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“The Absolute Majority of the Population”¹:

Women in Twentieth-Century Cambridge

By Eva Moseley

“We look at all of history, but we look at women first.” So said Patricia King, then director of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, in a 1988 video.² This is a useful perspective in Cambridge as elsewhere—adding people, events, and ideas without taking anything away, which may even alter one’s view of familiar times and places.

Women and girls make up more than half the population, and in the twentieth century they did more and more of what men did: they got more education in larger numbers, became more active politically, and took up any and all occupations and professions. (Even in the nineteenth century, women were factory workers, teachers, nurses, and, in smaller but significant numbers, doctors, lawyers, Protestant ministers, writers, photographers, and social workers—a profession women invented.)

What women also did that men didn’t have to do was assert their equality, both as human beings and as citizens. Feminist movements were among the major trends of the twentieth century. The “first wave” women’s movement (which was not called that until the “second wave” began in the 1960s) was launched at the Woman’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in July 1848. Thanks to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, suffrage—seen by many at the convention as too radical a demand—became the focus of

the movement, especially after the Civil War, when African American men were enfranchised but women were not.



Women workers at Boston Woven Hose Co. in Cambridge, 1912. Women and men apparently worked in separate departments and probably at separate tasks. From the records of Boston Woven Hose Co., Cambridge Historical Society.

Cantabrigians stood on both sides of the suffrage question. In 1892 Hannah Luscomb took her daughter Florence—who would live in Cambridge at various periods of her long life (1887–1985)—to a suffrage convention, where Susan B. Anthony spoke. “I guess you might say that was my introduction to the women’s movement,” Florence Luscomb said in 1974.³ Later she worked for suffrage herself and was one of the first women to vote.

In the late 1890s, a Harvard professor had his class of nearly seventy Radcliffe students write about suffrage for women. Only two wrote in favor: Maud Wood and Inez Haynes. Together they went on to found the College Equal Suffrage League, the

first of many such leagues throughout the United States.⁴ And on Class Day at the private Berkeley Street School, one lone girl marched as “class suffragette,” her classmates regarding her “with black disapproval” before she was taken away by “two...males with brass buttons and helmet-shaped hats.”⁵

Abbie Brooks Hunt, a middle-class woman who lived on Lancaster Street and for many years kept a diary rich in quotidian detail, attended some suffrage events. On January 28, 1914, the Economic Club met at Symphony Hall, and Hunt recorded that “both Suffrage and Anti-Suffrage was talked of...; it was very — —,” but alas, the adjective is illegible.⁶ On April 28, 1914, she “went to a great Anti-Suffrage meeting in Faneuil Hall,” which was “most interesting,” probably not how an avowed suffragist would have described an “anti” meeting.⁷ When there was a referendum on women’s suffrage in 1915, she did not write at all, and on August 26, 1920, when women were enfranchised with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Hunt was unaware of it or had no comment. She did vote that November, however: “I cast my first vote for President of U.S. & I voted for Harding—the straight Republican ticket, except for Lt. Governor.”

One of the arguments women used during their seventy-two-year suffrage campaign was that the vote would make them better able to apply their domestic skills in the public sphere. Women had long used voluntary associations to overcome some of the limits on their participation in public life, influencing and changing society without claiming political power. In a section of her book on women’s voluntary associations, the historian Anne Firor Scott compiled a list of issues, reforms, and innovations tackled by women’s groups, in “corrections, education, housing, public health, recreation, “the social evil” (prostitution and venereal disease), and other categories, all concerns throughout the country.⁸

The Mothers’ Club of Cambridge (MCC), for example, started a vacation school for boys on Hilliard Street in 1896, adding girls in 1897. The boys’ carpentry class was oversubscribed; one boy waited for someone to cut a finger “so I’d get his chance.”⁹

The MCC then promoted playgrounds in Cambridge's more congested neighborhoods. Rindge Park Playground, open in 1902 for eight weeks in July and August, accommodated seventy-five or more children a day. The same year, the MCC's "municipal housekeeping" included a playground at Pine and Eaton streets, where a small lot was cleared of trees, leaving the largest stumps. "[If] not objects of beauty, they were objects on which the children could climb and play," says the Playgrounds Committee report—a use to which Cambridge tree stumps are still being put. There were also swings, a sandbox, and an open area for "basket-ball, bean-bags, ring-toss, blocks." A paid staff of three women oversaw a daily average of two hundred children, "who would play on the street if there were no playground." When it was hot, the children made scrapbooks; the girls played with dolls, sewed, or read.

In 1902 the playground was open from June to September, except when it was closed for a week due to smallpox. In 1903 attendance increased. Although the playground was too small, assistant teacher Gladys Abbot proclaimed its good effects: "Children that were timid have become confident, and many of them that were inclined to be little bullies have learned to settle disputes with tongues instead of fists, at least in the Playground."¹⁰

By 1907, Cambridge had nine playgrounds. "Some big boys came" to one of them one day, the committee reported, "and when told they were too big for the playground they went away, but in an hour a third of them returned with babies, pleading to be allowed to 'mind babies in the sand.'"

The Playgrounds Committee's 1910 report begins with the notice that "hereafter the city of Cambridge will have full charge of the playgrounds," and on March 19, Mayor William F. Brooks invited Mrs. Charles (Helen) Almy, who had chaired the committee, to join the new Special Commission on Playgrounds.¹¹ This pattern of a public need noted by women and met through their voluntary efforts, then taken over by a local government or institution almost invariably headed by men (with women still doing much of the work), was repeated thousands of times in cities and towns across the

country. The former Cambridge city councilor and mayor Barbara Ackermann calls city government “a householder’s job.”¹²

The MCC was only one mothers’ club among at last five founded in Cambridge between 1878 and 1919. Generally, they aimed to educate members to be better mothers by hosting talks on relevant topics by members or “expert” speakers. At the fifth meeting of its first season (1899–1900), the Mothers’ Discussion Club considered children’s obedience, the speaker advocating “unquestionable obedience” and members disagreeing “as to this form of obedience and the methods of enforcing it. Some advocating telling the reason why, others holding that obedience should be enforced without question, others again that the reason should be told after the obeying.”

Other topics also concerned children: how to teach them “the deference and respect that we showed to our parents,” whether to pay children for “their little services” or give an allowance. At the sixth meeting, the physical education expert Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent “took up the different parts of the body in order, said that a large head indicated brains and a small neck out of proportion to the head indicated lack of physical force to support the brain.” He advised every mother to have “a table of average weight and measurements to compare her child’s growth.” The flavor of those gatherings may also be gleaned from the report of the fourth meeting: a paper entitled “What we shall give our children to read” was followed by a discussion of “Miss Alcott’s books, some upholding them, others condemning them as tiring, too sentimental and emotional. It was decided to serve tea after the meetings.”¹³

The Cambridge Home Information Center (CHIC), in existence from 1927 to 1975, originally provided instruction in cooking and household management. A home economist was present one day a week at its office on Brattle Street, and it had a “scheme to train household assistants” — which sounds like an attempt to deal with that old bugaboo of middle- and upper-class families, “the servant question.” Earlier, Charles R. Lanman, professor of Sanskrit at Harvard, had kept a “Household Record of Servants” (1889–1915), a recital of comings and goings at 9 Farrar Street and a record of

wages.¹⁴ The professor kept the accounts, though Mrs. Lanman presumably hired and managed the help.

The record was peppered with comments. One nurse, employed at the house for five weeks, “knew too much and did too little”; another “became exceedingly impertinent and excitable” and was let go after three months. Yet another nurse was “faithful, and very kind to our little daughter” but “not physically strong, and after Thomas was a few weeks old, she felt unable to keep on.” Mary Chambers, however (employed for nineteen months) was “simply invaluable to us—a faithful, kind, and most acceptable nurse. I shall always be thankful that she stayed so long.” Her replacement lasted thirty-eight days.

Then there were the cooks. One was “wasteful and slovenly,” another “excessively disobliging” though “very neat” (barely eight months). Another, “too old to do much,” lasted three days, as did the next, a “blear-eyed Cyclops.” A period with no cook or nurse or “second girl” was an “Interregnum.” Though some comments sound uncharitable (“forgetful, unintelligent, can’t read”), the penultimate entry hints at the ambiguous relations between mistresses and servants: “Mary Hayes (Irish) young & inexperienced. Had tonsillitis. Mrs. L. cared for her for some days. She went to her brother’s & then left.” The women were largely Irish, and many came from Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island. One longs to have the servants’ side of the story.

