

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

# PRECEPTRESSES AND DEANS OF WOMEN

Coeducation on the American campus, inaugurated in 1837 by Oberlin College, brought in time an institutional sense of special responsibility. The land-grant colleges and state universities of the mid-west followed suit from 1855, and by the 1870's faculty positions for women to look after the health, social relationships, and moral standards of coeds began to appear. The University of Wisconsin, opening its doors to women in 1863, created the position of Dean of Women in the 1890's; the University of Michigan, admitting women in 1870, established the position in 1896.

Probably because the title "Preceptress" was widely employed in female seminaries and in high schools at the time, carrying with it special responsibility for deportment and character development, it was included from the very first in the organization of Normal. The need for such a position in a teacher training institution was greatly enhanced by the general assumption that the teacher must be a model of upright Christian character.

But the title also had an academic connotation. The Preceptress was, in fact, first a teacher, then a counselor. The history of the term reveals its traditional significance, that of an older or superior practitioner who undertakes the tutoring of the neophyte. In the area of medical training the Preceptor was the practicing physician who accepted the young student as an assistant and gave him personal training. In the area of higher education, he was the faculty member who undertook to direct the reading and study of a small group of students in his field. The emphasis on rules and regulations, discipline, and social counseling was to come much later, and with it a change in title from Preceptress to Dean of Women.

At Normal the period of the Preceptress extended to the close of the century. Then, after an interval, with the coming of President McKenny in 1912, the office reappeared in its modern dress and character and title.

In 1853, the position of Preceptress and Teacher of Botany and Belles-Lettres was filled by Abigail Rogers. It stood next to the Principal in importance.

Miss Rogers, coming from New York State, had been in charge of a seminary for girls in Canada, preceptress in a seminary in White Plains, New York, head of the Female Department of the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary at Lima, New York, and a teacher in the Albion and Ypsilanti schools. Putnam, writing in 1900, said of her: "She was a lady of 'the old school' and the ceremonious courtesies of old-time forms had their last exponent in her." He added:

I well remember how, at the close of the session each day, in the 'old Seminary,' as the young ladies passed, in a long, decorous line from the school room, each one turned at the door and 'made a curtsy' which was so graciously and kindly returned by her stately figure standing at the desk. The work of Miss Rogers, as first Preceptress of the Normal School, set the high standard which has always continued to mark this position. The exalted aims and large success which so many young women have shown, who have been trained here, had their beginnings in the foundation which she laid in the first years of the school.

But Abigail Rogers was not content with social forms, nor with a co-educational Normal School that was, academically speaking, as yet but a glorified academy. She believed strongly in higher education for women—so strongly, in fact, that she decided to devote the rest of her life to the establishment of a state-supported college for women. Discouraged over the failure of efforts to open the University of Michigan to women, she resigned her position at Normal in 1855 and moved to the new state capital at Lansing where, with her older sister Delia, she founded the Michigan Female College. This school lasted until her death 14 years later.

Miss Rogers' place at Normal was filled by Sarah Allen, recently graduated from Oberlin College. Miss Allen held the position of Assistant Principal of the Ladies Department of Oberlin at the time. She remained at Normal four years, then married James Lawrence Patton, a Congregational minister. Writing in later years, Mrs. Patton said:

I entered upon my work with a good deal of trembling, and the trembling never entirely ceased during my four-year stay. It was a very responsible position and I never for a moment got out from under the load. I tried to do good work in the classroom and in this I was, perhaps, fairly successful, but my great anxiety was to do what one in my position ought to do for the young ladies, and be to them what one ought to be . . .

She must have made a strong impression on the students, one of whom was to follow in her footsteps and become an outstanding influence in the institution, Julia Anne King. Commenting some thirty-six years later, Miss King said:

I cannot forbear confessing my debt to Miss Allen, a debt which every woman owes to that one who is both her ideal and her inspiration. Miss Allen's influence was far-reaching and permanent. She made a difference in my whole life.<sup>1</sup>

To replace Mrs. Patton, Normal went again to Oberlin College and again brought to the school one who had been Assistant Principal in the Ladies Department, Mrs. A. D. Aldrich, a young widow. Mrs. Aldrich served as Preceptress and Professor of Botany and Mathematics, and remained at the Normal from 1859 to 1867 when she married the professor of mathematics, E. L. Ripley, and went with him to the normal school at Columbia, Missouri.

