled their studies because of Anna Sill's "heroic self-sacrifice." Students of the 1870s felt the same "atmosphere of intensity." Not only was the seminary providing the world with dedicated missionaries, but it was also proving that women were fully capable of mastering<sup>13</sup> higher studies.

### Higher and Higher

Anna Sill may have lost a skirmish, but once again her defeat would pave the way for greater advancement. The trustees' refusal to change the name of the institution had implied their belief that the seminary was not qualified academically to be called a college. There were two major hindrances to the standard they required--the quality of the faculty and the course of study. For several years Sill had demanded more money to attract and keep qualified teachers.

In 1875 the trustees acknowledged her appeals by adding a hundred dollars to Sill's salary (now seven hundred dollars a year); and heads of departments were to receive five hundred dollars. Although a bit higher than before, these figures were well below the average teacher's salary. What was needed was a large endowment. In 1873 the trustees had resolved to raise an endowment of fifty thousand dollars. Two years later they hired Rev. Hiram Foote as financial agent. Although he worked diligently, a substantial amount of money would not be raised until the 1880s.<sup>14</sup>

After the board authorized a committee to look into a change of name for the institution, Sill had worked with President Chapin and Rev. Wilder Smith to design a truly collegiate curriculum. The result, published in the 1876 catalogue, more than ever before resembled the course of study at Beloit College. It included the following:

#### PREPARATORY STUDIES.

##### Junior Year.

Latin--Latin Grammar and Reader, Latin Prose Composition, (Harkness.)

Mathematics--Practical Arithmetic, (Robinson) from percentage; Elementary Algebra, (Robinson.)

Physical Geography, (Warren)--Grammatical Analysis of the English Language, Composition Exercises and Elocution.

German and French--(Optional.)

Bible History--Genesis and the Gospels.

##### Senior Year.

Latin--Caesar, and Latin Prose Composition.

Mathematics--Higher Arithmetic, (Robinson), Algebra (Olney.)

History--General Outlines; Zoology, (Tenney), American Literature, Word Analysis, Composition Exercises and Elocution.  
German and French--(Optional.)  
Bible History--Continued.

At this time there was much debate among educators about whether the ancient languages were central to collegiate education, but Beloit College continued to offer generous portions of Latin and Greek. These studies also began to hold a prominent place in Rockford's catalogues. Rockford's preparatory studies continued to span two years. Although many preparatory course offerings remained the same, there were fewer subjects, and additional studies were dropped entirely. Students advanced farther in both mathematics and Latin. However, beyond Latin grammar, reading, and composition, Rockford's preparatory students tackled only Caesar. Beloit College preparatory students progressed beyond Caesar to Virgil and Cicero. Although Rockford's entering students were examined in most of the same basic courses as before, they were expected to have advanced through quadratics in algebra. In Latin they were tested in "Grammar and Reader, Caesar."<sup>15</sup>

Rockford's preparatory and first-year collegiate students continued to follow a standard curriculum. However, more advanced students could choose among the Classical, Literary, or Scientific Courses. What this meant was that "with the approval of faculty" students could elect to take mainly ancient languages, modern languages, or courses in mathematics and natural science. Those who wanted more than

one complete course could finish another program "in a Post Graduate Course." Graduates of other schools were encouraged to enroll in special courses provided their knowledge was sufficient to allow them to keep pace with the class.

16

Rockford's collegiate curriculum had advanced from two to three years of Latin, including the works of Virgil, Cicero, Horace, and Tacitus. Beloit's curriculum included two years of Latin. The men studied the same Latin authors as well as Livy. Formerly Rockford students had progressed in mathematics only to trigonometry. Now they advanced to calculus but did not study analytical geometry. Beloit students began with algebra and advanced to analytical geometry and calculus. Following is Rockford's 1876 curriculum:

#### COLLEGIATE STUDIES

##### First Year.

##### First Series.

Latin--Virgil, Aeneid and Eclogues [sic], Latin Prose Composition.  
Natural Science--Physiology and Hygiene, (Hutchins) with lectures; Civil Government, (Townsend.)  
Greek, French or German--(Optional.)  
Ancient History--(Labberton's Outlines); Literature, Critical Reading--Selections from Goldsmith, Wordsworth and Tennyson, (weekly.)  
Bible History--Genesis, Exodus and the Gospels.

##### Second Series.

Latin--Virgil, Eclogues [sic] and Georgics, Latin Prose, etc.  
Mathematics--University Algebra, (Olney. [sic])  
Natural Science--Botany, (Wood.)  
Rhetoric--Literature, Critical Reading of Poets continued.  
Greek, French or German--(Optional.)  
Bible History--Continued.

## Second Year.

## First Series

Latin--Cicero, Orations and Essays, Latin Prose, etc.

Mathematics--Geometry, (Loomis), National [sic]  
Philosophy, (Elective.)

Greek, French or German--(Elective.)

History of English Literature--Critical Reading of  
selections from Shakespeare, Macaulay and other  
standard writers.

Bible History--Joshua, Judges, Monarchy to the death of  
Solomon.

## Second Series.

Mathematics--Geometry, (Elective), Trigonometry,  
(Olney), Natural Philosophy.

Greek, French or German--(Elective.)

Modern History--(Labberton's Outline), Literature,  
Critical Reading of Shakespeare, etc.

Bible History--Acts of the Apostles with reference to  
Ecclesiastical History.

## Junior Year.

## First Series.

Latin--Cicero, De Amicitia, Latin Prose, etc.

Natural Science--Chemistry, (Elliot & Storer's), with  
Lectures.

Mathematics--Trigonometry and Calculus, Olney,  
(elective), Astronomy.

Greek, French or German--(Elective.)

Literature--English Literature, Anglo Saxon, (elective),  
Critical Reading of selections from Milton, Young,  
Spencer and other poets.

Bible History--Monarchy from the death of Solomon to the  
dispersion of the Jews. Romans or Hebrews.

## Second Series.

Latin--Horace, Latin Prose Composition, etc.

Natural Sciences--Chemical Analysis, Mineralogy,  
Astronomy or Botany, (elective.)

Greek, French or German--(Elective.)

Rhetoric--(Bain), Literature, Critical Reading of  
Selections from Milton, Young, Spenser and other  
Poets.

Bible History--Monarchy, etc., continued.

## Senior Year.

## First Series.

Latin--Tacitus, (elective)

Greek, French or German--(Elective.)

Mental Philosophy--(Haven), Evidences of Christianity,  
(Hopkins.)

Literature--Ancient Literature, with Critical Reading of  
English Dramatists, and Translations from Classics.

Bible History--Jewish History, Prophecy of the Old  
Testament, Book of Revelation, reference to Church  
History.

## Second Series.

Moral Philosophy--(Haven.)

Natural Science--Geology, (Dana.)

Greek, German or French--(Elective.)

Analogy--(Butler.)

Literature--Reading of the Poets continued. Comparative  
Literature of Modern Europe. (Elective.)

Bible History and Prophecy--Continued.

Exercises in English Composition, extend throughout the  
course.

The 1876 catalogue also introduced four-year programs in three languages: French, German (both still considered ornamental) and Greek. Since 1871 French and German students had been listed separately under the title "Modern Languages." Although language students were grouped with those in the preparatory department, their language studies were advanced by today's standards. Following is the curriculum in Greek:

First Year.           Greek Lessons--(Crosby.)  
                          Greek Grammar--(Crosby.)  
                          Anabasis--Xenophon.  
                          Exercises in Composition.

Second Year.           Herodotus  
                          Memorabilia--Xenophon.  
                          Iliad--Homer.  
                          Exercises in Composition.



Third Year.        Greek Grammar--(Crosby)  
                      Demosthenes.  
                      Greek Drama.  
                      Exercises in Composition.

Fourth Year.        Plato  
                      Greek Drama.  
                      Exercises in Composition.17

Rockford's Greek course paralleled several of the Greek offerings in Beloit College's classical course. Both men and women studied Herodotus, Homer, Plato, Greek drama, Xenophon's Memorabilia, and Demosthenes. In addition to these ancient literary selections, Beloit men spent four years studying the Greek Testament and the Gospels. Rockford women did not tackle the Greek Testament in their classes although Jane Addams recalled reading from the Greek Testament to her language teacher on Sunday mornings. By 1875 Beloit College offered a "Philosophical Course" supposedly equal to the classical course except that it included "new branches and a more thorough investigation of science and philosophy." This course included two years of Latin or Greek as well as four years of New Testament Greek. Thus, even in its alternative course, Beloit College continued to build its curriculum around ancient languages. In all probability, the Rockford trustees refused to grant the seminary full collegiate status because its courses in the ancient languages still did not parallel those of the men's college.

### Like Male Colleges

For some time the seminary had imitated a few extra-curricular practices of male collegiate institutions. During the 1870s Rockford students inaugurated many more, probably because of the encouragement of Anna Sill. The two campus literary societies, the Castalian and Vesperian, had been formally established probably in 1856 and were jointly called the Pierian Union. Like literary societies on male college campuses, they offered lectures, read papers, and collected books for their libraries. Some lecturers they brought to Rockford were well known: Bayard Taylor, Horace Mann, Henry Ward Beecher, Bronson Alcott, Oscar Wilde and Dwight L. Moody. Anna Sill tried to prepare her students for the popular evangelist, Moody, by saying that he was "uneducated and unaccustomed to addressing young ladies." Her students liked him in spite of his grammar.