Abbie Hunt, who also had an Irish servant, wrote on January 28, 1910: “Hannah Mahoney has been with me ... twenty years today, a good faithful servant & one of the best friends in the whole world to us all. I gave her \$5.00, I wish I could have given her \$500.00.”¹⁵

After World War II, the CHIC gave up its office and its initial goals. For a time it conducted educational trips to museums, historical sites, and craft studios, and then just held luncheons with speakers at members’ houses.¹⁶ This evolution was typical of many clubs. Meeting topics were no longer confined to household management and child rearing, but there was less activism. The CHIC also seems to have succumbed to the dilemma facing women’s groups in the 1970s: older members did not want (or were

afraid) to go out to evening meetings, while younger members could not go to daytime meetings because they had jobs.

Unlike the CHIC, the Cambridge Plant and Garden Club—formed in 1966 when the Plant Club (1889) merged with the Garden Club (1938)—persists and has changed with the times. It has expanded its interests to include the preservation of “wetlands near Cambridge Cemetery” (that is, Hell’s Half Acre, now a project of the new Charles River Conservancy, another organization founded by a woman) and the redesign of Winthrop Square Park, as well as household and other hazardous waste, water pollution, and additional environmental issues.¹⁷

Mary Isabella de Gozzaldi, president of the Plant Club from 1903 to 1906, worked on another of her multiple interests during this time. From 1904 to 1905 she chaired a “Committee of Ladies” in the Hannah Winthrop chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, its task to index Lucius Paige’s *History of Cambridge*. In the course of this work, she realized that the city needed a way to collect and preserve historical materials, and so she became one of the founders, and a vice president, of the Cambridge Historical Society.¹⁸ She was also concerned with the education of her daughter and other girls.

In 1900, the Mothers’ Discussion Club heard a paper, “The Public Schools,” in which a Mrs. Richardson praised their “modern buildings.” She declared:

that the ventilation and plumbing were well considered and frequently inspected, that the teachers were carefully selected, the discipline excellent, and in the case of her child the methods were far superior to a private school in inducing attention and interest in work.... The drawbacks...were the lack of appliances for nature work and the lack of beauty in the rooms.... [and that] the medical examinations might be improved by being more thorough.¹⁹

Mary Gozzaldi might not have agreed with the comparison to private schools, for she was a devoted alumna of Berkeley Street School (as was her daughter) and served as first president of the alumnae association. Founded in 1861-62 by Lyman Richards Williston as Irving Street School, it later moved to 17 Berkeley Street. The curriculum, designed to “fit students for the entrance examinations to Radcliffe and

Bryn Mawr," included French, German, Latin, and Greek; ancient, European, and American history; arithmetic, geometry, and algebra; and sciences, geography, current events, history of art, and drawing.²⁰

Addressing the first meeting of alumnae at the Berkeley Street School on June 4, 1912, Mary Gozzaldi claimed that "few private schools for girls round out the half century."²¹ This no doubt referred to the fact that many schools for girls were run by an individual woman, meeting in her house and expiring when she did—or when she was too old or unwell to carry on. Such schools and small female academies in fact had a long history, with curricula emphasizing the traditional graces expected of a marriageable young lady: piano, embroidery, French, and so on.

Three years before Gozzaldi's remarks, Edith Lesley had launched Miss Lesley's School in her house at 29 Everett Street. Miss Lesley's differs in at least two ways from other private girls' schools of the time: its mission, to train kindergarten teachers, was more specific; and it still exists today, having evolved as Lesley Kindergarten School, Lesley Normal School, Lesley College, and (in 2000) Lesley University, which also merged with the Boston Art Institute.

Begun by Friedrich Fröbel in Germany, the kindergarten movement was brought to the United States by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody in the mid nineteenth century. "Kindergarten education will soon become established as a permanent unit in our national educational philosophy," Lesley explained on the first day of her school. "Teachers trained as specialists in this field are alarmingly few.... I plan not merely to set up just another training school; I plan for us to be different: to consider the individual of basic importance; to inculcate the ideal of gracious living; and to foster the tradition of American democracy."²² Whether gracious living and democracy are compatible is an open question, but soon Lesley added the training of elementary school teachers, then a home economics course and a Program in Management of the Tea Room.²³

In 1939 Edith Lesley gave her school to a board of trustees to turn into a college, and by 1943 it was accredited to grant four-year degrees rather than the previous two-year certificates. As Lesley College offered evening courses for teachers, graduate

education developed, and in 1953 the state approved the granting of master's degrees. In 2005 men were admitted to undergraduate, in addition to graduate, programs. While Lesley now offers programs in education, human services, and the arts, not only in Cambridge but also at its Boston campus and at more than two hundred sites in twenty states, it has also grown in place to more than fifty buildings, including historic 29 Everett Street.

Another school, begun in 1914 by Agnes and William Ernest Hocking (a Harvard professor) on the back porch of their house at the foot of Shady Hill, carried its name with it when it moved to Coolidge Hill in 1926. An early prospectus tells us that "the coöperative open-air school" admits both boys and girls from the age of four or five; children learn in nine classes, and the aims are "those which inspired its founders: to keep childhood alive to an open-mindedness and a love of learning; to provide life with all possible richness and fullness; to secure freedom with self-control." A later letter recalls the open buildings and old-fashioned stoves: "In the extreme weather their effectiveness depended upon how freely logs were fed into them."²⁴

Shady Hill School was headed first by Agnes Hocking and then, from 1921 to 1949, by Katharine Taylor, by all accounts a remarkable educator. She added a teacher apprentice program, increased the school's size and gave it a national reputation, and maintained its balance of freedom and discipline. Although trained in "progressive" education, she called Shady Hill a good school rather than a progressive one. Fellow educator Ella Lyman Cabot wrote to Taylor from 101 Brattle Street after a visit to the school: "No bored children, almost no self-conscious children, or showing off bragging children, and an extraordinary minimum of punching little boys considering how many little boys of punching age are there.... [Some schools] accent appreciation, or discipline, or correlation, or passing your exams, or being 'socially minded.' I think you do all of these."²⁵

Like many people who made their mark in Cambridge, Taylor had migrated to the city, in her case from Chicago. Another midwestern educator, Ada Louise Comstock, came to Radcliffe College from Moorhead, Minnesota, by way of the University of

Minnesota and Smith College. Comstock had been Smith's first dean and had been denied the title of "acting president" when she served that function—between two male presidents.

Comstock served as Radcliffe's first full-time president between 1923 and 1943. Begun in 1879 as the Society for the Collegiate Instruction of Women (Harvard Annex, for short), Radcliffe had been incorporated as a college in 1894. It had no faculty, for its *raison d'être* was to give women a Harvard education, which it did, but in separate classes.²⁶ While turning a "provincial school into a national institution," Comstock had to struggle to preserve Radcliffe's charter—in which Harvard had agreed to certify that Radcliffe's degrees were equivalent to Harvard's—in the face of President A. Lawrence Lowell's hostility. After James Bryant Conant succeeded Lowell in 1933, Comstock and Provost Paul Buck of Harvard engineered an agreement by which, starting on July 1, 1943, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences assumed "complete responsibility for the undergraduate and graduate education of Radcliffe students." Most classes were to remain separate, but the exigencies of World War II soon made them coed, though everything was still separate—and not equal.²⁷

Two years after Comstock came to Radcliffe, Cecilia Payne came to the Harvard Observatory from Cambridge University and was soon the first person to earn a Ph.D. in astronomy at Harvard. Her major contribution was "the demonstration that normal stars all have essentially the same chemical composition," and she proved that it is possible to combine hard, sustained scientific work and family life. Her long career was, however, a succession not only of professional achievement but also of instances of exploitation and at times exclusion. Being a woman made no difference intellectually, she believed, but "on the material side, being a woman has been a great disadvantage. It is a tale of low salary, lack of status, slow advancement."²⁸ Only after many years of doing the work of a faculty member without the pay, title, or status was she made a professor and chair of the Department of Astronomy.

It was this kind of treatment, as well as their tiny numbers, that with the impetus of the women's liberation movement led women faculty members to meet on December

2, 1969, to discuss the proposed merger of Radcliffe and Harvard, "both in itself and in relation to the larger question of the place of women in the University." At the second meeting of the group on January 13, 1970, "Bobbie Cohn reported on her interviews with women lecturers....[E]ach lecturer felt that she was an exception and that rules had been bypassed as a favor to her, for which she felt grateful....[S]ome...thought that hiring women was against the rules in the 'real' system."²⁹ That year women held one of 483 tenured positions (the one being the Radcliffe chair meant only for a woman); they were 4.6 percent of assistant professors and 15.5 percent of lecturers, including language instructors, research associates, and the like.