Mrs. Ripley was succeeded by still another Oberlin graduate, Ruth Hoppin, who came as Preceptress and Professor of Botany and History. Miss Hoppin had been Preceptress in the Three Rivers (Michigan) High School where she taught under Principal William H. Payne, who was later to hold the first permanent chair in any American university devoted exclusively to the professional training of teachers (Chair of the Science and Art of Teaching, University of Michigan, 1879). During the three years prior to coming to Normal, Miss Hoppin taught in the Ann Arbor High School. Her background was that of the southwestern Michigan pioneer. Of her early life she said:

Before the era of rag carpets was the notable one of the scrub brooms; those well remembered homemade splint brooms. The rule for cleaning was to dash on and sweep off water till the floor was clean enough to 'eat off' and rinsed until the water was clear as drinking water. My mother spun, wove, colored and made up the wearing apparel for her whole fam-

ily until the incoming railroad changed everything and made home manufacture unprofitable.

She described her early schooling with just a touch of wistfulness:

Much of the time until fifteen years of age my only schooling was obtained by walking two miles and a quarter through the dust of summer, and the drifting snows of winter. The teaching in the country schools then might not have been as scientific as now, but those schools had an element that the district school of today [cir. 1900] has nearly lost, namely, the stimulus, moral and intellectual of all the best minds in the district. I look back to this portion of my life with pleasure, as one of real value in fitting me for my life work.

Preceptress-Professor Hoppin remained with Normal for 14 years, resigning in 1881 to accept the offer of the chair of botany at Smith College.

The last of the Preceptresses was Julia Anne King, of Puritan stock and Puritan inclination. Lacking the formal academic training of her predecessors, she nevertheless was strongly attracted to the fields of history and government and gave her attention increasingly to teaching. In 1888, she organized the Department of History and Civics which she continued to head until her retirement in 1915. Meanwhile, in 1899, the position of Preceptress was dropped.

Miss King was a graduate of Normal, receiving her life certificate with the class of 1858. Her formal training was concluded with an additional year but her ability as an organizer was early recognized. State Superintendent John M. Gregory requested her assistance in organizing a graded school (including high school) at St. Clair, Michigan, and made her the principal of the high school. She became high school principal at Lansing, then was put in charge of the Lansing schools. From there she went to Kalamazoo College as head of the Ladies Department under Gregory who was then president of the college. The honorary degree of Master of Arts was later conferred on her by Kalamazoo. Here she taught modern languages, history, and literature. Later she was principal of the Charlotte high school, then superintendent of the Charlotte schools.

Thus her experience, when she returned to her alma mater, had been essentially administrative, yet tempered with an experience in teaching that covered a broad range of subject matter. Later in her

career at Normal she commented that she had taught everything in the curriculum except Greek, and that her preferences were history and the physical sciences.

Miss King made a strong impression on all the students, male as well as female, perhaps as a teacher even more than as a preceptress. We have, for example, the awe-inspired question of a young man just entering Normal:

Who is that woman with her hair combed straight back and dressed in plain black? Why, was the answer, that is Miss King, teacher of History. They say that she makes her classes work awful hard, and then there are lots of them who don't pass; and I wouldn't wonder if it were so, too, judging by the looks of her.<sup>2</sup>

But, as of a later time he added: "So remarks a student who is not yet acquainted with one of the grandest, noblest hearted women that ever lived."

A young woman student of the late 1890's, commenting some sixty years later, said of Miss King:

Julia Anne King was a beautiful woman as well as a very strict disciplinarian. She could hold a study hall of 150 giggly girls in complete silence by one well aimed remark. She was feared but much respected.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of Miss King's duties as Preceptress was described broadly by her superior, President Willits:

The preceptress has the special charge of the ladies, as regards their deportment, etc., which makes it advisable that at least once a day she may see them all at one time alone. Matters which have to be repeated in three or more different rooms lose much of their force, and the effect is to distribute that personality which ought to be a unit.