Literary societies were found in many female seminaries, but male colleges stressed debate. Since women were believed to be too delicate for legal or political wrangling, they were discouraged from developing forensic expertise. A popular book of etiquette, Miss Leslie's Behavior Book, warned:

Generally speaking, it is injudicious for ladies to attempt arguing with gentlemen on political or financial topics. All the information that a woman can possibly acquire or remember on these subjects is so small, in comparison with the knowledge of men, that the discussion will not elevate them in the opinion of masculine minds. . . . let her listen as understandingly as she can, but refrain from controversy and argument on such topics as

the grasp of a female mind is seldom capable of seizing or retaining.

Instead of debating issues, polite young ladies of the nineteenth century were encouraged to hold scintillating conversations. The Presbyterian magazine said that the conversation of women should be "pleasant and grateful," not "improving." Women's talk should be "bright without ill-natured sharpness, playful without silliness," full of "the wittiest and the cleverest play of words." Above all, women should remember "that good-humor, sympathy, and the wish to please for the sake of giving pleasure, will lend a charm to the most common-place thoughts and expressions."<sup>20</sup>

In spite of such opinions, the young ladies of Rockford's Pierian Union held debates at their Thursday or Friday meetings, and in the early 1870s they invited the community to their performances. On one occasion they entertained the "elite of the city" by reading the proceedings of a former literary meeting, playing an overture and a duet, reading a poem and an essay, and finally debating the question: "Has wealth greater power than intellect?" A local newspaper called this last performance "the chief excellence of the evening." The columnist went on to say,

The arguments were shorn of all sickly sentiment, so common in the exercises of our schools and colleges, and were logical, pointed and terse. Indeed the debaters seemed to have exhausted the arguments on both sides, so that the question hung in the balance at equipoise.<sup>21</sup>

Around this time eastern male colleges were beginning to

have inter-collegiate literary contests. In 1874 delegates from fourteen colleges in the East and Midwest met to form an Inter-Collegiate Literary Association. The next year a contest was held in New York City in which eleven orators from Williams, Rutgers, Cornell, Princeton and other colleges competed for the first prize of 175 dollars.<sup>22</sup>

In 1880 Rockford tried unsuccessfully to gain admittance to the Illinois Inter-Collegiate Oratorical Association. The following year the bid was renewed, and this time the seminary was accepted. Two years later Rockford was selected as the site for the 1883 Illinois Oratorical Convention. In October of that year the seminary held an elaborate banquet for one hundred college students followed by a contest at the local opera house. Anna Baume of Rockford Seminary won second prize. Perhaps sponsoring the festivities was too much for the aspiring college, especially since the women confronted hostility for having invaded male territory. When their guests departed, they found themselves with a debt of 125 dollars. Over the next few months they slowly paid off this amount by giving fairs and other fund-raisers. Exhausted by these efforts the sophomore class withdrew from the organization the next April. Several months later the entire Rockford association withdrew from the state organization.<sup>23</sup>

#### Other College Rites

The Rockford class of 1878 inaugurated class day

exercises, another popular celebration in male colleges. The community was invited to attend the festivities. For this event, the chapel was decorated with evergreens and flowers. An arch, a shield and anchor were incised with the 1878 class motto: "True in Everything" and placed on the rostrum in the front. The program included band music, prophecies, a history of the class, class poem, and presentations of relics and trophies to campus societies. The following class statistics were later printed in a local newspaper:

The age of the youngest member is 18 years 7 months, the oldest 23 years 6 months, average 20 years 1 month; entire age 241 years. Weight of the heaviest young lady 145 pounds; the lightest 98 pounds [sic] average weight 120 1/4 pounds, and entire weight 1443 pounds.

In his account of the class day exercises, a local reporter wrote that the "new departure" deserved high praise and "encouragement." More significantly he said, "It places the Seminary on a footing with other Collegiate institutions in respect to their closing exercises. . . ." <sup>24</sup>

Two years later the class of 1881 initiated the junior exhibition, another celebration which included the attendance of a large audience. An article in a local newspaper described the hall, which had been decorated with evergreens, flowering plants, and scarlet flags "bearing the sacred symbol, '81." At eight o'clock in the evening seventeen juniors stepped up on the platform and sang their class song. Then the class president, Jane Addams, delivered

an address, which a newspaper reporter described as "pitched to the key-note of the true intellectual progress of the time."<sup>25</sup>

Addams explained that the seminary's first junior exhibition was not an imitation of the activities of male collegians, for "we are not restless and anxious for things beyond us." Rather it was a claim "on the highest privileges" and "best opportunities" of the times. Addams said that the exhibition represented a radical change in women's education:

It has passed from accomplishments and the arts of pleasing, to the development of her intellectual force, and her capabilities for direct labor. She wishes not to be a man, nor like a man, but she claims the same right to independent thought and action.<sup>26</sup>

The cremation of Miss Minnie R. Alogy was another student activity which resembled the book-burnings of male institutions. The 1879 juniors invited the sophomore class to attend a ceremony held in a darkened room of the seminary. Guests were given long programs, and after hearing a song by the juniors, they were initiated into the "Junior mysteries," as a newspaper reporter said. Placing their hands on a skull, the sophomores swore to learn all the verses in Hebrews, giving a junior exhibition, revere all seniors, and "learn the system, cleavage, and specific gravity of each crystal mentioned by dear departed Minnie." After forming a procession of chanting mourners, the group carried Minnie to a funeral pyre and made an enormous bonfire of her.<sup>27</sup>

The Women's Voice

It has been said that the first college paper ever published was the Dartmouth Gazette, first issued in 1810. However, Professor Joseph Emerson claimed this honor for the Yale Literary. Whether Dartmouth or Yale deserved the title, most men's colleges were publishing either a paper or literary magazine by the 1870s.<sup>28</sup> Following the lead of Yale, Beloit College had issued the Beloit College Monthly, later renamed Round Table, since 1853. Although it was many years before the seminary could afford to print a monthly, students had copied essays into their student magazine, The Gleaner, as early as 1849. In 1860 they published a few issues of a sixteen-page monthly called Leaves From Forest Hill. Thirteen more years passed before they finally issued Rockford Seminary Magazine, their first lasting periodical.<sup>29</sup>

The creative flair of the Rockford Seminary Magazine placed in the first rank of collegiate publications. A potpourri of literary essays, local and international news items, alumnae letters, scientific lectures, famous and humorous sayings, fiction and poetry, it often featured opposing viewpoints on controversial issues. There were also editorials, newspaper accounts of alumnae and trustee meetings, obituaries, and descriptions of commencement exercises. One of the most interesting columns was "Clippings and Exchanges," containing remarks about and

from other college periodicals. The Rockford editors displayed the names of the college periodicals they received each month:

The Palladium, Hearth and Home, College Days, American Agriculturist, Beloit College Monthly, Tripod, University Press, Yale Record, Volant [sic], . . .

They proudly shared the praise: "The Rockford Seminary Magazine has some well-written letters from abroad--Volante." They quarreled with some exchange items:

The cooks at Wellesley College are men; the professors are women--Woman's Journal. From this the only deduction to be drawn is that the Wellesley folk have a higher regard for their stomach than their heads.--Vidette. An, no friend: it rather shows their broadening mind--equal division of labor, you know.

And they chronicled the advances of women. For example, in 1882 they reported that there were 140 United States law firms conducted by women; and in the same year there were 170 United States colleges that were coeducational.

At first the magazine was controlled by alumnae and edited by an alumna, Caroline Potter, who also taught English at the seminary. By 1882, however, the editors proudly reported that because the publication was totally in the hands of students, it was now "on a footing with other college papers, and its prosperity and standing in the college world" would "depend on its remaining in that position."

