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The End of the Best Men's College West of the Alleghenies:

Coeducation at Indiana Asbury University

Carroll T. Bible

History Seminar

12/11/2012

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History Seminar  
Professor Fancy  
Seminar Paper – 12/11/2012

### The End of the Best Men's College West of the Alleghenies: Coeducation at Indiana Asbury University

This action [i.e., the implementation of coeducation] was the beginning of the end of 'the best men's college west of the Alleghenies,' the end of a long fight to put such action through the Board, and the beginning of a struggle between the students, a struggle which constitutes one of the most dramatic episodes in the entire history of coeducation.

- Bettie Locke, Class of 1871<sup>1</sup>

On June 26, 1867, Indiana Asbury University, later known as DePauw University, joined other small religiously affiliated colleges across the country by deciding to admit women. Oberlin College pioneered coeducation in 1833. Iowa Wesleyan College, University of Mt. Union, and Hillsdale College were all founded as coeducational institutions in the 1840s. Lawrence College, Northwestern Christian University (later known as Butler University), and Monmouth College began admitting women in the 1850s. State Universities, such as the University of Iowa, University of Kansas, and University of Utah, began admitting women in the 1860s.<sup>2</sup> After the Civil War, colleges and universities with low enrollments and depleted funds adopted coeducation as a solution to solve their fiscal problems.

The Civil War thus served to break down many traditional nineteenth century ideas about women and their right to education. Post-Civil War circumstances opened the door for women to prove skeptics wrong about women's inability to thrive and find vocational meaning in higher education. The passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 also propelled the expansion of

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<sup>1</sup> Lilian Neiswanger, "First Coeds," Student Paper, 1935, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 6.

<sup>2</sup> George B. Manhart, *DePauw Through The Years: a brief historical sketch of Indiana Asbury University (1837 – 1884) and DePauw University (1884 0 – 1919)* (Greencastle, IN: DePauw University, 1962), vol. 1, 78.

coeducation higher education institutions. With the financial support and incentive from the federal government, many state governments in the Midwest and West chartered and funded the establishment of colleges and expanded the classical European curriculum to include more applied sciences including mechanics and engineering-related arts.<sup>3</sup> Land-grant colleges were established to educate the working, rural class in “practical and scientific agriculture knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> The act by itself did not make the admittance of women a requirement, but progressive ideologies following the Civil War and the economic necessity to sustain these institutions propelled land-grant colleges to individually admit women. Women at land-grant colleges learned how to better overcome hardships in rural, western life through domestic economy coursework and become more refined as cultural Victorian women through traditional Greek, Latin, and philosophy coursework.<sup>5</sup> According to education historian Page Smith, “By 1872 [five years after Indiana Asbury admitted women] there were ninety-seven coeducational colleges and universities in the United States, the great majority of them, like Oberlin, Antioch, and Knox, were denominational institutions.”<sup>6</sup> The coeducation movement in higher education is therefore central to America’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century history.

Histories have been written about the evolution of women in higher education; however, few have drawn attention to the pattern that religiously-affiliated higher education schools granted women’s admittance earlier than others. The thought that small religiously affiliated colleges were at the forefront of the advancement of women’s education is an idea that sits uncomfortably with contemporary critiques of religions’ conservatism. For example Andrea

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<sup>3</sup>Diana B. Turk, *Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women’s Fraternities, 1870 – 1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Andrea G. Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women & Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 96.

Radke Moss' book *Bright Epoch: Women & Coeducation in the American West*, describes different catalysts for the admittance of women (Morrill Act of 1862, financial constraints, etc.), the arguments of critics against coeducation, and the challenges women faced on campuses across the country.<sup>7</sup> However, she does not differentiate between women's experiences in secular and religiously-affiliated institutions. In a similar way, John Faragher's and Florence Howe's collection of essays – *Women and Higher Education in American History* – provides arguments for women to have access to higher education, descriptions of the limits of coeducation, and details about the careers college educated women pursued.<sup>8</sup> But again, this research does not explore religious influences to admit women and women's actions at higher education institutions. *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World* by Carol Lasser also explains the reasons for colleges to admit women and includes a case study of Oberlin College, the first university to become coeducational. Lasser mentions the influence of Christian virtues at Oberlin but does not extend it to other colleges and universities.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this research will explore the influences of religion, particularly Methodism, at Indiana Asbury in the context of the national trend in the late nineteenth century to admit women to higher education institutions. This paper will layout the foundational beliefs of Methodism, Indiana Asbury's road to becoming coeducational, the experiences of the first Asbury women at college and after graduation, and the establishment of exclusive female organizations. Through detailed analyses, I will demonstrate how Indiana Asbury's affiliation with the Methodist Church and students' Methodist faith dramatically shaped: 1. Indiana Asbury's decision to become coeducational in 1867; 2. the first collegiate women's experiences at Asbury and post-

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<sup>7</sup> Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*.