These meetings evolved into Miss King's famous weekly sessions known as her "Conversations," and referred to by her colleague in the History Department, Bertha M. Buell, as the precursor of the weekly "Faculty Chat" which later and for many years brought students and faculty together in weekly discussion of some topic of broad interest. These Friday meetings, held in the study hall of Old Main, dealt with matters of conduct, social forms, and religious ideals. As Miss Buell later stated, they inspired "a feeling that one's

life among neighbors shapes the world community.” It was not unusual for Ypsilanti women also to attend.

This social emphasis carried over strongly into Miss King’s teaching, creating a unity in what otherwise might have been two distinct and disparate positions.

Julia Anne King’s role as Preceptress, and the position itself, came to an end with the administrative reorganization of 1899 in which President Boone resigned, and the three Normal Schools of Michigan were placed under a statewide presidency (President Leonard), with the Ypsilanti institution presided over by Principal Elmer A. Lyman. For a period of 10 years there was no preceptress. Instead, a Standing Committee on Student Affairs, consisting of three or more members of the faculty, was organized to assume this function. Miss King served on this committee, which was chaired by a male member of the faculty. Much later she was made chairman.

The committee system did not prove to be satisfactory. Although the student enrollment remained through these years fairly stable at 1,500, with a great preponderance of women, there was dissatisfaction. In 1909, President Jones established the office of Dean of Women by adding its duties to those of the head of the Department of Household Arts.

Grace Fuller thus became the first to hold this title. When President McKenny arrived in 1912, the following paragraph was inserted in the College catalog:

The College authorities appreciate the solicitude which parents feel when they send their sons and daughters away from home to school and they also appreciate the great responsibility which a college assumes . . . No subject is given more serious consideration by the faculty of the Normal College than the physical and moral welfare of its students.

The new title, “Dean,” implied a modification of concept, a shift from emphasis on personal guidance and counseling to one of administration of rules and regulations, of regularization and discipline. Indeed, rules and regulations in regard to rooming and boarding houses were a matter of first concern for the Dean of Women and were listed in the catalog for all to become familiar with. A “Women’s Council” was organized under the chairmanship of Dean Fuller which included some matrons from the community.<sup>4</sup>

The function of the office could, then, be better described as

enlarged rather than altered. Where the emphasis would lie might vary with the incumbent; where it might eventually rest, only the future could disclose. But the essential psychological conflict between the function of policeman and that of counselor would remain to plague and puzzle all future deans.

Miss Fuller had been with the College as head of the Department of Household Arts since 1905. She had won the hearts of her students as a teacher; she now extended her following to the entire campus. In 1910, at the close of her first year as Dean, the college annual was dedicated to her.

Edwin A. Strong, in a tribute to her which appeared in the same volume, said:

It is as the wise and efficient Dean of Women that she is best known among us. In this capacity her home has come to be a social center of great attraction for the girls of the school, who find in her a faithful friend and judicious adviser, and, through her influence, an introduction to a wider circle of interests than they could otherwise have known.

After five years the heavy load proved to be more than Miss Fuller's strength would bear, and she resigned.

She was replaced in 1915 by Marion B. White, who came to Normal from an associate professorship at the University of Kansas. While at Normal she founded a faculty women's organization known as "The Contemporary Club." She quickly acquired a reputation for upholding high academic standards, womanly behavior, and the college regulations on housing. In other words, her emphasis in dealing with students appears to have been on the side of enforcement. A brief statement in the student paper at the time is revealing:

Possibly her Scotch and Puritan ancestry did not incline her to great sympathy with purposeless, selfish or lazy girls, yet many such girls she has helped.<sup>5</sup>

Miss White resigned after three years to take a teaching position at Carleton College in Minnesota, and was replaced by Bessie Leach Priddy.

Mrs. Priddy continued the tradition of combining the deanship with teaching in an academic field. She had come to Normal in 1915 as assistant professor of history, and while in that position pursued

her doctorate, which she received in 1917 at the University of Michigan.