The women convinced the Faculty Council to appoint a Committee on the Status of Women at Harvard, which investigated the problems of female faculty and graduate students. Its recommendations included tying the percentage of women in faculty positions to the percentage of women Ph.D. students, a permanent committee on women, various maternity benefits, part-time graduate study, and better provisions for day care.³⁰

The School of Science at MIT undertook a similar study in the 1990s. At the start, junior women faculty felt "well supported" by their departments and did not expect their careers to suffer due to gender bias. They did worry that "family-work conflicts" would affect their careers more than those of men. In contrast, according to the report, "many tenured women faculty feel...excluded from a significant role in their departments. Marginalization increases as women progress through their careers at MIT [and is] often accompanied by differences in salary, space, awards, resources, and response to outside offers...with women receiving less despite professional accomplishments equal to those of their male colleagues." The investigating committee, using both data and interviews, found that "the difference in the perception of junior and senior women faculty about the impact of gender on their careers...repeats itself over generations." Young women believe that gender discrimination has ended, but as they age they realize "that the playing field is not level at all."

In response to the committee's interim report, Dean Robert Birgeneau addressed issues of space, resources, etc.; increased female participation in department activities; and made efforts to recruit more women at all ranks. One senior woman had thought that being "unhappy at MIT for more than a decade...was the price you paid...to be a scientist at an elite academic institution." After the committee's work, she said, "my research blossomed, my funding tripled....It is hard to understand how I survived those years—or why."³¹

Founded in Boston in 1865, MIT accepted its first female student, Ellen Swallow, in 1870. She was allowed to study chemistry *gratis* so that, as she learned later, the president could deny she was a student in case trustees or other students objected. A young MIT instructor, Robert Hallowell Richards, proposed to her in the chemistry lab. She started a Woman's Laboratory at MIT in 1875 and ran it until 1882. From 1884 until her death in 1911, she was an instructor in sanitary chemistry, and she invented the field of home economics.³² All this happened before MIT moved to Cambridge in 1916 (as did Florence Luscomb's years as an architecture student).

Between Ellen Swallow Richards and the women scientists of the 1990s, quite a few alumnae and women faculty succeeded in their fields, though in minuscule numbers compared with men. Katharine Dexter McCormick (1875–1967) earned a B.S. in biology in 1904 and used her knowledge of endocrines—and her private fortune—to work with various experts to try to find a cure for her husband's mental illness and with Gregory Pincus to develop "the pill." A suffrage leader, she later supported Planned Parenthood and built women's dormitories at MIT, "ending the long-standing excuse" that MIT could not admit more women "because no housing was available."³³ Vera Kistiakowsky (b. 1928) came to MIT in 1963 after teaching and doing research in nuclear and particle physics elsewhere and became professor *emerita* in 1994. She had been a director of the Council for a Livable World, which works for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Sheila Evans Widnall (b. 1938) has three degrees from MIT. She taught aeronautics there from 1964 to 1993, has edited journals in her field, and holds several patents. From 1993 to 1997, she served as secretary of the U.S Air Force.³⁴

Faculty and students are, of course, not the only women at a university. Since 1636, Harvard has relied on women to cook, clean, wash, and later to type, file, do research, and so on (as the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers [HUCTW] put it in a slogan used during its organizing drive in the 1980s, "Harvard Works Because We Do"). This necessary but invisible cohort became famously visible in 1929. On December 21 Harvard chose to fire the Widener Library "scrubwomen" rather than pay them the state-mandated minimum wage of thirty-seven cents an hour. (Harvard paid thirty-five cents; MIT was paying forty-seven cents for comparable work, the State House sixty cents.)

The scrubwomen's story brought Harvard and President Lowell adverse publicity nationwide. Investigations and student pamphlets followed, and soon a group of alumni—led by wealthy socialist Corliss Lamont—raised enough money to pay the women the difference between what they had earned and what they should have earned since the minimum wage was enacted in 1920. On December 25, 1931, Lamont divided \$3,880 among them, but "Harvard...remained recalcitrant," and the women did not get their jobs back. As it would do again decades later, "Harvard...claimed that its 'prestige' compensated for lower wages." (Again, the HUCTW had a succinct comment: "We Can't Eat Prestige.")

To replace the scrubwomen, Harvard hired men to clean Widener; because the minimum wage did not apply to them, they were paid only thirty-two cents an hour. In this case, protective legislation that applied only to women backfired. It had been a bone of contention among feminists, some advocating protective legislation for everyone, others arguing that it was politically impossible to secure protection for men.³⁵ The former were allied with the National Woman's Party, which in 1923 began to advocate an equal rights amendment, the latter with the League of Women Voters (LWV).

The LWV worked (and continues to work) on many issues of concern to voters. One item of business left unfinished by the suffrage amendment was jury duty for women. Pearl Katz Wise of Cambridge led a statewide legislative campaign in 1948 that

secured this right, and Agnes Goldman Sanborn, an officer of the LWV of Cambridge (LWVC), served on a jury from October 1 to November 2, 1951, about which she wrote:

This was the second or third session to which women jurors were called and it was therefore a novel experience for the women, the men jurors, and the court officers.... Usually [during the long waits] the women sat on one side in the so-called pool room, the men on the other.... Though there were a few foolish people and big talkers, on the whole both men and women seemed a conscientious group.... I was favorably impressed by the women. All of them were serious about their responsibilities.... The ones who came from an ordinary middle class housewife's background had a lot of common sense gleaned from the daily experience of life, and I felt that they put it all over me.

Although Sanborn learned that "accurate recall and honest intention" are always in question, "I shall never believe that the juries did not make a real effort to arrive at the truth."³⁶

A bacteriologist originally from New York, Sanborn had moved to Boston when her husband became secretary of the Museum of Fine Arts, and to Cambridge (7 Meadow Lane) in 1933 so their daughter could go to Shady Hill School. She was vice president of the LWVC and editor of its newsletter, co-founder and president of the Cambridge Community Center, and, later, a major supporter of the Committee of Responsibility, a Vietnam War-era organization that helped wounded Vietnamese children.³⁷ Earlier, as chair of the LWVC's committee on international affairs, she had helped get the Lend-Lease Act passed. Enacted in 1941, it enabled the president to sell, grant, lend, or lease war supplies to countries whose defense was considered vital to the defense of the United States. Before and during World War II, the Sanborn house (which from 1940 to 1974 was at 147 Brattle Street) was filled with students and refugees.

World War II refugees were the focus of another undertaking by Cambridge women, initially a group of Harvard faculty wives "deeply disturbed by [their] plight." Seeing that social agencies helped with immediate needs but left unmet "a need for a long range plan to fit the refugee into the community economically and socially," the women opened a shop with a large window at 36 Church Street, above the present Border Cafe, on May 2, 1939. There "the refugees could sell the products of their skills

and provide small services then unobtainable in Cambridge," such as mending, dressmaking, cake baking, and photography. Mary Mohrer, herself a refugee from Vienna, was in charge. Like the other women, "she knew nothing of merchandising" but she knew languages, had good taste, and learned "to adapt the best of European taste to that of a new country." So sweaters would be made with less heavy yarns and pastries with less costly ingredients. Patronage fell off during a very hot summer, but when Mohrer wore an Austrian dirndl to work one day, orders began to pour in from near and far.³⁸

In November 1939 the shop moved to 102 Mount Auburn Street and began to serve tea, then lunch, despite the inconvenience of a basement kitchen. In 1941 the Window Shop was able to buy 56 Brattle Street, adding 5 Story Street in 1950. By 1959 it had employed 451 people from twenty countries. Some were wives of men retraining to practice their professions in the United States, others were like "the former judge over 70 years old who otherwise would not be employable"; he typed and mimeographed the daily menu for what became a first-class Viennese restaurant. Labor policies were progressive, including part-time work, job sharing, morning hours for mothers, health insurance, and—for those who reached fifty-five—a cut in hours without a cut in pay.³⁹

After a visit to the shop, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote about it in "My Day," her newspaper column. Would-be emulators wrote for advice from the Midwest and the West, and Alice Cope, the shop's president, spoke on the radio, at social welfare conferences, and before the President's Commission on Immigration. The shop continued to serve new waves of refugees, especially Hungarians in 1956, but changing tastes meant a drop in revenue. The shop and restaurant closed in 1972, and 56 Brattle Street was sold to the Cambridge Center for Adult Education. For some years the Blacksmith House, a café and bakery still featuring Viennese pastries, continued to use part of the building and the courtyard; now the Hi-Rise Bread Company runs the café. [2020 update: 56 Brattle Street is now part of the Cambridge Center for Adult Education.] Meanwhile, the Window Shop scholarship fund for foreign students continued until 1987.⁴⁰

In its heyday, the Window Shop advertised in the LWVC's *League Items*. It offered to mend runs in nylon stockings, which were hard to come by during World War II.⁴¹ Agnes Sanborn, the league's wartime service chair, led a "Do Not Hoard" campaign and promoted Defense Bonds and Red Cross blood drives.