### In Search of Equality

From its debut the seminary magazine voiced the women's growing discontent with male dominance. Its



first issue contained a satirical article, "Where Is My Place?" by Jerusha Jane Jones, "a poor, benighted woman, seeking to find that glorious realm for females that everybody talks about and nobody agrees about, called 'Woman's Sphere.'" In her search, Jerusha threw herself wholeheartedly into academics, philanthropy, and homemaking. No matter what she attempted, however, a "modern Solomon" protested. If she studied she was called a "blue stocking," if she remained at home, she was a "household drudge," if she devoted herself to science, she was called "strong-minded," and if she became a philanthropist, she was considered "self-seeking." Jerusha concluded,

If there is any realm where woman can walk uncriticised, will not these nineteenth century Solomons decide what and where it shall be? for I, Jerusha Jane Jones, am willing to go to the ends of the earth if I can sit down or rise up, put on my hat or take it off, ride or walk, read or talk, according to the dictates of my own conscience, without having it continually sounded in my ears, you are out of your sphere, or you are not filling the high destiny of which you were created. 32

In many issues afterwards there was some mention of women's restrictions and opportunities. There were articles about the origin of the word "blue-stocking," the absurdity of considering amiability "woman's highest virtue," woman's invaluable contribution to society, and woman's self-reliance. American women had not yet won the right to vote, but an editor went so far as to assert,

Why should not a woman of strong, ruling mind be our president, when a needy time comes, in place of a man of weak sense and administrative ability, who in the nature of possibilities may occupy the presidential chair? 33

Educational inequalities were attacked as well. The magazine included a historical article about the first women who tried to enter Harvard; a letter arguing that a woman should be educated to discover her place, not be forced into one; a poem celebrating the new professional opportunities opening to women; discussions of what the college curriculum should contain; and numerous news items detailing the advancement of women in various academic settings. <sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the most powerful article attacked the notion that women are intellectually inferior to men. In "Is John Smarter Than I?" Jerusha Jane Jones compared her experience as a female seminarian with that of her collegiate brother. She began with the assertion that "women do not attain the same standard of scholarship as men," but she refused to concede that men had superior brains. Instead, she asserted that while a boy was free to roam freely, a girl was required to take on domestic duties from earliest childhood. She had to fix meals, take charge of carrying the "lunch-basket," sew their own wardrobes, and spend weeks and months on "fancy work." While the boy was studying his Latin or Greek to prepare for college, his sister was required to practice the piano. When a girl suffered from headache or other ills, her physician shook his head and said to the girl's mother, "I told you so, Madam; girls have not the physical organization to endure study. I advise you to take all books away from your daughter." Thus, by the time the girl took her seminary entrance examinations, she fell far below

the performance of her brother.

Once at the seminary, the girl found herself still tied to domestic duties, for she was required to spend an hour daily doing household chores. In comparing this seminary requirement with those of her brother, Jerusha sliced to the jugular of discrimination:

I could but think it very strange that our trustees, who were also trustees of John's school, had never thought to set him planing board and boring holes, an hour daily, so that when he graduated he could be a house-builder, as well as a housekeeper.

To further support her argument, the author detailed how she and her brother spent their time in their respective institutions of learning:

John Jones	Hours	Minutes	
Dressing		15	
Morning Prayers		30	
3 recitations at 3 hrs.	9		
3 meals at 30 min.	1	30	
Sleep	7	45	
Balance	5		
	24		Total
Jerusha Jane Jones	Hours	Minutes	
Dressing		30	
Morning/evening prayers	1		
3 recitations at 3 hrs.	9		
Music	2		
Domestic work	1		
3 meals at 30 min.	1	30	
Private devotions		30	
Room work		30	
Care of wardrobe		15	
Sleep	7	45	
	24		Total

By these arguments Jerusha Jane Jones showed that it was because women were required to do so many little tasks that

they fell below their brothers in intellectual attainments.

### A Potent Force

The seminary students could help Anna Sill raise the institution to collegiate status, but their influence was limited. There was another group, however, which emerged during the 1870s to play an increasingly powerful role in shaping the future of the institution--the Rockford alumnae.

Before the nineteenth century, the graduates of a collegiate institution often met informally but rarely as a distinct body. The first known formal alumni organization in America was at Williams College in 1821. From that time on, alumni began to organize into cohesive groups. In Rockford a constitution was drawn up for the Forest Hill Alumnae Association in 1864, but apparently this group did not last. In 1872 a stronger group was organized, and in 1873 The Alumnae Association of Rockford Seminary received a charter from the Secretary of State to become a legally organized corporation. Two years later while Anna Sill and one of her teachers were spending the Christmas holidays in Chicago, two alumnae decided to hold a banquet in their honor. The guests at this dinner formed the nucleus of the Rockford Seminary Reunion Association of Chicago. A little later the alumnae of Minneapolis also formed the Rockford Seminary Association of the Northwest. These groups met at least once a year. They held dinners, reminisced about student

days, made financial appeals, and honored their principal, Anna Sill. Reports of their activities were fully chronicled in the Rockford Seminary Magazine, which also printed letters from alumnae scattered throughout the world.

The alumnae became a great source of comfort and hope to Anna Sill. In the company of her former teachers and students, Sill felt fully appreciated and understood. Here was a group with whom she could share both the struggles of the past and her dreams for the future. Here at last was a group that fully supported her goals for the institution. As Sill grew increasingly weary and out-dated, they rose up in her behalf. Having seen at close range her years of self-sacrifice for the seminary, they determined to make her cause theirs. As one alumna put it,

Daughters, dare we leave our mother struggling on the mountain side with others passing swiftly by? . . . It were treason to desert the ranks, to fail her in the hour of need. Her fate most nearly concerns us, her fall would be our shame, her up-lifting our pride and great glory. She must be to the future even more than she has been to the past. She must go forward, and the impetus and sustaining strength must come from us.

The alumnae knew that above all else Sill needed endowment money, so in 1872 they sent out a letter recalling Sill's twenty-three years of "arduous toil" for the institution. They mentioned her "nominal salary," her lucrative offers to other institutions, and her need for rest. They continued:

The twenty-fifth anniversary, the "silver wedding" of our Alma Mater will occur in June, 1876. Shall we not then present an appropriate memorial of our gratitude in an endowment for the benefit of our beloved Principal?

The amount they asked for was ten thousand dollars "for the

Chair of our honored Principal, Miss Anna P. Sill."

The alumnae staged a vigorous campaign to raise the money. In addition to sending letters, they made personal visits, published articles, and at alumnae banquets urged their "sisters" to give sacrificially. The press in both Rockford and Chicago seemed eager to publicize their efforts. Besides many articles in the Rockford papers, the Chicago Alliance reported that this might be the "first effort of the kind undertaken by a school distinctively for women." <sup>38</sup> Such praise was heaped on Anna Sill that it seemed as if the alumnae were defending her from unjust criticism. For example, an article published in a local newspaper pointed out that the seminary had cost a total of seventy-five thousand dollars and that in the last ten years it had bought a quarter of a million dollars to Rockford's business community. The article went on to say that Sill had nurtured the institution from its inception, and "To her zeal and efficiency the seminary owes its success more than to any other cause." Appeals at alumnae gatherings were often passionate. At the 1876 Chicago reunion, a former seminary teacher said,

For the sake of her who conceived this grand idea of a Seminary for the education of women, and who has so faithfully stood by it, amid all discouragements, and given to it not only many of her very best years, with her utmost energy and effort, but also real travail of soul for the spiritual birth of those entrusted to her care; for her sake . . . shall we not put forth our very best efforts to secure to this institution every advantage enjoyed by any in our land?

Another alumna pointed out that the Sill Endowment Fund

would protect Anna Sill from the debilitating poverty Zilpah Grant Banister had endured during her final years.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of all their efforts, the alumnae failed to raise the desired amount by their deadline date, and the Quarter Centennial Celebration of 1876 passed without a presentation of the money to the Board of Trustees. Two years later at the commencement exercises, however, the president of the Rockford Alumnae Association presented Professor Joseph Emerson with the Sill Endowment Fund of \$12,012.16. The sum was to be kept in tact, the income from which to "be devoted to the personal use and benefit of the present Principal." In their written acceptance of this donation, the Board of Trustees for the first time formally acknowledged Anna Sill as the "founder" of Rockford Female Seminary.<sup>40</sup>

Successful completion of the Sill Endowment Fund had both immediate and long-term effects. With Sill's salary assured, the board immediately raised teachers' salaries. The scale ranged from five hundred dollars for heads of departments to two hundred fifty dollars for assistant teachers. Although this pay was not sufficient to attract highly qualified teachers, it was nevertheless an improvement. The endowment also breathed new life into Sill, for she had come to realize what great strength she had in her loyal followers. She also had an assured income for the rest of her life. Raising twelve thousand dollars gave the alumnae a surge of self-confidence. Because of

their recent success they were eager to take on more fund-raising projects. They also began to wonder why they should be excluded from the Board of Trustees if they were capable of raising a substantial amount of money. At their 1880 business meeting they made two resolutions: to raise three hundred dollars for beautifying the seminary grounds, and to select a committee to ask the board about appointing an alumna trustee.<sup>41</sup>

In 1881 a special alumnae committee requested that one or more women be appointed trustees. They supported their bid by stating that women gave large donations to both male and female colleges, they worked diligently "in every department of educational work," and their alma mater owed "its life to the strong heart and brain of consecrated womanhood." The response of the trustees was divided. Some favored the move, and others bitterly opposed it. Thus, they put off making a decision for a year. In 1882 they decided to allow some women to attend as honorary members; that is, the women could attend but they could not vote. More time would pass before women would be recognized as voting trustees.<sup>42</sup>

#### The Final Push

Around this time a local newspaper reported that for some time Beloit College had been "weighing the matter of admitting women within its walls." Apparently Beloit



supporters wanted to send their sons and daughters to the same collegiate institution. Anna Sill may have heard about this possibility. In 1879 Joseph Emerson and Sill met to discuss the the future of both college and seminary. During their conversation Emerson said that perhaps the founders had made a mistake in establishing the college and seminary under two separate boards of trustees. From this conversation Sill drew the conclusion that the trustees planned to merge Rockford Seminary with Beloit College and open up the college to both men and women. Actually Emerson had no such plan in mind. He was probably implying that if the seminary were controlled by the Beloit Board of Trustees, Sill's ambitions would be properly controlled.