A year later she received high praise from G. Stanley Hall, at that time president of Clark University, for an article she had published on teaching the war.<sup>6</sup> In a letter to her, he said:

I have been trying to keep tab . . . for some time on the effect of the war on education in this country . . . and I find that most of the articles on the subject . . . are utterly inadequate; nor do I get much that is really valuable in English or French literature, while from Germany we have quite a number of excellent articles. The spirit and method of your own work seems to me the best I have seen in English anywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Mrs. Priddy assumed the additional responsibility of Dean of Women in the fall of 1918. For the first years, her path as dean was relatively smooth. In 1921 the senior class dedicated its yearbook to her with the following inscription: "To Bessie Leach Priddy, Dean of Women and mother of us all, this volume is lovingly dedicated."

It was not to be thus much longer, however. Indeed, the story from early 1922 could well be headed "Hazards of Administering a State-Supported Teachers College," and involved President McKenny as well as Dean Priddy. Upon his return to the campus in Mid-April from a week's absence at a national educational meeting, McKenny found that the press had picked up an item and broadcast over the country the news that seventeen coeds had been dismissed from the Michigan State Normal College for smoking. Great excitement ensued. The president promptly drew up a lengthy statement of explanation and correction, the Governor of the State talked to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and newspapers headlined that a probe of the Normal was about to be made. One of the students dismissed insisted that the president and the dean had no authority to deny her readmission, appealed her case to the State Board, then went to the Circuit Court for Washtenaw County, and from there appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the newspapers were having a gala day. A good example was *The Kansas City Post* which sent a reporter to the campus, printed pictures of the president, the dean, the irate coed and the Governor of the State—and such quotations as the following:

*Miss Tanton:* It's the fault of my landlady. She did find two cigarette stubs in my wastebasket. She told Mrs. Priddy. Mrs. Priddy charged me with being an inveterate smoker. In reality, I used those two burned cigarettes as punk to burn the edges of a poster I put on my wall. I have smoked cigarettes . . . Once last fall several of us girls smoked in a dark street just to be devilish. But I never smoked in my room or in the presence of a man . . . the regulations and constant surveillance over us by school authorities tend to make us all sneaks.

*Dean Priddy:* The action taken by the school was right. We had the interest both of the girl and of the teaching profession at heart.

*President McKenny:* The Normal does not wish to pass on whether women should smoke. But it has reason to believe the people of Michigan do not want as teachers women who smoke.

*Governor Groesbeck:* It makes no difference whether teachers bob their hair or wear short skirts. But teachers or girls preparing to be teachers should not smoke.<sup>8</sup>

The president did not misinterpret the sentiment of his time. Resolutions of support came from the women students' organization, the Women's League; the Student Council; the Ypsilanti Matrons' Association. The leading ladies' club of Ypsilanti, the Ladies' Literary Club, published a strong resolution in defense of Dean Priddy.<sup>9</sup> The State Board met and supported the president. There was no probe of the College. Miss Tanton's suit in the Circuit Court for Washtenaw County failed and was appealed. Two years later, the State Supreme Court rejected her plea for a writ of certiorari. In explaining the rejection, Justice Fellows took occasion to commend Dean Priddy "for upholding some oldfashioned ideas of young womanhood." The official attitude of the teaching profession on problems of this nature was stated in item 12 of the Code of Ethics published by the Michigan State Teachers' Association:

Since teachers are rightly regarded as examples to pupils, a teacher should so conduct himself that no just reproach may be brought against him. When liberty of conscience is not concerned, a teacher should stand ready to make a personal sacrifice, because of the prejudices of a community.

One can agree with McKenny when, in the course of his ordeal, he said: "Unquestionably the position of Dean of Women, in an

institution enrolling 1800 girls, and where there are no dormitories, is in many respects the most difficult one on the campus."<sup>10</sup>

He thought very highly of Dean Priddy and when, in the summer of 1923, she resigned to take a similar position at the University of Missouri, he wrote:

All in all she is the most capable woman with whom I have been associated. She has scholarship, teaching power and signal administrative ability . . . She has leadership both with the faculty and with the students and she has the confidence and respect of the young women of the college.<sup>11</sup>

The College did not forget her and, in June, 1935, under another administration, voted her the honorary degree of Master of Education. It was awarded posthumously. She had died a month earlier.