The LWVC tried not to neglect "other essential matters."⁴² Among these was a self-supporting high school lunchroom—an issue that Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, chair of the league's education committee, had addressed since 1934, when she surveyed other cities and learned that lunchrooms in Boston, Lynn, Medford, and Somerville were self-supporting and served healthful food. Cambridge, on the other hand, had no hot food or salads, sold candy throughout the lunch period instead of at the end, and cost the city \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year.⁴³

Schlesinger's suggestion to cut staff salaries was guaranteed to annoy some, as was her campaign in 1932 to stop school committee members from "dining extremely well in the midst of the depression" at public expense. In fact, the committee's chairman, Raymond FitzGerald, accused Schlesinger of "picayune prying into public peccadillos."⁴⁴ That didn't stop her from also taking on the issues of nepotism and corruption in the appointment of teachers, as in the 1942 case of domestic science teacher Gertrude Trant, who did not meet the city's requirements, already lower than the state's. "Having elected the teacher...the School Committee at the same meeting piously moved to raise the requirements for the position to those proposed by the State Department [of Education]," Schlesinger wrote.

Schlesinger's further efforts to make the school committee honest entailed a discussion with Mayor John H. Corcoran and an angry letter from him. "It is quite apparent to me," Corcoran wrote, "that you have no real desire to cooperate with me in regard to school matters.... I consider your statement regarding my position as a deliberate insult.... I feel that...it would be an absolute waste of time for me to hold any further discussions with you."

Ten years later, she was still at it. A 1952 letter to the editor of the *Boston Herald* pointed out that an "examination procedure for all appointments and promotions" had

been set up to replace “political horse-trading.” But, Schlesinger continued, “now this program is ignored and in its place four school committee members sneak their appointees, including three relatives, through the back door of politics into the school system, avoiding the front door of open competition.”⁴⁵ She campaigned, too, for the accreditation of Massachusetts teachers’ colleges and against teachers being solicited for funds for political candidates.

When Schlesinger died in 1977 at nearly ninety-one, one condolence letter paraphrased Camus: she “sought respite...in the very thick of the battle.”⁴⁶ Originally from Columbus, Ohio, she and her husband, Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., had come to Cambridge in 1924, when Harvard appointed him professor of history. They lived—and she composed her critical letters and reports—in the house she designed, at 19 Gray Gardens East. She also researched and wrote articles about women before women’s history was a discipline, and she encouraged her husband to “remember the ladies.”

Schlesinger evidently relished her role as a citizen gadfly, but there were other women who chose to go into politics.⁴⁷ Pearl Katz Wise, an LWVC activist, was the first female city councilor elected under Plan E. Wise was another immigrant to Cambridge, born in Russia in about 1901 and raised in Connecticut. Barbara Ackermann—the first woman mayor (1972–73) and one of a growing number of women to follow Wise on the school committee and city council—could have spoken for Wise, a mother of four, when she wrote: “What pushed me into politics was my parental interest in our public schools. Once I was in I was hooked.”⁴⁸ Privately, Wise was chair of the education committee of the Cambridge chapter of Hadassah, president of the LWVC (1942–45), and founder and first president of the Parents-Teachers Association at Cambridge High & Latin. Once in politics, she served three terms on the school committee (1949–55), one as vice chair, and was largely responsible for the construction of three new schools, the inauguration of a federally funded hot lunch program, and the establishment of a library in each public school. She then served four terms on the council. Politics seemed to come naturally to her; as one of her daughters wrote, at ninety-five Wise was “working the floor” of her nursing home “like an old pro pol...getting favors, extra help, etc.”⁴⁹

In 1957, the city's boards and commissions had a total of five women members and forty-two men. Noting this discrepancy, Wise filed a council resolution for equitable representation. In 1959, when she urged Mayor John J. Curry to appoint women to the Housing Authority, he responded, "I have never consciously discriminated against women at any time in my life."⁵⁰ Concerned with racism as well, Wise got the city to observe Negro History Week and ban race discrimination in public housing. She initiated a conservation commission and secured group health insurance for city employees and pensions for widows of former employees.

Another major concern was affordable housing. In 1958 Wise voted against the Riverview project. As she wrote to a constituent) "there was no guarantee that those displaced would be able to return to live in apartments within their financial reach," and "I am against the bull-dozer approach in seeking answers to housing problems."⁵¹ She voted against other urban renewal projects as well, and as she left the council, she earned effusive thanks from Julia Hamilton Smith, writing on behalf of the Riverside Neighborhood Association:

We owe you our gratitude for your courage when you...challenged the right of the government to take away people's homes under Urban Renewal while others sat in silence. The minority groups such as ourselves need leaders who understand our problems.... [W]e have been deceived by many who received our support and votes...but [who] after the election turned a deaf ear to our pleas.⁵²

Smith, an African American woman who had taught in Washington, D.C., for forty-three years, moved to Cambridge in 1947 to live with her brother at 12 Lee Street. Active in the YWCA and the Cambridge Community Relations Committee, she saw to it that blacks were hired in stores under the Fair Employment Act. Like Wise, she opposed urban renewal and especially the "Inner Belt" highway, convincing her neighbors that it would destroy a swath of Cambridge, including their "lovely residential area." Although she had escaped the "bitterness, indignity, humiliation of racial bias that thousands of Negroes have...been forced to endure...conscious of the horrible injustices of hate ... bigotry and vengeance...whenever I could, I raised my voice in protest."⁵³

Racism and other forms of prejudice have always been issues in Cambridge. In 1910 the Mothers' Club Playgrounds Committee had asked its workers, "On your teams composed of various nationalities, has there been any race feeling?" (At that time, "race" could refer to nothing more exotic than having Irish, Jewish, or Eastern European roots.) The answers, according to the committee, "proved that whatever small amount there was at first disappeared as the work went on." Abbie Brooks Hunt reported on several events involving what are now called "minorities." On April 13, 1917, she wrote, "Jennie & I went to a Patriotic Man meeting for colored people at our church [probably the First Unitarian Church in Harvard Square]. It was very interesting and the music was beautiful—A colored glee club of about 20 men sang."⁵⁴ On March 20, 1929, she remarked, "I sold my house this P.M. to a Mr. & Mrs. McCullough.... He is a policeman & they seem to be nice respectable Irish people, I hope the neighbors will not mind."

In a 1949–50 report, the executive director of the YWCA wrote that Cambridge "is about 75% Roman Catholic with many different racial and nationality groups...[which] do not mix.... The Y.W.C.A. is one organization that definitely brings people together."⁵⁵ Indeed, the group has pioneered good race relations both nationally and internationally, though some might find its being "a movement rooted in the Christian faith as known in Jesus" problematic, even if it "draws together...women and girls of diverse experiences and faiths."⁵⁶ When the YWCA of Cambridge grew out of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in 1891, active members had to be church members, though "any other young woman of good moral character" could be an associate member.⁵⁷

The Cambridge YWCA was founded for the "temporal, moral, and religious welfare of young women who are dependent upon their own exertions for support," but some church leaders opposed it for doing "Christian work not part of church work."⁵⁸ The organization struggled and thrived nevertheless. It has changed with the times, adding coed activities, groups for older women, summer camps, and classes in auto mechanics and self-defense. It has extended its work to the suburbs. And, with the school department, it has held prenatal classes for pregnant teens. When it built a new

residence in 1964, it had to turn away more than one hundred applicants. That spring, it collected books for Mississippi, “since many public libraries in the south are not open to colored people.” Clearly, the Cambridge “YW” was part of the struggle to overcome racial and other prejudices.⁵⁹

At the Shady Hill School, Katharine Taylor had encouraged black parents to apply and had worked to make their children’s experience at the school positive—rare among private schools in her day. At the Window Shop, as business improved and fewer refugees came, “Negroes were employed who proved most satisfactory and who said that the Window Shop was the best place in Cambridge for Negroes to work.”⁶⁰

And at Agnes Sanborn’s memorial service, her daughter recalled that

...some time in the mid forties, a Cambridge restaurant refused admittance to a black person. Out marched Agnes, taking me with her, and we joined a small group of sign-bearing pickets.... I was scared, but proud, and figured that if she could do it, so could I—I’ve avoided crossing picket lines ever since. Agnes took it for granted that...such unfairness must be challenged.⁶¹

Elizabeth Schlesinger criticized Lucy Wilson Benson, then head of the Massachusetts LWV, for not taking the lead on civil rights even when the

Cambridge and Northampton leagues had expressed some concern over the matter.... It is also quite depressing to read that you believe that in our own state “the League will never be able to be far ahead of the community as a whole.” This was not always so.... You certainly were ahead of the current thinking on the council reform.... Our difference lies in the choice of issues to work for.⁶²

In 1944, at the request of the American Defense–Harvard Group (which was organized during World War II to carry out various projects to aid the war effort), Schlesinger wrote “Instruction, Research, and Community Work at Harvard, Bearing Upon Problems of Group Prejudice and Conflict.” She found little relevant activity, except for “community activity...carried on by one small group of Harvard instructors who are called upon again and again.” In a characteristic dig, she added that “the writer is inclined to the view that the Harvard staff is not particularly distinguished from the

community at large in respect to its prejudices, or its attitude toward prejudice."⁶³ Schlesinger's observations are not far from those expressed in the 1949 YWCA report, which continues as follows: "There is definite cleavage between Central and Harvard Squares, i.e., the so-called town does not approve of Harvard, and Harvard Professors and Laboratory Assistants, as its own report states, do not know Central Square exists."