Upon returning to Rockford, Sill wrote to Emerson and suggested that instead of admitting women, Beloit College should help the seminary attain full collegiate status. Then the agents of both institutions could offer families male and female colleges in close proximity. If Rockford's curriculum were deemed inadequate, the institution might "add farther to" its course of study. If the teachers were thought inferior, better teachers might be secured. In fact, Beloit and Rockford might share the same instructors. To hammer home her point, Sill appealed to Emerson's conscience:

Let Beloit College steadily pursue its course; it is the Yale of the West. Can it not afford to be the gallant brother to defend and aid the younger sister. I write with the conviction that good Father Kent, if alive would say, "This let us do, ye, and to this end,

Brethren, let us pray." He used to tell me that "of the two institutions The [sic] Seminary was his pet." 42

In response to this letter Emerson told Sill that he and the trustees had no intention of merging the seminary and the college. In her answering letter Sill assured him that she did not believe in coeducation for two reasons: women might become ambitious for "public life," and women might not be able to keep pace physically with college men. Thus, the only direction to take was to establish an excellent college for women:

I prophesy that within 10 years colleges for women will be founded in the West; and if Rockford Seminary does not take the lead, these will take the work from us as these eastern colleges for women are now doing in a measure. 43

During this time Sill's health deteriorated to such an extent that the seminary's physician, Dr. Clark, recommended that she resign. Although at first she seemed willing, by fall 1879 she had regained enough strength to resume her duties. At the board meeting of 1880 a motion was made to change the name of the institution to "Rockford Female College." At this time Emerson suggested instead that the seminary become a preparatory school to Beloit College. A local newspaper editor commented,

The question was brought up, not because Prof. Emerson gave any special intimation that he favored the project, but in order to awaken a discussion and gain the sense of the trustees in the matter. It was quickly apparent, however, that the board were decidedly opposed to the proposition, and some very emphatic remarks in disapproval were made.

The article went on to say that the board preferred to raise

the seminary's "standard of studies" to the level of Beloit College. The article concluded by stating that the seminary was in a "healthy and flourishing condition," and with moderate endowment it would not be long before the institution's scholarship matched that of "collegiate institutions which confer degrees." At this meeting the trustees also resolved to search for a man to administer the affairs of the seminary.

44

Knowing that a "suitable" man might soon replace her, Sill pressed all the harder for collegiate status. She proposed following the standards at Wellesley or Smith in upgrading the curriculum. "The desire has been expressed by some who have graduated," she wrote to Emerson, "to take a degree." Emerson was reluctant to move ahead, so she suggested another plan. She closed her letter by arguing defiantly,

I classify the students myself, and I think my classification means thoroughness; if it did not, I have no right to be here. . . . In what respect is this course deficient. [sic] Is it wanting in higher mathematics? Am I wrong in desiring progress? Am I wrong in asking that the young women of the West who want a collegiate education in a woman's college should be allowed this without going east? I know there is wealth in Rockford to put this institution on a college basis. 44

Letters continued to fly between the two campuses. Sill consulted with Rev. Wilder Smith of the curriculum committee. She adjusted the courses in the degree program according to his suggestions. She asked whether the catalogue should state new requirements for a degree. She wanted to know if department heads should be called professors and whether the

title "Principal" should be changed to "President" as at Wellesley. She said that the faculty would subscribe one thousand dollars for better equipment if ten thousand could be raised in six months. She sent notes from "Miss Potter graduated in 1855; Miss Lucy M. Smith 1867; Miss Addams this year" applying for degrees. She added, "but they desire a degree when in the judgment of the Trustees they will be entitled to the honor."<sup>45</sup>

Finally in 1881, after years of intense struggle, Sill won a partial victory. At a special meeting of the board in June, the curriculum committee recommended that seminary students who completed a three-year preparatory program and any of the seminary's three elective courses be awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree. The two subject areas which had always distinguished the seminary's curriculum from that of the men's colleges were ancient languages and mathematics. That gap was narrowed considerably in the new curriculum, printed in the 1880-81 catalogue. The three-year preparatory course included Latin grammar, Caesar, Virgil's Aeneid, Bucolics, Georgics, and Cicero's Orations. Mathematics extended through algebra and geometry. The collegiate course listed three programs, all of which included considerable study in foreign languages and mathematics. Latin studies in the classical course included Cicero's Orations, Livy, Cicero's de Senectute, Horace, and Tacitus. Mathematics included plane, solid and analytical geometry, university algebra, plane and spherical trigonometry,

calculus, and higher astronomy. Students could also elect to include four years of Greek.<sup>46</sup>

After considering the report of the curriculum committee, the trustees voted to accept their recommendation. The women at this board meeting must have been jubilant. At long last seminary women would earn degrees. At last they would have a measure of equality with the men of Beloit College. However, the male trustees were not yet ready to accept full equality. They did not change the name of the institution to "Rockford College."<sup>47</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1

Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House (1910; reprint, New York: The New American Library, 1961), 46.

2

Ibid., 46-47. See also Twenty-Seventh Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Rockford Seminary, Rockford, Illinois, 1877-78 (Rockford, Illinois: Abraham E. Smith, Printer and Binder, 1878), 5, 8.

3

Letter of Mary B. Downs to Jane Addams, 14 November 1880, Microfilm Correspondence, Jane Addams Collection, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Addams: R.C.A. Manual of Rockford Seminary--1878 & 79, handwritten by Jane Addams, Addams: R.C.A. According to "Rockford College, Schedule of Bells," [dated in the early 1900s], Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, as late as the 1910s the bells rang twenty-one times on week days, eleven times on Saturday, and fifteen times on Sunday. All future references to this collection will be labeled History: R.C.A. See Marie Thompson, Alumna Address in "Second Annual Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (February 1875), 69. See Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1877-78, 27. This poem is found in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 5 (January 1877), 75-76.

4

Allen F. Davis, American Heroine, The Life and Legend of Jane Addams, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 11; Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1877-78, 27; Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 185; "Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 4 (January 1876), 37.

5

Davis, America Heroine, 11; see letter of Jane Addams to Eva Campbell, 25, 29 July 1879, [owned by Eugene Goodrich], Jane Addams Collection, University of Illinois Library, Chicago, Illinois.

6

See Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1877-78, 19-21; "Report. Rockford Female Seminary" in Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of Rockford Seminary for the Academic Year 1860-61 (Rockford, Illinois: Register Steam Printing Establishment, 1861), 32; Emerson, "Quarter-Centennial Historical Address," in Sill Scrapbook, a collection of local newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary dating from 1849 until after Sill's death, History: R.C.A., 87; letter of Eliza R. Emerson to John Smith, Esq., 6 November 1865, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be labeled Emerson: B.C.A.

7

Letter of Elizabeth Emerson to Professor Joseph Emerson, 11 February 1865, Emerson: B.C.A. Ralph Emerson wrote many letters to his wife because she was so ill that she could not live at home. See typescript letter of Ralph Emerson to his wife, 2 February 1876, History: R.C.A.

8

Typescript letters of Ralph Emerson to his wife, 2 and 7 February 1876; see also letters of 5 March 1876 and 14 April 1876, History: R.C.A. See also Cederborg, Thesis, 192; Davis, American Heroine, 12, 14-16.

9

Davis, American Heroine, 15; for a full report of the 1877 Examining Committee, see "The Seminary," in Sill Scrapbook, 90.

10

See letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor J. Emerson, 30 June 1877, Emerson: B.C.A.

11

See 28 June 1877, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Records of the Board of Trustees, Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, 19 September 1850 - 7 February 1884, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to these records will be abbreviated Trustees: R.C.A.

12

The account of Sill's attendance at the commencement exercises of East High School is taken entirely from the letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor J. Emerson, 30 June 1877, Emerson: B.C.A. See also Maggie Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford, 1980), 50-51.

13

Addams, Hull-House, 47.

14

See 1 July 1875 and 25 June 1873, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A. In 1873 a math teacher who also served as assistant to the principal of the Normal School (of Chicago) earned one thousand dollars a year. In 1874 two assistants to the principal each earned \$1100. The principal earned \$1300. See Joan Karen Smith, "Ella Flagg Young: Portrait of a Leader," (Ph.D. dissertation, Iowa State University, 1976), 34.

15

See Historical Sketch of Beloit College, report prepared for the U.S. Commissioner of Education, National Centennial Exposition for 1876 (Madison, Wisconsin: Atwood & Culver, 1876), for a comparison of curricula between 1847-75, 13-17; see also Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1876-77, 18-19. Although this curriculum was printed in the 1876 catalogue, it was not instituted until fall 1877.

16

Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1876-77, 18.

17

Ibid., 21-22.

18

This comparison is based on the curriculum in the Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1876-77, 19-23, and the Beloit curricula in Historical Sketch of Beloit College, 13-17.

19

For an indication of Sill's role in the student's junior exhibition, see letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor J. Emerson, 6 May 1882, Emerson: B.C.A.; see Cederborg, Thesis, 145-46, 303. Although the societies were mentioned as early as 1858, according to "Editor's Miscellany," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (February 1873), 35, the societies were organized in 1867. Perhaps they were defunct for a time.

20

[Eliza] Leslie, Miss Leslie's Behavior Book, (reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 197. "Conversation of Women," excerpt from Presbyterian, in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (June 1875), 189.