<sup>8</sup> John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe, eds. *Women and Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Carol Lasser, ed. *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

graduation, and; 3. the establishment of the women's fraternity Kappa Alpha Theta (1870) and the Philomathean literary society (1871).

### **The Foundational Beliefs of Methodism**

The Methodist Church became known for its value in higher education in the mid-nineteenth century. According to scholar James Burtchaell,

From 1829 to 1850 they [the Methodist Church] founded nearly 400 schools and colleges. They are reckoned to have established more than 1,200 schools. Though nearly 90 percent of them have closed, merged, or disaffiliated, the Methodists have founded and sponsored more colleges than any other Protestant denomination and, for a while, more than the Catholics.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike other Protestant churches, Methodists founded “literary institutions” for the laity, not necessarily for the clergy. “The academies and colleges were from the start intended for the laity – a devout and Pietist laity – and they grew in accord with their people’s social, economic, and cultural aspirations.”<sup>11</sup> The Methodist Episcopal Church opposed exclusive theological education and believed it more beneficial to learn concepts outside theology even if later one decided to become a minister.<sup>12</sup> Indiana Asbury was one of several permanent Methodist colleges founded in the 1830s. In the first session of the Methodist Indiana Conference in 1832, an education committee was established whose report stated, “We therefore think that seminaries and colleges under good literary and moral regulations are of incalculable benefit to our country, and that a good Conference seminary would be of great and growing utility to our people.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 260.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>12</sup> William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1933), 223.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

Methodists stood out amongst peer religions because their educational institutions were established to train the laity, not solely the clergy.

The Methodist Church remained steadfast in its commitment to higher education as Indiana Asbury University opened its doors to women in 1867. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1868*, there is an entire chapter dedicated to Educational and Benevolent Institutions. *The Doctrine* states,

*Quest.* How shall the Church provide for the higher education of her youth? *Answer.* It is recommended that wherever practicable each Conference have at least one academy or seminary under its direct supervision . . . it shall be the duty of each Preacher in charge to preach on the subject of education once a year . . . it is also recommended that each Conference take up annually a collection to aid the work of education.<sup>14</sup>

The Methodist Church had a definitive educational governing structure and funding mechanisms in place to support its institutions. Furthermore, *The Doctrine* of 1876 describes how it has a Board of Church Extension (composed of thirty-two ministers and thirty-two laymen for four year terms) and a Board of Education that offer the church hierarchy suggestions on matters related to education.<sup>15</sup> The established infrastructure shows that Methodists had a commitment to training its laity, men and women. As women began walking the halls of Asbury, the Methodist Church remained committed to serving the Methodist laity in higher education.

### **Indiana Asbury University Becomes Coeducational**

Indiana Asbury University's road to coeducation began twelve years earlier in 1855, before the Board of Trustees resolved to admit women. Each time the idea of coeducation or the

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<sup>14</sup> *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1868 with an appendix*, Cincinnati, OH: Hitchcock & Walden, 1876, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 236 - 237.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 168 & 390.

establishment of a Females Department was discussed, the Board of Trustees showed little interest in the idea, claiming that there were not enough monetary funds to grow the student body. Discussions were also, disrupted due to the beginning of the Civil War.<sup>16</sup> However at the June 1866 meeting, the Board of Trustees announced its decision to admit women:

Resolved 5 – That the Board stand ready & willing to meet all the obligations imposed upon them, as the corporation of a University to furnish to the people of Indiana facilities for the attainment of a literary, scientific, & professional education, without regard to the sex of the students, and that we hereby pledge ourselves to meet those obligations as means are provided.<sup>17</sup>

The Trustees Minutes do not include the discussion of what swung the decision in favor of coeducation. However with the knowledge that one third of the trustees were Methodist Ministers, all members of the board of visitors were Methodist Ministers, and the President of the University was a Methodist Minister, it seems logical to argue that religious reasoning played a role in the decision to admit women.<sup>18</sup> Indiana Asbury's decision to become coeducational in 1867 reflected the general views of the Indiana Methodist Church. In the end, the Board did not come to the decision to become coeducational easily or quickly; however, their 1866 decision drastically transformed Indiana Asbury's future as a nationally competitive college and its student life on campus.