Her successor, Lydia I. Jones, arrived in the fall of 1924. In the interim, the post had been filled by Acting Dean Fannie Beal, who became Assistant Dean under Miss Jones.

The new dean had a Master of Arts degree from Teachers College, Columbia University, had taken undergraduate work at Harvard University, Oxford University and the University of Chicago, and had held the position of Dean of Women and head of the English Department at the State Teachers College at Geneseo, New York. She came to the Normal College from the State Teachers College at San Jose, California, where she was Dean of Women and associate professor of English. She was the first at Normal to devote full time to the office of Dean of Women, qualified by the fact that from time to time she taught a course in Shakespeare.

In her fifteen-year tenure at the Normal College, Dean Jones played an active role in the national organization of her field, the National Association of Deans of Women (now known as the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors). For instance, at the 17th Annual Meeting of the Association, held at St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1933, she addressed a luncheon of the state presidents on "A New Co-operation in Changing Times." At the same meeting she addressed the general session on "Experiments in Creating Morale in Student Groups." At the meeting of 1939, held at Cleveland, she was cited by the Association for completion of 25 years of service.

Her work at the Normal College was characterized by an empha-

sis on good taste, courtesy, and the importance of self-discipline. The student must be educated for self-direction toward the goal of the common good. To facilitate this educational aim, the College should house its students.

Throughout her years at Normal she persisted in urging dormitories for women. Indeed, the policy of housing students on campus at all four of the teachers colleges of Michigan owes much to Dean Jones' pioneering fervor and effort. From the time of her arrival at Normal in 1924 she avidly collected stacks of pictures and information about dormitories on other campuses. She found an active supporter in a State Board member, Edna Wilson.

In September of 1933, the Board recommended that each teachers college be provided with a dormitory to be financed by that depression-fathered federal agency, the Public Works Administration. In December, Mrs. Wilson presented a proposal. The Board thereupon asked her to survey the conditions in the four colleges and to call a conference of the deans of women to formulate a uniform plan of action. At this conference the deans were constituted a committee to cooperate in the survey and Dean Jones was named chairman. A year later the survey was presented to the Board, whereupon Mrs. Wilson was authorized to confer with the state representative of the Public Works Administration (Mortimer E. Cooley, Dean of the Engineering College, University of Michigan) concerning the possibility of federal assistance.

Two years later (1937), both Normal and Western were authorized to proceed with plans. In another two years (1939) the first dormitory for Normal was completed (Julia Anne King Residence Hall), financed 45 per cent by the Public Works Administration, the rest by a bonded loan from the Ann Arbor Trust Company.<sup>12</sup> Thus began not only the dormitory program at Normal but also the concept of the self-liquidating project.<sup>13</sup>

In her contact with students, Dean Jones stimulated them to think about their problems, and encouraged them to keep their goals ever in mind. At the same time she tried to make the students feel that rules and regulations were not ends in themselves.

We wish [she said] to make the regulations of the college seem not as obstacles, but as aids to the achievement of the three fundamental things in college life—namely, studies, health, and emotional balance. We want

you to attain these things that you may enjoy life more, both while you are attending college and after you have finished.

She was skillful in encouraging self-restraint and reflection. The student paper reported a talk that Dean Jones made to entering students:

Miss Jones sympathizes with the students who are revolting against out-worn traditions and hypocrisies of another day. They should carry the revolt still further lest they become the victims of the machine age and lose their appreciation of beauty. Youth unconsciously are developing new fallacies and modern prejudices in spite of their fight for freedom of thought.<sup>14</sup>

She resigned in 1939 for reasons of health.

Today, two women's dormitories stand in honor of her memory—one at the Geneseo State University in New York, where she had served as first Dean of Women; the other on the campus of Eastern.