21

Cederborg, Thesis, 316-17; see also "Pierian Union," Sill Scrapbook, 39.



22

"Inter-Collegiate Literary Contests," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (January 1875), 37-40, explains the development of the national organization and includes the constitution; "Notes and Clippings," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (March 1875), 120, reports on the Inter-Collegiate Literary Contest in New York City.

23

"Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (July 1883), 223, gives a history of Rockford's efforts to join the organization; see also "Personals," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 9 (June 1881), 173-74; "Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 9 (November 1881), 236-38; "The Contest," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (October 1882), 250-253; "The Oratorical Convention," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (November 1883), 243-51. According to "Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine 12 (November 1884), 304, the Blackburnian had expressed the opinion that the constitution of the Illinois State Oratorical Association should forbid women from debating with men. For a statement of withdrawal by the sophomore class, see "Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (May 1884); for a withdrawal of the seminary, see "Personals," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (November 1884), 299-300.

24

See "Class Day Exercises at the Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 95; Cederborg, Thesis, 318.

25

See "Bread Givers," Sill Scrapbook, 108; Cederborg, Thesis, 319-20.

26

Ibid.

27

See "The Last Sad Rites," Sill Scrapbook, 107; Cederborg, Thesis, 314-15.

28

This information is taken from "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 13 (July 1885), 331; "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (April 1887), 126.

29

Issues of Beloit College Monthly are housed at Beloit College Archives. The Gleaner and several issues of Leaves From Forest Hill are stored at Rockford College Archives. Leaves did not have the sparkle nor diversity of Rockford Seminary Magazine; see also Cederborg, Thesis, 165.

30

See "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (June 1873), 40. In "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 9 (July 1881), 215, the editors delightedly reported, "Our success has transcended our wildest dreams," for having realized that the Vassar Miscellany held up the Rockford publication as an ideal. For more praise, see "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 5 (January 1877), 41: "The Rockford Seminary Magazine is before us, for which of all exchanges we hold a high regard, both for its literary productions and the fact that we have a sister who once walked the consecrated walls [sic] which the magazine represents. The "Centennial Poem" we would recommend all lovers of poetry to read." For praise and censure, see "Clippings and Exchanges," 4 (January 1876), 31. For the number of women conducting law firms see "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (January 1882), 25; see also "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (March 1882), 88.

31

This item is found in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (February 1875): "A friend commenting upon the Seminary Magazine, said: 'Yes, it is a very good paper--equal to the best, perhaps superior to any College paper now published, but it seems to me it would be better as a representative of the school if more of the articles were from the pens of the undergraduates.' This prompted us to count, and we find the whole number of original articles in Vol. II, exclusive of the Editor's Miscellany, to be 71, of which 36 were written by under-graduates." See also "Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (July 1882), 224.

32

Jones, Jerusha Jane, "Where Is My Place?" Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (January 1873), 11-14. Jerusha was a pseudonym. I have been unable to discover who she was.

33

See "The Origin of Blue-Stocking," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (May 1873), 30-31; "Amiability," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (October 1875), 308-09; Jones, Jerusha Jane, "The Woman's Pavilion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 4 (October 1876), 197-207. The article on women's self-reliance was actually a commencement address printed in the literary magazine, "Commencement Week," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 8 (July 1880), 214-20. See also "Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 8 (May 1880), 159.

34

See "The First Step," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 8 (November 1873), 35; Potter, Caroline, "Dear Friend,"

Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (February 1884), 53-55; "The Coming Woman," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (November 1873), 4-6; "Study," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 6 (April 1878); "Editor's Miscellany," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (April 1873), 34; "Science Versus Language," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 1 (May 1873), 6-8; see also "Clippings and Exchanges," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10 (March 1882), 88; "Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 9 (November 1881), 234; "Editorial Miscellany," Rockford Female Seminary, 3 (June 1875), 199; and "Editorial Notes," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 5 (July 1877), 126.

35

Jerusha Jane Jones, "Is John Smarter Than I?" Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (October 1875), 300ff.

36

Ellena Linsky, An Exploration of the Relationship of Alumni Membership and Subsequent Support of Rockford College (M.A. thesis, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Illinois, 1979), 4-5; Cederborg, Thesis, 200-01; The Jubilee Book of The Alumnae Association of Rockford College (Rockford, Illinois: The Alumnae Association of Rockford College, 1904), 5-11.

37

On one occasion, Sill told the alumnae, "You are my hope, my joy, my strength. I thank you most heartily for all you have done for your Alma Mater." Alumnae Address in "The Alumnae Meeting," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (July 1883), 214; see also Marie Thompson Perry, "A Paper," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 4 (October 1876), 242; "To the Graduates of Rockford Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, n.p.

38

Cederborg, Thesis, 201.

39

"Address in Behalf of the Endowment of the Principal's Chair of Rockford Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 81; Mrs. E. L. Herrick, Alumnae Address, in "The Chicago Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 4 (January 1876), 58. After speaking of the poverty of Banister, Mary A. Wood said to the alumnae, "Let us see to it, that the honored friend, who stands at the head of Rockford Seminary, is not called to such a trial." Quoted from "Second Annual Reunion," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 3 (February 1875), 71.

40

See Cederborg, Thesis, 202; 25 June 1878, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; "Rockford Seminary Commencement Exercises," Sill Scrapbook, 96-97. University, 1976), 34.

41

26 June 1878, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; Cederborg, Thesis, 203-04; "The Term Terminated," Sill Scrapbook, 114-15.

42

Cederborg, Thesis, 204-08; 10 and 21 June 1881, 20 June 1882, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.

43

"The Term Terminated," Sill Scrapbook, 115; see "Women Enter the College," in Edward Dwight Eaton, Sketches of Beloit College (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1928), 121-22. Joseph Emerson's letter to Anna Sill has been lost. See letters of Anna Peck Sill to Professor Joseph Emerson, 3 and 10 July 1879, Emerson: B.C.A.

44

See letter of D.S. Clark to Professor Joseph Emerson, 29 August 1879, Emerson: B.C.A.; 22 June 1880, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; "The Term Terminated," Sill Scrapbook, 115.

45

See letters of Anna Sill to Professor Joseph Emerson, 19 January; 25 and 26 April; 31 May; 2 June 1881, Emerson: B.C.A.

46

See 10 June 1881, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A. Apparently Sill put off publishing the 1880 catalogue until the board had met. See Thirtieth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Rockford Seminary, Rockford, Illinois, 1880-81 (Rockford, Illinois; Daily Gazette Steam Print, 1881), 19-28.

47

10 June 1881, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.

## CHAPTER X

### WINDING DOWN

Rockford's old graduates are her [Sill's] worst enemies, [sic] they always have been, and they always will be, until this generation who remember her short comings [sic] rather than her successes shall have passed away.  
--Adaline Talcott Emerson, 1883

#### The Graduation of 1882

Dark clouds hovered on the morning of 21 June 1882 as crowds of people streamed into Rockford Female Seminary for its thirty-first annual commencement exercises. At 9:30 the student body recited a chant, followed by Professor Joseph Emerson's opening prayer. Then seven young women stepped up on the platform and read their commencement essays. Last came the valedictory address. Arguing in favor of universal education, Miss Kitty Waugh explained how education had changed women's position in society. She exulted over the fact that women writers were taking prominent positions in the literary world, a domain once completely dominated by men. She concluded her address by saying that she hoped women would soon have the right to vote. Kittie Waugh was one of nine students to receive the seminary's first Bachelor of Arts degrees.

Some trustees attending commencement were probably wondering whether Kitty Waugh or any other of these graduates truly deserved bachelor's degrees. Others may have questioned why women even wanted them. Yet Anna Sill did not question. She knew that her students needed the best education possible to prepare them for a life of service. The stamp of approval on that education was a B.A. degree.

In attaining her goal, Anna Sill had boldly cracked the mold of higher education. Her students would crack even tougher molds. Catherine "Kitty" Waugh (McCullough) would pass the Illinois Bar in 1886, practice in the Supreme Court of the United States, and also serve as vice-president and legal advisor of the national American Woman Suffrage Association. Another of the first graduates, Jane Addams, would gain even greater prominence. For her humanitarian and social work in the founding of Chicago's Hull House, she would receive the coveted Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.<sup>2</sup>

### Divided Ranks

Sill had paid a great price to raise the status of women at the seminary. In the intense struggle of the last five years, her health had slowly deteriorated. Her friendship with Professor Joseph Emerson was uncertain. President Chapin had gradually stopped attending trustee meetings and tendered his resignation in 1882. Although asked to remain

on the board, he continued to stay away from meetings until Sill's resignation. There were others on the board who wanted new leadership, but as yet they had not found a male replacement.<sup>3</sup>

In the spring of 1882 discord had erupted among Sill's teachers. Puritans had historically frowned on attending the theatre, and that prohibition was bound to be tested after the Rockford opera house opened in 1881. When the popular actor, William Booth, advertised a spring performance in 1882, Sill knew her students would clamor to attend. To ward off a battle, she wrote to Professor Joseph Emerson asking for an official decision from the Board of Trustees:

Personally I never attend the theater and could not as a matter of principle. Some of our patrons will want their daughters to go. Some will be grieved that any will be allowed to go, and so I am destined to be censured [sic]. Please reply definitely and as soon as may be convenient. I want an official opinion.