Indiana Asbury University's affiliation with the Methodist Church was one variable that dramatically shaped the university's decision to become coeducational, as well as the priorities

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<sup>16</sup> Robin Kloppenburg, "Coeducation: Indiana Asbury – University," Papers History Seminar 490G – J. Schlotterbeck Fall 1978, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 3 – 5.

<sup>17</sup> "June Session 1866," Joint Board of Trustees and Visitors Minutes, 1852 – 1879. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 235.

<sup>18</sup> *DePauw University I.A.U Catalogue 1860 – 1870*, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

of its first women and the foundational values of the first women's fraternity, Kappa Alpha Theta. Before women had access to higher education, they educated themselves and were shaped by their own reading, diary keeping, and letter writing activities. Women were shaped by their informal education to carry out domestic responsibilities including teaching their children about religious faith. Linda Kerber, notable women's historian, explains that there were three main justifications for women's higher education: "religious self-appraisal . . . , service to the family by preparing oneself to teach one's children, and self-indulgence."<sup>19</sup> A central pillar to the Methodist faith was its commitment to educating the youth and passing down its religious values and biblical teachings. Charles Thwing, 19<sup>th</sup> century clergyman and educator, believed, "that intellectually both sexes are stimulated and helped by association with each other, and that morally the habits of each are improved or kept from deteriorating . . . [There] lays the foundation for the greatest spiritual development and inspiration of both."<sup>20</sup> Asbury became a coeducational institution with the hope that such beliefs would hold true. According to religious historian William Sweet, "It [Methodism] has perhaps been the most successful church in meeting the needs of the advancing frontier and for that reason was the largest factor in shaping the ideals of the great Middle West."<sup>21</sup> The Methodist church of Indiana strongly supported educating females because of the important role they played in educating the family and larger community. Alice S. Rossi, a historian of education, describes the Church's desire to have literate women provide religious instruction for their children and the societal need for more

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<sup>19</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Why Should Girls Be Learn'd and Wise?: Two Centuries of Higher Education for Women as Seen Through the Unfinished Work of Alice Mary Baldwin," in *Women and Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia*, eds. John Mark and Florence Howe (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 36.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Franklin Thwing, *The College Women* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1894), 114 – 115.

<sup>21</sup> William Warren Sweet, *Our American Churches* (New York: The Methodist Book Connection, 1924), 98.

teachers as the “entering wedge for women in higher education.”<sup>22</sup> Even though in the late nineteenth century, women were considered to be different from men in their capabilities, there were individuals who supported women’s access to higher education because they wanted women to be formally educated before instructing the next generation on Christian moral character.

Indiana Asbury University’s decision to become a coeducational institution rather than establish separate male and female higher education institutions was significant. Adopting the belief that it was morally right to educate women was one reason for this change. Coeducation resulted partially from the efforts made by the early women’s rights movement whose leaders asserted that coeducation was essential for ending separate spheres between men and women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading figure in the nineteenth century women’s rights movement, declared, “If the sexes were educated together, we should have the healthy, moral, and intellectual stimulus of sex ever quickening and refining all the faculties without the undue excitement of senses that results from novelty in the present system of isolation.”<sup>23</sup> Stanton argued that men and women should both have access to education because of its positive and healthy effect on moral and intellectual development. Coeducation was a milestone in higher education that invigorated men and women alike.

Asbury also transformed into a coeducation institution because of several other compounding reasons. For example others contended that exclusive women’s universities were inferior to exclusive men’s universities. They believed that men would actually benefit from the presence of women at University because of women’s moral instruction. Catharine Beecher

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<sup>22</sup> Alice S. Rossi, “Coeducation in a Gender-Stratified Society,” in *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World*, ed. Carol Lasser (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg, “The Limits of Access: The History of Coeducation in America,” in *Women and Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia*, eds. John Mark and Florence Howe (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 107 – 108.