In writing about her response to racism, Julia Smith declared, "God reigns, & is a just God.... Righteousness must prevail," a sustaining faith evident also in the story of the Pearson sisters, Satyra P. Bennett and Ozeline P. Wise. The Pearson family hailed from Jamaica, where one grandfather had been a slave. Both sisters lived at 26 Mead Street and were devoted to St. Paul A.M.E. Church at 85 Bishop Allen Drive, holding numerous offices as "a sisterly team" —as trustee, Sunday School superintendent, and on various committees. Wise was the first African American employee of the Massachusetts Banking Department and a passionate advocate of education for black youth. "Parents and guardians," she wrote, "I advise you to make the sacrifice to keep your children in school as long as possible, encourage them to press forward, and assist them all you can....Children, go to school, learn your lessons, go as far as you can."⁶⁴ Bennett was for a long time treasurer of the Cambridge Community Center (while Agnes Sanborn was president).



Ozeline Wise, an active member of St. Paul A.M.E. Church and co-founder of the Citizens' Charitable Health Association, ca. 1982. (Portrait by Judith Sedwick for the Black Women Oral History project, Schlesinger Library Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

Together the sisters founded the Colored Charitable Health Association (CCHA) in 1948, with Bennett as president and Wise as treasurer. By 1955, the first C stood for *Citizens*. “Our goals are aiding and sustaining research for Arthritis, Heart Disease, Cancer and Birth Defects,” a 1970 statement explains. “We were founded...for the purpose of making the public more health conscious and to make an annual monetary contribution to national health drives.”⁶⁵

While the Pearson sisters and the CCHA focused on major illnesses, others were concerned with reproductive issues. A 1940 poll by Massachusetts birth control activists on repealing restrictive laws showed citizens favoring repeal by a comfortable margin, but referenda in 1942 and 1948 were defeated, largely through the efforts of the Catholic Church; priests’ homilies instructed parishioners to vote no. In 1966 the legislature finally permitted birth control information and devices, for married people only.⁶⁶ In 1974, a year after *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal, the Women’s Community Health Center (WCHC) began its short life, first at 137 Hampshire Street, as “the only women worker owned and controlled licensed free-standing clinic in Massachusetts.” It offered educational and medical programs, “work[ed] politically on local and national levels... and struggle[d] to create a viable workspace” for those who worked at the center. It opposed unnecessary Caesarean sections and episiotomies, drugs to slow or hasten labor, and the separation of mother and newborn.

In 1978 the WCHC moved to 639 Massachusetts Avenue. Self-help groups chose their own topics, and the center offered pregnancy screening, first-trimester abortions, child care during medical hours, and Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking staff. But while the center met the needs of many women, it faced “harassment,” and financial difficulties were a major factor in its dissolution in 1981.⁶⁷

The WCHC was one of several Cambridge institutions that attempted to carry on their work as collectives, eschewing leadership and hierarchy. New Words Bookstore also began in 1974, a four-woman collective in a one-room storefront on the Cambridge-Somerville line. In 1976 it moved to 186 Hampshire Street, where it carried books by and about women and nonsexist, multicultural literature for children and teens; hosted

readings; and became an “informal community center.” In 2002, suffering the fate of the many independent booksellers who have been done in by chain stores and the Internet, it ceased to be a bookstore and became the Center for New Words. According to the center's website, “The Center for New Words is dedicated to a simple mission: To use the power and creativity of words and ideas to strengthen the voice of progressive and marginalized women in society.”

[2020 update: the Center for New Words, with office and event space at the Cambridge YWCA in Central Square, continued until 2008.]

The saga of the New Words experiment as a collective is for now buried in its unprocessed records at the Schlesinger Library, but one can get some insight into the difficulties from the documents of Bread & Roses, a conglomeration of small feminist collectives that flourished in Cambridge from 1969 into the early '70s. A “Draft Internal Statement” of October 10, 1969, declares that “Bread and Roses is an organization of socialist women” and that it should “fight against male supremacy as it exists in all institutions and in its structural base, the bourgeois family.” Along with questions about membership and decision-making, the document asks:

How do we deal with our bureaucratic problems? — getting and renting an office, fundraising, setting up agendas and chairmen for meetings.... Many organizations have an executive, or steering committee to deal with certain functions. If we want no such thing, we have to find some other way to handle it. [One suggestion was] a secretary to do the minutes. This is a shit job and should be paid.... It may be possible to rotate it but that's a big bureaucratic hassle. ⁶⁸

Another Bread & Roses document also asks numerous questions, including the following, under the heading “Women’s Culture”:

- 1) What is women’s culture? What is its relation to drop-out culture? To freak culture?
- 2) Have we developed a sense of community? What communal forms, institutions, services, have we created? Is developing communal forms a priority? Do communities cut us off from other people?

And under “Organization, Structure, Leadership and Non-leadership”:

Is it possible to develop a structure which meets our needs, the needs of new women, and is able to divide leadership and shitwork functions in some equitable way?... What are the possible forms of leadership? Can leadership be different from elitism?⁶⁹

As, by their own admission, these were educated, mainly white (and in Bread & Roses, though not other groups, disproportionately Jewish) women, and as they were breaking new intellectual and social ground, the soul-searching was earnest and nearly endless. Eight women “started a friendship group,” asking “why the [women’s] movement [was] so competitive.” Another Bread & Roses document echoes that concern as it addresses a question posed earlier, “Do communities cut us off from other people?” One member chronicled the evolution of this group:

As we became personally vulnerable and supportive, we began to feel a real sense of responsibility to the people in the group—and a sense of commitment to the group itself.... As we began to participate and trust each other, we became almost giddy and condescending when we thought about how much better our group seemed to be than other groups we knew.... Naturally, this attitude caused a lot of hostility among women and men outside our group.⁷⁰

But it wasn’t all *Sturm und Drang*; they learned to use a potent weapon: humor.

WBCN wrote and ran a...spot announcement for the Riverside Drug Dependency Unit, which asked for volunteer doctors and therapists. “And,” it glibly continued, “if you’re a chick, they need typists.” The male supremacist assumption was that “chicks” by their very nature type; we do fifteen words a minute at birth and work our way up. Many phone calls later, they modified it to, “If you’re a chick and can type, they need typists.” No men need apply. It’s beneath male dignity, and besides, men will be too busy being those doctors and therapists, which, presumably, no “chick” can ever be.

Could a radio station get away with an ad that ran, “And if you’re black, we need janitors?”

Then, on Friday, February 13, 1970, thirty Bread & Roses women “stormed the offices of...WBCN,” got the station manager to grant them an hour of air time on March 8 (International Women’s Day), and presented him with

eight live baby chicks as a Valentine's Day present, "pointing out that women are not chicks."⁷¹

Amaranth, a feminist restaurant at 134 Hampshire Street, mirrored this incident in its "woMenu," which included Casseopeizza and a chickpea-spread sandwich called "Don't Call Me Chick" Delight. Run by a collective, Amaranth held shows of women's artwork, performances by musicians and poets, and discussions about housing and other current issues. But customers and money were in short supply, and a "severe financial and emotional crisis" soon led the women to close Amaranth's doors.⁷²

The women's liberation movement continued, of course, and continued to wrestle with important issues. A flyer that used capital letters only when needed for emphasis asked, "is women's liberation a 'lesbian plot'?" The flyer argued that:

women in bread and roses must begin to understand lesbianism, and deal with their fears and misconceptions about it. if gay liberation is given a verbal approval in a manifesto...women who are not gay must be prepared to defend this position to people outside the movement.... we will all be ACCUSED of lesbianism at some time.... if someone, female or male, asserts that women's liberation is a bunch of dykes, how would you respond?