With a decision from the board, she told her students<sup>4</sup> they could not attend Booth's performance.

Sill was unprepared for an assault from her teachers. Ralph Emerson heard about the confrontation and reported it to his daughter, Mary:

So, as I said, Miss Sill found her teachers wanted to go to the theatre. "No. It would never do." . . . Along comes spunky little Miss Williams and buys her ticket. "Don't care what it costs, I will have one." And she is going come what will. Up comes Miss Kety Smith. She wants to go. Miss Sill says "No, it is not a fit place for young ladies to go." But, Miss Sill, I am thirty years old, and I think by this time I am old enough to judge for myself what places it is proper for me to go

to." Thereupon Miss Sill concludes to go to Chicago for a few days and let the waters settle a little.

Although the teachers ended up not being able to attend the performance because tickets were snatched up so quickly, this incident forced Sill to realize that her old sway over the faculty had diminished considerably. A month after Booth's visit Sarah Anderson, an alumna who handled the seminary accounts and taught English, wrote to Jane Addams,

I dont [sic] know as you will understand this, but in reality Miss Sill is the only member of the faculty. The rest are hired workers or tutors. Miss Blaisdell was head of her department but none of the others are.

On paper the faculty had the right to decide many matters, but apparently Sill had never learned to grant them true decision-making power. Teachers of the 1880s who were earning advanced degrees would be less likely to tolerate Sill's domination.<sup>5</sup>

Sill's students were also demanding more freedom of expression. In the early 1880s editors of the Rockford Seminary Magazine had several confrontations with Sill over the contents of the magazine. In 1882 she threatened to stop publication if they wrote what she considered insults to the seminary. She also disapproved of the 1882 class letter and demanded that it be rewritten. Afterwards the student editor wrote to Jane Addams,

Miss Sill has been going for everybody lately. . . . The eds [editors] are contemplating resigning en masse-- which would be more dignified for them than to have her stop the Mag [magazine] . . . she has ill-treated our class.

Had Sill known that another student had called her an "old



cow" in a recent class letter, she might have prohibited all student publications.<sup>6</sup>

To some minds the seminary had lost its former popularity. Its total enrollment had remained at around two hundred, yet between 1880 and 1883 the number of women in the collegiate course had dropped from fifty-three to thirty-five. There had also been a considerable drop in the number of boarders. By 1884 only around fifty students were living in a dormitory that could easily house one hundred. Sill felt that one reason for this drop was that poor young women could not pay the 225 dollars a year in tuition and board.<sup>7</sup>

#### Still an Old Fashioned Seminary

There were other problems as well. One local newspaper article reported that "the Seminary as an institution of learning, [sic] has not kept pace with the growth and improvement of the people." In spite of the electric telephone jangling, the newly installed steam heat that kept even the halls warm, the new carpets and wallpaper in many rooms, and the new fountain on the grounds, Rockford still functioned much as an ante-bellum seminary. One trustee was overheard to say that Sill was "at least two hundred years behind the times." Her rules continued to be repressive. From Smith College, a former seminary student wrote that the only rule was to be in bed by ten p.m. Rockford students were still escorted nearly everywhere, and they had few

contacts with young men their age. Smith students could come and go as they pleased and were only advised not to go out unescorted in the evening. "Imagine Anna P. Sill doing that," wrote the former seminary student.

8

Rockford's teaching methods were dated. In many colleges of the 1880s the investigative method of the German universities had replaced recitations. The new method required access to a well-stocked library, but the seminary had shelves

filled with unreadable, or at least unread, books. . . . We have some fine books in our library, but the ratio they bear to those practically useless is small. Geological surveys, patent office reports and bound volumes of missionary magazines "fill up", while they cost but little. . . . Files of old newspapers too are very good in their way, but we would prefer to see their places filled by reference books, histories and standard works of literature.

A former Rockford student wrote from the University of Michigan that she felt sure in one year she had gained more in "real scholarship" than in any year at the seminary. The inductive method was not practiced at Rockford, but it was at least discussed in class. After recitations in Francis Bacon, Jane Addams wrote that at the moment she felt "very firm in the resolve never to reason but in the inductive method." Later Addams said that instead of probing the foundations of knowledge, Rockford students had reasoned from premises. "There was an exact definition in our minds and we were examined in them [sic]."

9

The laboratory method was another popular teaching method. It required well-equipped scientific laboratories

where students could carry out experiments. Jane Addams stuffed some birds that had been donated to the seminary, but her other laboratory experiences were limited. She and other chemistry students crowded into a laboratory only eight by fifteen feet. More than half of this space was filled with shelves, a desk, chemicals and instruments. Having only one entrance off a recitation room, the laboratory had no water pipes or faucets, so students were forced to carry water through the neighboring classroom.<sup>10</sup>

Sill had retained the seminary course of study for students who could not afford the more demanding degree program. Yet one student wrote in the literary magazine:

As long as a seminary course is also offered, demanding a year less of work, the college course will take a secondary place, and practically, the school will be, as it is, only a seminary.

Anna Sill was aware of some of these deficiencies. There were also others which she felt needed immediate attention. Large endowments for faculty salaries were desperately needed. In addition to scientific equipment, the seminary could use an art gallery and a separate buildings for science and the library. "In a word," she told the alumnae, "it [the seminary] needs such facilities as similar institutions have to enable it to carry forward the work of the different departments of study." Until that time she could not press for a change of name to "college." In her alumna address of 1883, Jane Addams captured the uncertainty of this transition period:

She [the seminary] has pressed forward with every step attended by chagrins, misunderstandings and perplexing disappointments. She has had the the [sic] bitter experience of representative but not actual, a College in name, a Seminary in form, a hobbledehoy, neither a man or a boy.

There was still much work to do before Sill's ideal could be reached, and she wanted to keep striving for it. She was probably reluctant to face the fact that she no longer had the strength or youth to continue the struggle.

### Resignation

In 1883 Sill called a special meeting of the Board of Trustees to discuss some critical issues: faculty salaries, important teaching vacancies, revisions of the catalogue, "diminished patronage from abroad," tuition, and endowments. In response to her presentation, the trustees agreed to reduce tuition and board. They also voted to hold a local meeting to solicit funds if "the ladies who are honorary members of the board" would meet with community leaders to see "if circumstances would justify it." The other matters would have to wait.

One month later at a stormy Board of Trustee meeting, Sill requested a six-month leave of absence. The trustees promptly granted it. During Sill's leave they placed the seminary under the direction of a graduate of the Boston University School of Medicine, Sarah Jenness. Ralph Emerson described her administrative style this way:

She was as good as a barb wire fence. So many rules sticking every way that it was a constant temptation for some of the lambs and all of the old sheep of the institution to try to climb through. As near as I can get at it, they all climbed through that fence so many times that at the close of the year it was hard to tell which side any of them--teachers or scholars--were. Even Miss Sill. Nobody knew just where she landed. She had tried to be on both sides and just whether the result was to leave her on top or under it I do not know.

13

Jenness lasted only until the end of the school year.

By the following January 1884, Sill must have realized that her day was over, for she officially resigned. Her letter, later published in the local newspapers, requested two things of the trustees: that the seminary be kept "in tact as a college for young women," and that the teachers be selected not only for their "cultivated intellects" but also for their Christian commitment. Her official break with the Board of Trustees was especially painful because she felt they wanted to be rid of her. She wasn't sure where she would live or what she would do, and she felt desolate. In a letter she poured out her grief to her old friend, Joseph Emerson,

No one can feel as deeply as I do a regret that I have failed to meet my own ideal and failed to meet the expectations of the trustees. I can only say that I have given the best I had to give and so I leave the work given to me to do thus far and which is dear to me as life itself and go forth as an exile.

The trustees had no intention of sending Sill into exile, even though her presence might cause problems for the next administrator. Appointed principal emerita, she was

granted the right to live in her two rooms in Linden Hall for the rest of her life. During that time she would draw her usual salary from the interest of the Sill Endowment Fund.<sup>14</sup>

### A New Principal

The Board of Trustees did not ask Anna Sill to pick a successor, an honor bestowed on President Chapin at his retirement from the presidency of Beloit College. Instead, Joseph Emerson asked a recommendation from Eunice Caldwell Cowles, Mary Lyon's first assistant principal and friend of the deceased Zilpah Grant Banister. Emerson hoped to find a woman who would be "ready and fit to take it [the seminary] to mind and heart as a life work and love." Cowles recommended Martha Hillard, a Vassar College graduate who was assisting in the math department of her alma mater. Cowles wrote, "She is probably as much like Mary Lyon in capacity and versatility and integrity as any lady who is not in some way unchangeably moored." That summer President Chapin invited Hillard to visit Rockford.<sup>15</sup>

Martha Hillard never forgot her first impression of the seminary campus:

The buildings, three of them--Chapel, Middle, and Linden--were fine, well-proportioned and strongly built. I felt the presence of a spiritual quality, a loyalty and earnestness and cooperation, that had been handed down from a purposeful, struggling past, but too much in method and manner was also of the past. The Seminary had been founded upon the Mount Holyoke plan and in its more than thirty years of life had not broadened or altered.