Stowe, a major nineteenth century educator and supporter for the expansion of education to women as students and instructors, was also an advocate for refocusing education on the moral and intellectual development of children. She championed evangelical reform and advocated for women's education with men because she believed that women's unique characteristics could transform the male sphere to adopt additional moral qualities and Christian virtues.<sup>24</sup> Essential to her argument was the belief that women were innately different than men. Lori Ginzberg, professor of history and women's studies at Penn University, explained how Oberlin men tried to conform to the religious standards exemplified and lived out by female students.<sup>25</sup> Like Oberlin, Methodists at Indiana Asbury University supported coeducation because of the influence women would have on men's morals and the belief that education prepared both men and women for their future roles in society.

Despite overcoming the initial obstacles to admit women, Indiana Asbury women did not become fully included in the institution's academic structure until 1871. During the fall semester of 1867, women were restricted from taking "scientific courses," and from enrolling in the preparatory department.<sup>26</sup> The preparatory department was a school that young men attended before entering University in order to prepare them for the rigor of University classes. Therefore women were put at a disadvantage by going directly from primary school to University without any other formal pre-collegiate preparation. In 1868 the catalogue changed to allow admitted women to be eligible to take college classes on the same conditions as men, but the preparatory department did not accept women until 1871.<sup>27</sup> When the first class of women graduated in

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<sup>24</sup> Lori D. Ginzberg, "The 'Join Education of the Sexes:' Oberlin's Original Vision," in *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World*, ed. Carol Lasser (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 69 – 70.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Kloppenburgh, "Coeducation," 6 – 7.

<sup>27</sup> Manhart, *DePauw Through the Years*, 80.

1871, Dr. Bowman, the President of Indiana Asbury Univeristy (1858-1872), announced that “hereafter females will be admitted to the University at large on the same terms as men in every respect.”<sup>28</sup> The Board of Trustees also announced in 1871 that coeducation was a success and resolved to continue coeducation with the foresight that all American colleges and universities would follow.<sup>29</sup>

Despite women’s full inclusion being a process rather than immediate, coeducation had the potential to alter the course of Asbury’s development as a higher education institution. In fall of 1867, Bettie McReynolds Locke, Laura Beswick, Alice O. Allen, Mary Euphemia Simmons, and Amanda Beck – the latter did not graduate – became the first women to attend Indiana Asbury University.<sup>30</sup> These women carried the future of women’s education at Asbury on their shoulders. They were not readily accepted as peers by male students, as capable students by faculty, or even as reputable students by alumnae during their first years. The women had to prove critics wrong and thrive academically at Indiana Asbury in order to sustain the established coeducation system.

When they were admitted to Indiana Asbury, there were still strong objections to coeducation nationally and locally. Despite Asbury being a Methodist University with a Methodist Minister as President, objections to women’s education rose from outside and within the Church. One of the central objections was that women would be a “distracting influence to the scholars and women’s ‘inferior minds’ would lower class averages and retard progress.”<sup>31</sup> This critique was founded on upholding rigid beliefs concerning men’s and women’s separate spheres; as well as the idea that women, like Eve, would divert men’s attention and investment

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>30</sup> Kloppenburgh, “Coeducation,” 6.

<sup>31</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 27.

from important matters. Another objection elaborately put by Reverend John Todd was that women physically could not thrive in higher education. He argued:

[A Woman] will die in the process . . . The poor thing has her brain crowded with history, grammar, arithmetic, geography, natural history, chemistry, physiology, . . . Alas! Must we crowd education upon our daughters, and, for the sake of having them ‘intellectual,’ make them puny, nervous, and their whole earthly existence a struggle between life and death?<sup>32</sup>

Reverend Todd’s view shows how the Methodist Church hierarchy was not unified in supporting coeducation. Thus, some people with religious backgrounds supported coeducation while others did not. Despite these concerns and critiques, the first women showed that women were capable of succeeding and competing with men at the University level. The first women at Indiana Asbury University were conscious of these objections; consequently, they did everything in their power to disprove the critics’ ideas. 1867 was an important year that altered the course of Indiana Asbury’s history. The admittance of women challenged the status quo on campus and the national belief that women were intellectually inferior to men.