Further probing about the attitudes of "straight" feminists points to a divide that for some years vexed the women's movement, and not only in Cambridge.⁷³

International Women's Day was an annual focal point for the movement. On March 8, 1971, feminists marched from Park Street in Boston to Harvard Square. Either some or all participants (memories vary) went on to 888 Memorial Drive, still identified by a sign over the door as the Hingham Knitting Factory but by then a Harvard building in minimal use by the Architectural Technology Workshop. [2020 update: Harvard demolished the Hingham Knitting Factory building at 888 Memorial Drive later in 1971 and eventually replaced it with graduate student housing.] There were twenty women in five teams, one of which had gone ahead that morning, loosened the boards on a basement window, and detained the one man at work there until the others came. Relays of women—about two hundred in all—occupied the building for nine days, demanding that Harvard provide a women's center. Supporters brought blankets,

flashlights, and groceries, including a lot of peanut butter, and the occupiers learned to deal with overloaded plumbing and with electricity: Harvard turned it off; they turned it back on. They organized day care for their children and held lengthy political discussions. The teams took turns keeping watch, and when the police came and read an injunction demanding that they leave, the women made so much noise that they could not hear it, making the injunction invalid. Later, when they learned that the police had a court order to evict them, they declared victory, painted their faces, left a note on the door, "Sorry, MDC police, we could not wait,"⁷⁴ marched noisily to Harvard Square and then to Old Cambridge Baptist Church, and issued a statement:

Today, those of us who have lived in and built a women's center in a Harvard building...have won a victory.... Our commitment to a women's center is well on the way to completion. We decided to leave the building so that the love and energy generated in the last eight days can be used towards the further creation of a center for women, rather than in the courtroom with legal hassles.

The second sentence turned out not to be an idle boast. Susan Storey Lyman, then director of the Radcliffe Fund and later chair of the Radcliffe board of trustees, gave the women \$5,000 for a down payment on a building; the gift was ostensibly from Harvard but was actually Lyman's own money.⁷⁵ As a result, there has been a Women's Center at 46 Pleasant Street since January 1972, "a place where we can learn to meet our needs and change society through collective alternatives in service, education, and action. The struggle to gain control of all aspects of our lives—our bodies, our jobs, our social roles, and our creativity—is the struggle of every woman."⁷⁶

The center launched, or became affiliated with, many programs and groups. The Boston Area Rape Crisis Center was an instance of "women helping women," but it also worked with police departments, mainly in Cambridge. "As part of the in-service training program of the police force," reads one document, "we have met weekly ...with veteran officers...to 'demythify' rape and to create an awareness as to the feelings of rape victims...[so] that the police officers will better understand all aspects of rape and be more sensitive in the investigation of rape cases."⁷⁷ Other projects included Self-Defense

for Women, the Feminist Therapy Research Project (“writing a manual on women’s experiences with traditional therapy”), a Women’s School, Transition House (a battered women’s shelter), and the Tooth and Nail Collective, “working to improve the physical structure of the Center.” Anyone who reads the weekly *Cambridge Chronicle* can see how busy the center continues to be. [2020 update: At the time of original publication of this article, the *Cambridge Chronicle* published weekly information about Women’s Center activities. This is no longer the case.]

The critique of the “bourgeois family” — together with beliefs about living communally, or at least cooperatively — brought about a wave of housing arrangements different from the single-family “American dream.” In 1957 at the age of seventy, Florence Luscomb began living in cooperative houses, “a classic example of an elderly person living on a fixed income” as real estate prices were climbing. Her housemates were in their twenties and thirties, students or working people “interested, as she was, in cheap rent and left politics.” For them it was an “experiment in communal living,” for her a permanent arrangement.⁷⁸ One group that included Luscomb moved together from 10 Kirkland Road to 11 Russell Street; Luscomb also lived with ever-shifting groups at 29 Bowdoin, 37 Pleasant, and 64 Wendell streets.

“If you expect me to cook I must have a sink free of other people’s dirty dishes. FL.”⁷⁹ This note, found among her papers, evokes the benefits and frustrations of communal living: the ease of coming home to a hot meal (and congenial company) when it’s someone else’s turn to cook, the unevenness of the cooperative impulse. Steven Seidel, who lived with Luscomb on Pleasant Street when she was in her early eighties, remembers her as reliable and independent, up to date on current events, a source of wonder to her housemates, and in demand as an anti-Vietnam War speaker.⁸⁰ In the 1970s she was the essential speaker about women’s history, a living link between the first and second wave women’s movements. Whatever one’s views about women’s liberation, it is clear that Luscomb, Bread & Roses, and the Women’s Center have been part of a movement that has profoundly changed American society.

One woman, not a member of Bread & Roses, who joined in the occupation of 888 was just beginning to work toward profoundly changing another society: South Africa. Caroline Hunter, with a brand-new degree in chemistry (1968) from Xavier University in her native New Orleans, had been hired as a bench chemist by Polaroid, a company reputed to be concerned with social justice and good to minority employees. There she met her future husband, Ken Williams, who had started as a janitor but was soon, thanks to his skill, working as a photographer. One day in October 1970, she and Williams happened on a badge tacked to a bulletin board; it bore a Polaroid picture and had been issued by the South African Bureau of Mines—one of the infamous passes that all black South Africans had to carry. Polaroid's instant film made it feasible to "shoot" people quickly, and its cameras were easy to carry to remote areas.

The next weekend, Hunter and Williams distributed a flyer: "Polaroid Imprisons Black People in 60 Seconds." They launched the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement (PRWM), were fired (Williams in January 1971, Hunter in March after her suspension in February), and testified to the UN Special Committee on Apartheid on February 3 and before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Africa on May 5. Meantime, Polaroid responded by asking the pair how they found out and by insisting that the passes were a small part of its business and that Polaroid was not in South Africa. The PRWM continued its active boycott until Polaroid left South Africa in 1977, and the divestment movement broadened to other companies and spread geographically, continuing until Nelson Mandela was released from prison in February 1990. Hunter and Williams found jobs at the Cambridge Public Library; after apartheid ended, she visited South Africa, finding enormous inequality between whites and blacks and, in the black townships, poverty, squalor, energy, and hope.⁸¹

Hunter is one among many Cambridge women whose activities have had an international impact. When Katharine Taylor retired from Shady Hill, she chaired the Unitarian Service Committee's child care project in Germany (1949–53) to promote services for children during that period of reconstruction, and she continued to work with international education agencies, such as the Fellowship in Israel for Arab-Jewish

Youth.⁸² Radcliffe's Ada Comstock helped found the International Federation of University Women and was vice chair of the Institute of Pacific Relations, an independent research agency with affiliates in Asia and Europe.⁸³ Gisela Warburg Wyzanski, of 39 Fayerweather Street, who herself was forced to leave her native Hamburg because of Nazi persecution, worked with Youth Aliyah during the 1930s to enable Jewish children to escape from Europe to Palestine. Olivia Abelson—of 5 Ashton Place, then 218 Hamilton Street—a math teacher originally from Philadelphia, was a mainstay of the antinuclear movement in Cambridge.

Another kind of international reach comes with immigration, which has contributed to Cambridge's vaunted diversity. The program for the Tercentenary banquet honoring Mayor Richard M. Russell on November 13, 1930, lists International Festival Committees by ethnicity: American, Afro-American, Franco-American, Greek, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Lithuanian, Polish, Scottish.⁸⁴

One Lithuanian family is made faintly visible by a small group of documents that neighbors rescued from the trash when the second and last daughter died in 2000. Jenny and Andry Sawicz were themselves immigrants, married in 1930, had two daughters, Genevieve and Adele, and owned rental property at 92-94 Pine Street. In the 1940s and '50s, Genevieve worked variously for S. S. Kresge, the city's recreation department, Wolf & Smith Druggists, Gorin's department store, and the Edwin R. Sage Company.⁸⁵

Of course most Cambridge women lived "ordinary" lives. Many worked in stores, as did Genevieve Sawicz, others at Draper Laboratories or NECCO or the Boston Woven Hose Company, in offices at Harvard, Lesley, or MIT, as dental assistants, nurses at Cambridge City or Mount Auburn hospital, in city offices or libraries, as waitresses at the Wursthause or Honey Bee or Turtle Café, at home as dressmakers, at night cleaning offices, and so on. And many put in thousands of hours of volunteer time with organizations already mentioned, or at East End Settlement House or Margaret Fuller House, or at their churches.