Now, in the day of colleges for women, changes were long due.

Hillard quickly won the approval of the Board of Trustees. She was only twenty-eight, but she was intelligent, enthusiastic, and tactful. On 12 August 1884 she was elected principal at a salary of eight hundred dollars. Her impression of Anna Sill was that the older woman was "a fine woman, very limited, but a fine woman. . . . She had that old Puritanical idea about morals." Hillard ousted Sill's strict legal system and inaugurated an honor code. Later she recalled that only two or three students were expelled because they were too immature for the new  
16  
system.

Hillard felt that the seminary women needed opportunities to meet eligible young men. She sponsored many social activities and invited students and faculty from Beloit College. She also planned gatherings with people from the local community. Groups of students began to attend the opera house, and seniors could go into town unchaperoned. At least one aging trustee disapproved of some of these changes. In 1888 Anna Sill's old friend, Hiram Foote, wrote the following to Professor Joseph Emerson,

With you I have grieved at the low spirituality for the past year among the teachers & pupils of our cherished institution. Parties & dancing & theater going has been the order of the day. Formerly Miss Hillard seemed a devoted Christian. Her voice was often heard in prayer at the meetings of the First Congregational Church.

Of late we have learned. . . that she engaged in the dance at W.A. Talcott. The pupils have . . . not

[been] encouraged to attend the revival services now in progress in the churches on the East Side of the river.<sup>17</sup>

The trustees thought that Anna Sill might object to Hillard's changes, but Sill spent much time away from the seminary. Her niece, Minnie Hollister Chapman, lived nearby in Ridgeland. Minnie's small children were frequently ill, so Sill helped nurse them. Sill soon became especially fond of Minnie's youngest son, Robert, born the year of her retirement. Sill also attended many alumna gatherings, raised money for student aid and the missionary societies, began an art collection, and wrote numerous letters to seminary patrons. Whenever she visited the seminary, she received students and visitors in her room and ate at Martha Hillard's table. Many years later Hillard described Sill's visits to the dining room this way:

Miss Sill always came down to dinner with the little black lace scarf over her head. . . . She was very tall and very straight and dignified and always talked in a little delicate high voice. She saw many great changes going on in her school and it must have been very hard for her, but she never said a word. She was a Christian!

The suffering and self-sacrifice of a lifetime had considerably softened the retired principal. She might have ruled fiercely, but she gave up her authority with unusual gracefulness. Apparently she harbored no resentment against those who had taken away her power, nor did she take out revenge on the new principal. Young seminary students who first saw the aging principal often whispered, "What a beautiful face!"



Sill Hall

One of the popular controversies of the times concerned the physical fitness of collegiate women. For many years critics of women's seminaries had warned that rigorous study would destroy a woman's delicate constitution. Sill had always included some form of physical exercise in her seminary program. At public examinations students usually performed calisthenic routines to an admiring audience. The requirement to spend an hour daily on domestic duties was also thought to have an invigorating influence. In 1860 the trustees instructed the faculty to "provide some method for securing a greater degree of physical exercise and recreation on the part of the students." In response Sill required students to walk on the grounds each day. In 1878 an editorial in the student magazine commented,

Many have declared that girls are constitutionally too feeble to pursue such a course of study as ours-- "even if they accomplish the required work, they are so enfeebled as to be unable to employ what they have gained for their own advantage or for that of others." It is not so much our work that ruins our health, as the manner in which we perform it. We need to fill spare moments with less reading and fancy-work, and more outdoor exercise and amusements.

The Rockford campus included a gymnasium, but as one editorial indicated, it was unused except for games and square dancing on Friday evenings and for forty-five minutes of gymnastics twice a week. All in all physical education had never been among Anna Sill's highest priorities.

Physical education was stressed in the newly established eastern women's colleges, probably because so much criticism had been aimed at them. In 1873, for example, a Harvard medical professor, Dr. Edward Clarke, published a book warning that women who pursued higher education would seriously impair their physical and emotional health. Among the cases he cited was that of a student who had neglected her menstrual cycle by standing during recitations. At nineteen, she graduated "the first scholar, and an invalid." Clarke's book caused such a sensation that Julia Howe published a convincing collection of refutations. Nevertheless, critics continued to question whether collegiate education permanently harmed the health of young women.<sup>20</sup>

At Vassar College physical education was foundational. The 1867-68 catalogue stated that the health of students was the first consideration of the college. All students were required to take daily calisthenics. Horses were provided for riding, grounds were landscaped to encourage walking, and a physician was always on duty. It is not surprising that Martha Hillard, a Vassar graduate, thought Rockford Seminary lacked adequate provision for physical exercise. Later she wrote, "I presented to the trustees our need for a gymnasium, and they responded manfully. They raised the money among the citizens of Rockford, and a new building was put up. . . ." The building included music rooms on the first floor and a large gymnasium on the second. It was called Sill Hall.<sup>21</sup>

The summer of its dedication, 1887, Sill wrote to an alumna serving on the mission field that there were many material improvements in the seminary. The chapel had a new carpet, and the library had been enlarged.

. . . More than all, a new Hall has been added south built of brick--80 x 38 ft. with an annex up to the upper story. It cost \$16,000 and is a very fine Hall. . . . The Hall by a vote of the Trustees takes my name and has the tablet over the entrance.

A year later Sill wrote to the same missionary that "unfortunately" the new principal was leaving to be married to a "gentleman in Chicago." The gentleman was Andrew MacLeish. One of their children, Archibald, would someday become librarian of Congress and a noted poet.<sup>22</sup>

Before she left, Hillard inaugurated programs to raise the seminary scholastically. Entrance requirements were upgraded. Women in the collegiate program studied spherical trigonometry, solid geometry, analytical geometry, and calculus. Their Latin courses included Livy, Horace's selected satires and Ars Poetica, Tacitus, Juvenal, Cicero, Germania, and selections from Agricola. Hillard also hired graduates of Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, and Radcliffe. By 1888 there were one hundred boarders in the dormitory and 205 enrolled in classes. Anna Sill may not have approved of everything Martha Hillard had inaugurated, but she kept criticisms to herself. To a friend she wrote that the seminary was "prospering." Joseph Emerson was probably deeply disappointed that Hillard was leaving the seminary so soon. He had wanted a woman who would make the school her

life's work, and after only four years Hillard was leaving the work for marriage. Where would he find a woman as dedicated at Anna Peck Sill?<sup>23</sup>

### Last Days

By autumn 1888 the new principal, Anna Gelston, had arrived. An 1881 graduate of the University of Michigan, she had taught mathematics at Wellesley and had studied abroad at Oxford, England. She would serve as principal only two years.<sup>24</sup>

That fall Anna Sill spent most of her time in Ridgeland. Early in 1889 she received news that her only living brother, his wife and two children had all died of pneumonia. She grieved deeply over these deaths, and soon afterwards she became gravely ill of the same disease. Eventually Sill recovered but her nephew, Robert Chapman, caught pneumonia and died. This tragic death seemed to sap Sill of her remaining strength. In May she returned to her rooms at the seminary. She attended chapel services, visited friends and made the acquaintance of students. On June 22 illness forced her to her room. Founder's Day passed, but no one visited her. Apparently Sill did not know that the doctors had forbidden people from seeing her. According to one report Sill felt that she had been forgotten by her friends. Several days later she died.<sup>25</sup>

Anna Peck Sill was buried in West Side Cemetery. Her

alumnae raised one thousand dollars for a granite monument over her grave. The inscription read:

Anna Peck Sill  
 Founder of  
 Rockford College  
 Born  
 August 9, 1816  
 Died  
 June 18, 1889.

### Postscript

Three years after Sill's death, the Board of Trustees changed the name of the institution Sill founded to "Rockford College." In 1905 the college became a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The next year a noted educational historian, Grant Dexter, wrote that of twenty-two women's collegiate institutions founded before 1850 only two "had risen to any prominence or are to-day doing work of the standard done in the colleges for men." The two institutions were Mount Holyoke College and Rockford College. The Board of Regents of the State of New York recognized Rockford College in 1914. It received a Class A rating from the University of Illinois, the highest given for undergraduate transfers. It received a class A plus rating for graduate school. In 1917 Rockford College became a member of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae. It also received approval by the Association of American Universities.

Most of the hundreds of female seminaries that flourished during the nineteenth century died or became

secondary schools. In 1948 the United States Government published a list of early female colleges that still existed at that time. Eighteen of the 166 institutions listed had risen from seminary to full collegiate status. Only seven of them were older than Rockford College.<sup>28</sup>

More than a collegiate institution or its curriculum, Anna Sill valued people. To her students she devoted her time, her prayers, and her energy. During Anna Sill's principalship, thirty classes had graduated from the seminary. Five thousand students from thirty-one states and six foreign countries had been represented. Forty students and teachers later served as missionaries. Many more became teachers. Others broke new ground as physicians, journalists, artists, humanitarians, musicians, and principals. One woman became the first county superintendent of schools in Coffey County, Kansas. Another was a member of the Twelfth General Assembly of Colorado. Countless other women contributed to their families, local churches, and communities. "She has certainly turned out a very fine set of woman [sic]," remarked one of the early trustees. These women have long since died, but their institution still flourishes on a sprawling, wooded campus in east Rockford. On the wall of the college library is a portrait of Anna Peck Sill. In the archives are her remaining papers and biographies. Over the years the story of Anna Peck Sill has continued to interest historians. May her story continue to be retold by the women she inspires.<sup>29</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1

For an account of the graduation, see "Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 10(July 1882), 234-37; untitled article, Sill Scrapbook, a collection of newspaper articles about Rockford Female Seminary from 1849 until after Sill's death, Historical Files, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois, 158; All future references to this collection will be abbreviated History: R.C.A.; see also "1851-1882: Thirty-First Commencement of Rockford Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, History: R.C.A., 166-67.