### **The First Asbury Women**

The first women took their academics seriously and achieved high grades at Asbury. Consequently, they were recognized for their exceptional performance by the University, community, and peers alike. Laura Beswick and Bettie Locke delivered speeches in calico dresses during their sophomore class annual review.<sup>33</sup> The men sitting in the audience and delivering speeches themselves responded to rumors of elegance by dressing in “long frock

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<sup>32</sup> Amy Cox, “Breaking Ground: College Women in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” Fall 1986: Family and Community Final Project, Archives of DePauw U University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 1 – 2.

<sup>33</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 26.

coats, stiff shirt bosoms, and if they were fortunate, huge watch chains.”<sup>34</sup> It appeared the male students attended the speech recitations under the notion that it would be a gala rather than primarily an intellectually-stimulating event. Contrastingly, by wearing ordinary school girl dresses the women were making the statement that they were not at school to dress up and participate in frivolous activities but rather were there to learn and challenge themselves. The women allowed their speeches to captivate center stage in both content and vigor because they prevented the focus from being on their femininity and female elegant gowns. The *Banner* explained the women “put to shame, if that was possible, the male sprigs who so strenuously resisted their entrance to the university.”<sup>35</sup> The *Banner* applauded the content and vigor of women’s speeches instead of focusing on their dress or presentation. In fact, the Greencastle residents expressed awe of the females’ verbal abilities in comparison to Asbury men’s speech performances. Thus, the admittance and success of Asbury women affected those at the University and the broader community even if it was simply an altering in perspective.

Women’s successful academic performances eased the minds of critics or skeptics who questioned whether women’s admittance would lower the standards and competitiveness of Asbury with other Universities. For example, one of the academic examiners in the same 1868 performance objected to the notion that university women discredited Indiana Asbury when he explained:

It was a novel sight to find in the halls of old Asbury five lady freshmen, yet all who witnessed the examination could but feel that it was a privilege worthily bestowed, and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>35</sup> William Warren Sweet, *Indiana Asbury-DePauw University 1837 – 1937: A Hundred Years of Higher Education in the Middle West* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1937), 118.

that there need be no fear by any young man in the university that the standard of the university character will suffer from its lady collegians.<sup>36</sup>

The academic examiner captured the idea that the admittance of women was transformative and new, but previous doubts should be put aside because Asbury women demonstrated that they were intellectual peers to Asbury men. Student peers at University even began to change their perspective after witnessing the women's abilities. Like Laura and Bettie, one of Hannah Fitch's classmates, Howard Hickman, Class of 1874, described at a reunion that,

Jennie [Hannah's nickname] was easily the best student in our class. When I entered college I believed co-education a mistake and that the course I laid out was too heavy for girls to carry but when Jeannie entered the class and became accustomed to the routine it was no time until I had to concede my error.<sup>37</sup>

Howard's explanation showed the impact high achieving females, like Hannah, had on the success changing the public's viewpoint about coeducation. Even President Bowman acknowledged in 1869 that "the young ladies have done well in their studies, their presence in the classes has been productive of decided good to the other sex, and time has demonstrated the wisdom of their admission."<sup>38</sup> When Asbury became a coeducational institution in 1867, administrators and male students were skeptical of whether the "experiment"<sup>39</sup> of admitting women would succeed; however, the first women of Asbury demonstrated that they were intellectual peers to men in the classroom.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>37</sup> Archibald Shaw, May 22, 1930 Letter, Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Sweet, *Indiana Asbury-DePauw University 1837 – 1937*, 116.

<sup>39</sup> "Patricia A. Palmieri. "From Republican Motherhood to Race Suicide: Arguments on the Higher Education of Women in the United States, 1820 – 1920." Found in *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World*, ed. Carol Lasser (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 49.