At Christ Church, for instance, in addition to managing the flowers, linens, silver, and brass for services, for many years the women held a Thursday Study and Work Day

for lectures and discussion, sewing, knitting, church office work, and the like. In 1956–57 the Tuesday Sewing Group sent layettes, operating gowns, and other items the members had made to agencies from Alaska to Puerto Rico. Women still raise money for the church and for related causes, partly through the Thrift Shop, which began in 1968 when the Shady Hill Thrift Shop on Huron Avenue closed and its experienced workers were willing to help start the shop on Farwell Place. We know more about these women than those at some other churches because two volunteer women archivists, Erika Chadbourn and Louise Todd Ambler, have consolidated and organized the church's records.⁸⁶

Nearly all, even the accomplished professional women, had absorbing domestic duties. Though Ada Comstock married only at the age of sixty-six, a week after leaving the Radcliffe presidency, the last three presidents were all mothers as well as academics. The three scientists mentioned above—Payne-Gaposchkin, Kistiakowsky, and Widnall—each raised two children. Pearl Wise, the politician, had motherly advice for her son David:

Keep a daily record of outlays. Keep a monthly record of your heating bills.
 Have all estimates for work you and Enid may be contemplating put in writing.
 Do not do business with relatives of relatives.
 Because your house is small, [electric] fixtures should not "hang down."
 Paint bookcase and chests gray like the floor, but you can use bright red or bright blue on inside shelves.⁸⁷

There is also a less pleasant side of domestic life. Transition House is one of several efforts to respond to domestic violence. Less dramatic but probably more common are Cambridge's many current divorcées. Abbie Hunt was also divorced—in 1906. There is no diary for 1901–06, but there are hints of trouble in the summer of 1900, when Freeman Hunt goes to Petersham—or does he? Then, on March 29, 1907: "I got my paper from the court... 'the decree absolute' today & so my married life is ended." We get a glimpse of her feelings only obliquely:

3 March 1907: Mrs. Tobey called this P.M. She has lost her youngest sister & she told us that this sister had undergone the same terrible experience which I have.

7 March: Beth came in the evening & read us some of Frank Elwell's letters to Mina. (She is suing for a separation & he wants a divorce), he is a horrid man.

Someone, perhaps a relative, has noted at the end of the 1914–18 diary that a “girlhood friend...informed Abbie of some of Freeman’s obvious ‘adultery.’ But Abby [*sic*] in getting divorce charged drunkenness, not adultery.” Whether this was to protect his reputation or her own we don’t know. We do know that when, in 1929, Freeman’s mental state deteriorated after he was “knocked down by an auto,” Abbie was solicitous and even contributed ten dollars a month for his keep in a mental hospital. And from the others she mentions, we gather that divorce was not quite as rare at the time as some like to think.

Perhaps what has changed most in matters pertaining to sex is not reality but perception and candor. On July 17, 1918, Hunt writes that her daughter Edith, married and living in Albany, “has been having a dreadful time, her maid was taken ill & the Dr. found she had Gonorrhoea (the horrid creature) and poor E. has had the house to clean & disinfect and do the work until she can get another maid.” The word *gonorrhoea* is underlined twice. Hunt clearly finds a poor woman infected by a lover (or perhaps a rapist) as blameworthy — “horrid” — as a man who wants to dump his wife. Perhaps it isn’t a fair comparison, but in 1975 Katharine Taylor, a “spinster” then almost 87, wrote to a younger woman:

I can well understand your plight, for several young women friends...are going through something very similar. The men they would like to live with are not free, so they are together intimately when feasible, and one such couple have been waiting several years until the man’s children are older and until he can work things out with his wife without too much damage.... Somehow our society seems to be becoming more flexible and freer about such relationships, outside of marriage “till death do us part.” I think it is all to the good.⁸⁸

Change is always a mixed bag, and one can both agree and disagree with Katharine Livermore, who in 1957 wrote a rueful poem for the forty-fifth reunion of the Berkeley Street School Association. She compares—then and now—clothing, household duties, education, and technology and concludes:

Schools and the world, since our young day
Are changed indeed, and I must say
I liked the times much better then.
I wish we had them back again.⁸⁹

But if we had them back again, we would not have Susan Hockfield as president of MIT, Margaret Marshall as Massachusetts chief justice and former university counsel at Harvard, Alice Wolf as former mayor and current state representative, and many other women in prominent positions; nor a Women’s Commission to look out for women’s interests; nor women on the police force, fighting fires, and on construction sites; nor young women assuming that that is how things are, unaware of what it took to get here.

Cambridge has changed, too. In 1955 the city was losing population, and Pearl Wise worried over it: “City tactically well run,” she wrote. “What is lacking is civic pride, joy of living in Cambridge....People need to be excited and want to stay here.”⁹⁰ Now nearly everyone wants to stay here. Surely we owe that in large part to the many women mentioned here and the many more who helped make Cambridge an exciting place to live.⁹¹

Endnotes

1. Dean Robert J. Birgeneau in his introductory comments to “A Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT,” *MIT Faculty Newsletter* 11, no. 4 (March 1999).
2. The 1988 video in which King was speaking was about the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at what was then Radcliffe College and is now the Radcliffe Institute. King was director from 1973 until her untimely death in 1994.
3. Interview on WHN, 19 March 1974. Florence Luscomb papers, Schlesinger Library, MC 394, no. 1.
4. Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 111. 5. Class Day, Berkeley Street School, May Thirty-First 1912, 13–14. Records of Berkeley Street School Association,

- Schlesinger Library, MC 238, no. 5. The British women used the term *suffragette*, which was generally pejorative here, where *suffragist* was the preferred term.
6. The elusive adjective looks most like *spicy*, which is unlikely, and may have been meant to be *inspiring*, with the first two letters omitted. All Abbie Brooks Hunt references are to Parmenter-Hunt Diaries, Cambridge Historical Society.
7. Of four referenda held in various states that year, the percentage of *ayes* was lowest in Massachusetts (35.5 percent), which one author ascribes to its being the “origin and home of the anti-suffrage movement” and to the influence of some “leading [Catholic] clerics.” Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 270–71.
8. Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History* (University of Illinois Press, 1991), 185–89. Scott derived the headings and the specific topics under them from Mary Ritter Beard’s *Women’s Work in the Municipalities* (1915).
9. Papers of Helen Jackson (Cabot) Almy, Schlesinger Library, A-84, no. 1.
10. *Ibid.*, no. 2.
11. *Ibid.*, no. 6. The full title was Special Commission to Investigate and Report on the Subject of Playgrounds for the City of Cambridge; Almy was to be “the member appointed by the mayor.”
12. Barbara Ackermann, *You the Mayor? The Education of a City Politician* (copyright Auburn House Publishing Co., 1989), xii. Quotation reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, Conn.
13. Records of the Mothers’ Discussion Club, Schlesinger Library, B-13, no. 3. Miss Alcott would probably have agreed that much of her work was too sentimental.
14. Household Record of Domestic Servants, 1889–1915, in Charles Rockwell Lanman papers, Harvard University Archives, HUG4510.36. Passages quoted courtesy of Harvard University Archives and Sally Cushman Lewis, granddaughter of Charles R. Lanman. Ms. Lewis told the author in a phone conversation on November 11, 2004, that Professor Lanman was kind but short-tempered and was known to yell at the servants, thus perhaps accounting for some of the early departures. Similar but briefer and more cryptic notes appear in a notebook of Sarah W. Dana for 1871: Dana family papers, Schlesinger Library, A-85, v. 38.
15. Parmenter-Hunt Diaries, Cambridge Historical Society.
16. Records of the Cambridge Home Information Center, Schlesinger Library, MC 276.
17. Records of the Cambridge Plant and Garden Club are at the Schlesinger Library. Information included here is from the finding aid.
18. Mary I. de Gozzaldi papers, Cambridge Historical Society, folder 19.
19. All quotes from proceedings of the Mothers’ Discussion Club are from the club’s records in the Schlesinger Library, B-13, no. 3.
20. Records of the Berkeley Street School Association, Schlesinger Library, MC 238, no. 1.
21. *Ibid.*, no. 3.
22. Edith Lesley in Carole Brandon, “An Investigation of the History of Lesley College: A Work in Progress,” unpublished paper for course HED 630, Fall 2000, p. 4. Thanks to Ms. Brandon for the use of her unpublished compilation of Lesley history.
23. *Ibid.*, 5-6.
24. Papers of Katharine Taylor (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 34. The letter, November 17, 1964, is a typed carbon copy to Taylor from A.M., probably Alva Morrison.
25. *Ibid.*, no. 39.
26. For a more detailed account of Radcliffe’s complicated birth and difficult history, see Sally Schwager, “Taking Up the Challenge: The Origins of Radcliffe,” in *Yards and Gates: Gender in the*

History of Harvard and Radcliffe (South Yarra, Victoria, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 87–108.