2

See The Jubilee Book of The Alumnae Association of Rockford College (Rockford, Illinois: The Alumnae Association of Rockford College, 1904, 112-13; Joan Surrey and Ted and Nancy Babcox, "Jane Addams Served Humanity," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 53.

3

See Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 1875-85, Records of the Board of Trustees, Rockford Female Seminary, Incorporated 1847, 19 September 1850 - 7 February 1884, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to these records will be abbreviated Trustees: R.C.A.

4

See "Home Items," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 9 (November 1881), 233; letter of Anna P. Sill to Professor Joseph Emerson, 4 March 1882, Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Emerson: B.C.A.

5

Typescript letter of Ralph Emerson to his daughter, Mary, 18 March 1882, History: R.C.A.; letters of Sarah Anderson to Jane Addams, 11 and 17 April 1882, Jane Addams Collection, University of Illinois Archives, Chicago, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Addams: U.I.A.

6

Letter of Mary B. Downs to Jane Addams, 14 November 1880; letter of Martha Thomas to Jane Addams, 27 April 1882; letter of Mary Ellwood to Jane Addams, 22 April 1883, Addams: U.I.A.

7

See letter of Mrs. E.C. Cowles to Professor J. Emerson, 27 August 1884, Emerson: B.C.A.; Annual Catalogues of the Officers and Students of Rockford Seminary, Rockford, Illinois 1880-1883; the number of boarders is indicated in Martha Hillard MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, (Privately Printed, 1949), 36; other sources are silent on this point. For Sill's interpretation of the drop in the number of boarders, see Hazel Cederborg, "The Early History of Rockford College" (Master's thesis, Wellesley College, 1926), 218-19. According to the annual seminary catalogues, total enrollment figures were as follows:

Year	Number of students	Year	Number of students
1877-78	180	1881-82	182
1878-79	200	1882-83	203
1879-80	194	1883-84	193
1880-81	201	1884-85	166

There was a considerable drop in enrollment after Sill retired. The catalogues do not indicate the number of boarders.

8

"Wanted--A Divorce," Sill Scrapbook, 157-58; Cederborg, Thesis, 211-13; typescript letter of Adaline Talcott Emerson to her husband, Ralph Emerson, 23 [22?] June 1883, History: R.C.A.; letter of Mary Ellwood to Jane Addams, 16 September 1881, Addams: U.I.A.

9

"Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (June 1883); letter of Helen Harrington to Jane Addams, 15 April 1882, Addams: U.I.A.; letter of Jane Addams to Sarah Alice Halderman, 21 October 1879, Addams: U.I.A.; see also Jane Addams, "A New Challenge to the Scholar," Typescript of Alumnae Address, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Rockford College, 1924, 1, Addams: R.C.A. This address is full of inaccuracies, but this particular statement is probably correct.

Jane Addams never gave Anna Sill credit for seeing that Rockford students received bachelor's degrees. In Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House (1910 reprint; New York: The New American Library, 1961), 46-47, Addams said that it was the faculty and students who worked for and achieved



this goal. However, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that Anna Sill was behind student and alumnae efforts to upgrade the seminary to full collegiate status. It was Anna Sill who urged Jane Addams to ask for the B.A. degree, and at first Addams was not sure that she wanted it from Rockford Female Seminary. See letter of Jane Addams to George Haldeman, 8 May 1881, Addams: U.I.A., in which she says, ". . . Miss Sill has offered to me this degree if I want to take it next commencement, [sic] of course it has not yet been offered by the Trustees . . . ."

10

See letter of Jane Addams to Sarah Alice Halderman, 23 January 1880, Addams: U.I.A.; "Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 13 (February 1885), 72.

11

"Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 15 (January 1887), 21; Anna Peck Sill, Alumnae Address in "Meeting of the Association of the Northwest," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 13 (October 1885), 277; Anna Peck Sill, "Rockford Seminary, Its Ideal," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 7 (March 1879), 78; Jane Addams, "To the Uncomfortableness of Transition," Alumnae Address in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (July 1883), 216.

12

See letter of Anna Peck Sill to Jane Addams, 3 May 1883, Addams: R.C.A.; Cederborg, Thesis, 218-19; 10 May 1883, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.

13

See typescript letter of Adaline Talcott Emerson to her husband Ralph Emerson, 23 [22?] June 1883, History: R.C.A.; Thirty-Third Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Rockford Seminary, Rockford, Illinois, 1883-84 (Rockford, Illinois: Gazette Publishing House, 1884), 4; Maggie Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill Founds Seminary," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 51; Emerson's letter is quoted from MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 28-29.

14

See letter of Anna Peck Sill to the Trustees of Rockford Female Seminary, 19 June 1883, 19 June 1883 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Trustees: R.C.A.; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Professor Joseph Emerson, 8 April 1884, Emerson: B.C.A.; see also Sedeen, Anna Peck Sill, 52; MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 29.

15

Letter of Professor Joseph Emerson to President A. L. Chapin, 4 August 1884, and letter of Mrs. E.C. Cowles to

Professor J. Emerson, 19 June 1884, Emerson: B.C.A.;  
MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 27.

16

MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 28; Betty DeGunther, "Martha Hillard Drafts Honor Code," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 65-67.

17

MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 30; DeGunther, "Martha Hillard Drafts Honor Code," 67; letter of Rev. Hiram Foote to Professor J. Emerson, 13 April 1888, Emerson: B.C.A.; Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 52.

18

Cederborg, Thesis, 223-25; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Mrs. Loretta Van Hook, 14 June 1887, Anna Peck Sill Papers, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated Sill: R.C.A. See also Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 52; typescript of interview with Martha Hillard MacLeish, 27 May 1946, Martha Hillard MacLeish Papers, Rockford College Archives, Rockford, Illinois. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated MacLeish: R.C.A.; see "Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 17 (June 1889), 138.

19

See Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, 2 (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 98-133; see, for example, "Thirteenth Annual Exercises of the Rockford Female Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 20; "Sixteenth Anniversary of the Rockford Female Seminary," Sill Scrapbook, 24; "Perian Union Entertainment," Sill Scrapbook, 94; see "Boading Department" and "Health" in Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1865-66, 26-27; see 4 July 1960 Board of Trustee Minutes; "Editorial Notes," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 6 (October 1878), 206-07; "Editorial," Rockford Seminary Magazine, 11 (November 1883), 290.

20

Woody, A History of Women's Education, 2, 116-18; Edward H. Clarke, Sex in Education: A Fair Chance for Girls (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 66-68. See also Julia Ward Howe, Sex and Education: A Reply to Dr. E. H. Clarke's "Sex in Education" (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874).

21

See Third Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Vassar College, 1867-68, (New York: John A. Gray & Green, Printers, 1868), 26-27; MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 31; see also Martha Hillard MacLeish, "Second

Principal of Rockford College, Martha Hillard MacLeish, Speaks at Dinner in Her Honor, November 1, 1946, at Rockford College," Typescript, MacLeish: R.C.A.

22

Letters of Anna Peck Sill to Loretta Van Hook, 14 June 1887 and 3 March 1888, Sill: R.C.A.; DeGunther, "Martha Hillard Drafts Honor Code," 68.

23

DeGunther, "Martha Hillard Drafts Honor Code," 69; Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1885-86, 17-23; MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish, 36; letter of Anna Peck Sill to Loretta Van Hook, 3 March 1888, Sill: R.C.A.; Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 52.

24

Jeanine Crilly, "Anna Gelston, Devoted Scholar," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 71.

25

Cederborg, Thesis, 233-34; Sedeen, "Anna Peck Sill," 52.

26

Cederborg, Thesis, 235.

27

Jodi Billstrom, "Julia Gulliver Faces Faculty Revolt," in Rockford College: A Retrospective Look, ed. C. Hal Nelson (Rockford, Illinois: Rockford College, 1980), 92-93. See also Grant Dexter, "The Education of Women in America to 1900" in The Development of American Education: Selected Readings, eds. Joan K. Smith and L. Glenn Smith (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University, 1976), 154.

28

Elizabeth N. Layton, "Significant Dates in the Early History of Institutions for the Higher Education of Women in the United States," 244 (Washington, D.C.: Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, 1948), 2-12.

29

See Anna Peck Sill, "Woman an Architect," Alumnae Address in Rockford Seminary Magazine, 12 (March 1884), 97; Book of Jubilee, 28-115; Billstrom, "Julia Gulliver," 92; letter of Adaline Talcott Emerson to her husband Ralph Emerson, 23 [22?] June 1883, History: R.C.A.

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