1871 was a landmark in women's academic achievement at Indiana Asbury because it was the first graduating class that included women, the first graduation that had two female commencement speakers, and the first graduation class to have a female valedictorian. In 1871, Alice Allen, Mary Simmons, Bettie Locke, and Laura Beswick (four of the original five women who enrolled in Asbury fall of 1867) graduated among thirty-two other male students. Laura Beswick and Bettie Locke both gave commencement addresses that alluded to the strong opposition they experienced from male students and administrators inside and outside of the classroom.<sup>40</sup> The *Banner* of Putnam County described how their speeches were met with approval.<sup>41</sup> Bettie Locke had earned the title Valedictorian, but Indiana Asbury authorities asked her to decline the reception of the honor in favor of bestowing the honor on a future Methodist Minister. However, Bettie Locke held her ground when she said she was "entitled to be Valedictorian."<sup>42</sup> Thus, Bettie fought for her rights and achieved the highest academic achievement possible at the university. This act demonstrated that despite admitting women, some Asbury authorities (with good probability of some being Methodist Ministers) were still not fully committed to the education of women, at least not the education of women as men's equals or superiors. The Methodist hierarchy was not unified in fulfilling its purpose of educating the entire laity on equal terms demonstrating the gradual acceptance and implementation of coeducation. However, the 1871 graduation class is noteworthy because individually and collectively the first women at Indiana Asbury generally disproved notions that women were less capable than men of achieving high grades and that women physically could not keep up with the pace and amount of learning at a higher education institution. Despite all the

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<sup>40</sup> Sweet, *Indiana Asbury-DePauw University 1837 – 1937*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Donna Kay Cunningham, "Bowman – The Man," 1956, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

obstacles, the early women at Indiana Asbury excelled in the classroom and often times outdid collegiate men in their academic performances – the “experiment” was deemed a success.

Bettie Locke, Laura Beswick, Alice Allen, and Mary Simmons all had close ties to Methodism and its value for education. Bettie Locke was the daughter of Dr. John W. Locke, Methodist minister and Professor of Mathematics at Indiana Asbury University.<sup>43</sup> Dr. Locke wanted his daughter to attend a “real university” as opposed to the Wesleyan Female College in Cincinnati.<sup>44</sup> Like Bettie, Laura Beswick was the daughter of a Methodist minister who valued education for both men and women. Initially Laura was going to attend a female seminary, but instead received a family scholarship to attend Indiana Asbury University.<sup>45</sup> Alice Allen was also academically ambitious and wanted to become a teacher; before attending Indiana Asbury University, she attended a Presbyterian academy in Waveland, Indiana.<sup>46</sup> Lastly, Hannah Fitch was the first woman to attend Indiana Asbury from outside of Putnam County. Her father placed great importance on women’s education; he once said, “If I had to choose between educating his sons or his daughters he would educate his daughters. The world would educate his sons.”<sup>47</sup> All four women were likely shaped by their family’s religious backgrounds and value placed on higher education.

The student paper *Asbury Review* was a central part of student life at Indiana Asbury. It is not surprising that there are noticeable Methodist influences. The Lady Correspondent, a female student’s pen name, wrote October 2, 1867 in her article “Old Things Have Passed Away,” described the reasoning of the authorities to admit women: “They are seeking to gain for woman that which rightly belongs to her and the first step toward this result will not be accomplished

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<sup>43</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 9.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 9 – 10.

<sup>47</sup> “Hannah Fitch Shaw – A Memory,” Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN.

until she is admitted to our college on *equal footing* with the gentlemen.”<sup>48</sup> Essential to her argument is the notion that women have a right to be educated as men’s equals, thus employing the Methodist notion that the laity should be educated. Methodists promoted education because it heightened moral and intellectual zeal, both elements exemplified in the Lady Correspondent’s language. Furthermore in her article she offered additional reasoning for Indiana Asbury to admit women. She stated,

As Christianity and refinement advance, woman is becoming more and more exalted. So firmly has the spirit of reform infused itself into the ideas of thinking men that it has filled their minds with a restless longing to raise the oppressed from the position in which the hand of the oppressor has placed her.<sup>49</sup>

The Lady Correspondent praised Indiana Asbury University for admitting women. She explained that coeducation was supported because formal training alongside men made women more equals and less submissive and deferential. Thus western progressive ideas were not inherently contradictory to religion but rather came out of religion.