Dean Jones' successor was Susan Burch Hill, who came to the Normal College from the position of Assistant Dean of Women at Iowa State Teachers College. At that institution she had been in charge of dormitories. At the Normal College she initiated dormitory self-government and programs. The first women's dormitories, Julia Anne King and Bertha Goodison Halls, were placed in operation that fall.

Dean Hill was a product of Milwaukee-Downer College of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the University of Minnesota, and Teachers College, Columbia University, where she received her master's degree. She had taught in high schools at Ironwood, Michigan, and Des Moines, Iowa.

She was the second Dean of Women at the Normal College to devote full time to her position, and the first to come with professional training for it. It was well that this type of person was chosen, not only because it meant keeping in step with the times but because of the immensely greater responsibilities being assumed by the College with the advent of dormitory life. Henceforth, the College would assume responsibility for the physical, social and cultural life of the student twenty-four hours a day. Programs in student self-government, cultural growth, social development would receive

strong emphasis; problems moral, ethical, family, academic would be laid at the dean's door. The parallel development of professional health services and psychiatric care would in time provide her with greatly improved facilities for effective work.

The annual reports from her office revealed the extent and variety of the areas of concern. There was, first, the operation of the dormitories, in which self-government was adopted as a fundamental policy. Dean Hill described it as follows:

The social life of the women and social regulation are conducted on the principle of democratic self-government. Each residence hall has its council, which in turn is in close contact with the executive board of the Women's League (representing *all* women students both in and outside of dormitories). The women make and enforce their own regulations.<sup>15</sup>

There was the organization known as the Women's League, with its many ramifications; the Panhellenic League, representing the sororities and the major problems attendant on rushing and bidding; jobs for women working their way through college; academic counseling for those in need; psychiatric and health counseling and treatment, not infrequently under the pressure of emergency. Lengthy studies were made in the area of academic difficulties, student employment, the evaluation of students by employers, the desirability of separate houses for sororities, psychiatric and personnel services, the function and role of the dormitory Head Resident and the Assistant Head Resident.

A student-counselor program, initiated in 1940, saw a senior student selected in each corridor to interpret rules and regulations, and to be concerned with the general welfare and happiness of the girls. A record system consisting of a folder for each student was maintained. Special projects were initiated, encouraged, conducted, such as a leadership clinic, a picture rental program, an extensive program of social service in the community.

But always of chief importance were the personal interviews in the office of the dean. Every student reported as doing unsatisfactory work was interviewed by Dean Hill personally, as well as many, many others who appeared on their own initiative, totaling a minimum of 600 in the year 1950–1951 and increasing as the student body increased through the years.

The Community Service program, developed and carried on for

many years under the initiative and direction of Professor Frances Gates, was of particular significance. It encouraged the girls to contribute to the community life, and provided opportunities for them in recreation, community activity centers, with handicapped children, the Red Cross, Girl Scouts, nursery school, and other activities. At the same time, those young people planning to be teachers were provided with opportunity to gain experience with children at an early time in their college careers, an opportunity that often helped them decide whether they were really temperamentally equipped to work with children. Dean Hill herself set a personal example of community service by serving for two terms on the Ypsilanti City Council.

Dormitory life and a greatly expanded student body added tremendously to the responsibilities of the office of Dean of Women. Social problems, arising with the advent of the automobile, changing attitudes towards the use of alcoholic beverages, and a general confusion in society about social standards, multiplied. At the same time, growth of the counseling concept and closer attention nationally to the functioning of the personnel dean had raised her to a professional status which meant not only informed attention to many more areas of concern, but impact on a far larger percentage of the student body. Fortunately for Normal, the personal touch and deep concern for the individual student, so characteristic of the Preceptress, had not been lost.

The two women's dormitories of 1939 multiplied to ten by 1969. Student apartments, first constructed in 1955, totaled more than 250 and more were under construction. At the same time, there were six dormitories for men and one which housed men and women in separate areas.

In 1963, Dean Hill found herself in a position of responsibility for all students. Following the trend in the larger universities, the offices of Dean of Women and Dean of Men were consolidated under a Dean of Students. Miss Hill occupied this position until she retired early in 1969.