27. For a good brief biography of Comstock and a list of additional sources, see the entry by Barbara Miller Solomon in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, eds. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 157–59. The Harvard-Radcliffe Agreement is summarized in *Radcliffe Quarterly* 27:3, Aug. 1943, 26. See also the following in *Yards and Gates: "The Changing 'Harvard Student': Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,"* by Marcia Synott, 195–207, especially 198–99, and Ruth Hubbard, "Memories of Life at Radcliffe," 229–32.

28. Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, *An Autobiography and Other Recollections*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), viii (in Introduction by Virginia Trimble), 226–27.

29. Records of the Committee on the Status of Women at Harvard, Schlesinger Library, MC 172, no. 1.

30. *Ibid.*, no. 48.

31. For source ("A Study on the Status of Women..."), see note 1.

32. For a brief biography, see the essay by Janet Wilson James in *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Edward T. James, et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), vol. III, 143–46.

33. See the entry by James Reed in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, 440–42.

34. Information from *Who's Who in America*, 2003–04.

35. For quotes and a much more detailed account, see the excellent essay "Fair Harvard? Labor, Law, and Gender in the Harvard Scrubwomen Case," by Linzy Brekke, in *Yards and Gates*, 159–72.

36. "Five Weeks of Jury Duty," (transcript), January 30, 1952, in Agnes Goldman Sanborn papers (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 46. She wrote at the behest of Elizabeth Borden of the Women's Archives (forerunner of the Schlesinger Library), whose letter of November 19, 1951, is also present.

37. Agnes Goldman Sanborn papers, Schlesinger Library, especially nos. 42–46.

38. The dirndl consists of a sleeveless bodice, usually black or navy, fastened with buttons or a drawstring and attached to a gathered skirt, often of a print fabric. An apron may be added. A white peasant blouse with short, puffy sleeves completes the outfit.

39. See various histories in Records of the Window Shop, Schlesinger Library, MC 427, nos. 1, 5, and 6, and in no. 18 in the history by Ilse Fang in *Germans in Boston* (Goethe Society of New England, 1981).

40. Upon dissolution it donated its assets to the Boston Foundation, Northeastern University, and Radcliffe College.

41. League Items 15:9, June 1942, in Pearl K. Wise papers (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 39.

42. Minutes of 1943 annual meeting in Records of the League of Women Voters of Cambridge, Schlesinger Library, MC 264, no. 19v.

43. Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger papers (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 8.

44. *Ibid.*, no. 2.

45. Letter to the Editor of *The Boston Herald*, 18 March 1942, and other items in *ibid.*, no. 9.

46. Letter from a U.S. senator (signature illegible) to Arthur Schlesinger jr. in *ibid.*, no. 6b.

47. One of them, Florence Lee Whitman, was elected to the city council in 1925 as one of four at-large councilors, along with eleven ward representatives. She had already served two terms on the school committee (1915–16, 1924–25), school suffrage having been extended to women in the 1870s in recognition of their presumed (and often actual) special concern for children.

Information about Whitman supplied by Glenn Koocher.

48. Ackermann, *You the Mayor?*, xi.
49. E-mail message from Abigail Simons to Eva Moseley, 1996. Wise was a candidate of the Cambridge Civic Association but did not always follow the CCA line.
50. Papers of Pearl Katz Wise (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, nos. 86, 88.
51. Letter from PKW to Enricus Everetze (no date) in *ibid.*, no. 85. These apartments, now condominiums, are among the most expensive in Cambridge.
52. Transcript letter "Written for this occasion by Miss Julia H. Smith," (no date, 1963?), in *ibid.*, no. 90.
53. Unpublished memoir, 1971, Schlesinger Library, A/S651. See especially 38, 61–64, 69.
54. Here, as elsewhere, Hunt's thoughts and feelings tend to be so conventional that one can't be sure what she really believed, and many entries are quite opaque concerning her response to events.
55. Records of the Young Women's Christian Association of Cambridge (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 139.
56. 1972 annual report, in *ibid.*, no. 134.
57. 1891 leaflet, in *ibid.*, no. 35.
58. See "The YWCA in Cambridge" by Frances Cooper-Marshall Donovan, in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society* 36: 41–51 (1957).
59. *Your Y News*, May 1964, in YWCA of Cambridge records, Schlesinger Library, 36.
60. Muller history, p. 7, in Records of the Window Shop, Schlesinger Library, MC 427, no. 6.
61. "A Memorial Service for Agnes Goldman Sanborn, 1887–1984, February 12, 1984, Library, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.," in Sanborn papers, Schlesinger Library, no. 43.
62. Transcript cc. of letter from EBS to Mrs. Benson, July 15, 1964, in papers of Elizabeth B. Schlesinger, Schlesinger Library, no. 14.
63. *Ibid.*, no. 15.
64. "Education—Its Advantages to Our Group," (no date, 1950s?), p. 4, in papers of Ozeline Wise and Satyra Bennett (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 17.
65. *Ibid.*, no. 28. Biographical information from Wise obituary in no. 33 and for Bennett, no. 18, 26, 27.
66. See, for instance, David J. Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe v. Wade* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 91, 101, 118, 269.
67. Information from WCHC publications in manuscript department control file, Schlesinger Library.
68. Papers of Annie Popkin (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 30.
69. *Ibid.*, no. 39.
70. "A Boston Women's Group," by Marya Levenson, Judy Ullman, Marcia Butman, Nancy Hawley (no date), in *ibid.*, no. 5.
71. Statement presented to WBCN and press release in *ibid.*, no. 30. The recollections of one participant, Rochelle Ruthchild, differ somewhat from what these records tell us: "I remember driving in my 1969 Saab and hearing Charles Laquidara on WBCN announcing that Project Place needed volunteers and 'if you're a chick and can type,' they needed us. I was outraged, and I remember mentioning it at a Bread and Roses meeting. A group of us from Bread and Roses planned the action against WBCN, including getting the baby chicks. When we came in to their office, they were stupefied and agreed to give us one hour of airtime.... Somewhere in the course of this, I interviewed Laquidara.... He said that women's voices were too high for radio, among other stupid things...." E-mail message to Eva Moseley, June 18, 2004.
72. Papers of Rochelle Ruthchild (unprocessed), Schlesinger Library, no. 11.
73. Flyer in *ibid.*, no. 12.

74. The MDC was the Metropolitan District Commission, which administered parks and roads, including Memorial Drive in Cambridge. Its successor agency is the Department of Conservation and Recreation.
75. Thanks to participants Nancy Falk, Tess Ewing, and Rochelle Ruthchild for details of the occupation. Ewing has documents about it and Bread & Roses that are eventually to go to the Schlesinger Library. Ruthchild (letter to Eva Moseley, December 27, 2004) is the source of the information about the funds, for which Sue Lyman never took credit publicly.
76. Ruthchild papers, Schlesinger Library, no. 14.
77. Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, vol. 1, April [1975], in *ibid.*, no. 22.
78. Sharon Hartman Strom, *Political Woman: Florence Luscomb and the Legacy of Radical Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 12–13, 260.
79. Florence Luscomb papers, Schlesinger Library, MC 394. Some addresses listed in no. 53; note re: dishes in no. 59. Wendell Street address in Strom, *Political Woman*, 7.
80. Interview by Eva Moseley, May 21, 2004.
81. Williams died in 1998; Hunter is an assistant principal at Rindge and Latin. Information from interview by Eva Moseley, May 19, 2004, and from papers in Hunter's possession, eventually to go to the Schlesinger Library.
82. Katharine Taylor papers, Schlesinger Library, no. 1.
83. Entry in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*.
84. Program in papers of O. Wise and S. Bennett, Schlesinger Library, no. 10.
85. See Sawicz family papers, Cambridge Historical Commission. The neighbors who rescued the papers believed that many more had been lost.
86. Information from records of women's groups in Christ Church Archives.
87. Typescript, September 12, 1972, in Pearl Wise papers, Schlesinger Library, no. 14.
88. From a letter (ts. cc.) of April 7, 1975, in Katharine Taylor papers, Schlesinger Library, no. 19.
89. Berkeley Street School Association records, Schlesinger Library, MC 238, no. 27.
90. Notes in Pearl Wise papers, Schlesinger Library, no. 112.
91. I have included no doctors, lawyers, social workers, artists, or tenant activists; omitted Italians, Portuguese, Hispanics, Chinese, other Asians, and other important ethnic groups, important families with notable women such as the Cannons, and individual famous women such as Julia Child, Joyce Chen, and May Sarton (who appears in several manuscript collections cited here: Luscomb, Sanborn, Taylor). There is much more to say about women in the history of Cambridge!