Echoes of positivist philosophy were present in the Lady Correspondent’s article. Despite wanting to establish a separate religion, Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, also promoted women’s leadership and active role in shaping society.<sup>50</sup> According to historian Mary Pickering, Comte advocated women being freed from “economic and sexual exploitation.”<sup>51</sup> In a similar way, the Lady Correspondent described how oppressed women were in relation to man.<sup>52</sup> Comte argued that women have a “positive identity” when they were called to “participate in the

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<sup>48</sup> Lady Correspondent, “Old Things Have Passed Away,” in *Indiana Asbury Review*. October 2, 1867. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Mary, Pickering, “Auguste Comte,” In *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theories*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000), 34.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Lady Correspondent, “Old Things Have Passed Away.”

public sphere and aid the spiritual power in reorganizing society along moral lines.”<sup>53</sup> One of the goals of achieving a positive revolution was placing empathy at the center of society; Comte believed the participation and leadership of women was the only way to achieve this type of harmonious social unity and consequently eliminate anarchy.<sup>54</sup> It is not entirely clear when or where the Lady Correspondent was introduced to the ideas of Auguste Comte, but it is possible that she learned positivist philosophy from taking an Asbury classical course. If the professor was trained at an east coast institution, there is the possibility that he was taught positivist philosophy because positivist philosophy arrived to the United States in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Additional research would be needed to investigate this postulation. However what is certain is that the Lady Correspondent included central ideas of positivist philosophy in her article “Old Things Have Passed Away.”

Even though the Lady Correspondent embraced coeducation in the October 2, 1867 issue of *Asbury Review*, later issues presented (December 17, 1867 and January 9, 1868) a more hostile reaction to coeducation by viewing the admittance of women as an act or digression rather than progression. Templar, a male student’s pen name, wrote in the article “Females in Asbury,” “Mixed schools have never attained any great celebrity; they can point to no Yale, to no Harvard, nor have any of them been ranked among the first-class institutions of our country.”<sup>55</sup> He described the presence of females at Indiana Asbury as “a sad oppression, grievous to endure.”<sup>56</sup> In the article he called on students, “Let us present an almost unanimous petition to the Board of Trustees for a change of affairs [i.e. put an end to coeducation] . . . Then, and then only, will we feel once more like *students* of a respected *University*, and not like little

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<sup>53</sup> Pickering, “Auguste Comte,” 36.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> Templar, “Females in Asbury,” in *Indiana Asbury Review*, December 17, 1867. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.

*urchins in a district school.*”<sup>57</sup> As demonstrated, Templar was an agitator who strongly disagreed with the University’s decision to admit women. He is used the student newspaper to project his viewpoint and bring about change in support of his understanding. The editorial also described how not one alumnus looks on the “innovation” of coeducation favorably.<sup>58</sup> Alumnae threatened the University to withhold financial support if Asbury remained open to women. The alumni were supporting the achievement of their own personal goals – the end of coeducation<sup>59</sup> As a result, both the current male students and male alumnae acted in self-interest.

The faculty of Indiana Asbury defended its collegiate women students and its decision to become coeducational by publishing statements that supported women’s education. In 1870, the faculty was predominantly composed of Methodist Ministers – The President, Vice President, Professor of Mathematics, Professor of Greek Language and Literature, Harmon Chair of Biblical Literature, and Instructor of Modern Languages, Hebrew and History. The only faculty members that were not ministers were Lewis Rogers, Professor of Latin Language and Literature, and John Ridpath, Professor of English Literature and Normal Instruction.<sup>60</sup> In response to the articles criticizing coeducation published in the *Indiana Asbury Review*, the faculty “[r]esolved that the President be instructed to say to the parents of the girls who are members of the University that it has been and still is the purpose of the Faculty to extend to the ladies of the Institution the same care and protection that are given to male students”<sup>61</sup> at their January 29, 1870 meeting. By publicly making this commitment, the faculty demonstrated that

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Editorial. *Indiana Asbury Review*. January 9, 1868. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

<sup>59</sup> *The Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Numbers 1, 2, and 3, in one volume, designed for consecutive study in Sunday Schools and Families*, New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1852, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 31.

<sup>60</sup> *DePauw University I.A.U Catalogue 1860 – 1870*. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 21.

many Methodist ministers were committed to the education of women as men's equals. They wanted to offer the same respect and support to women as men. Despite the possibility of the faculty being persecuted by the alumni and losing funding, they believed that treating male and female students respectfully and equally, as well as providing support to those who have been personally attacked was in the best interests of the Methodist University

Furthermore, in response to the male student's and alumni's articles in the *Review*, on January 29, 1870, the faculty presented and passed a motion that reprimanded those who had degraded female students and offended the administrators of Asbury. The motion read:

Whereas sundry articles have appeared in the *Asbury Review* grossly disrespectful to the Methodist ministry of Indiana, to the Trustees, & the Faculty of the University and discourteous to the Young Ladies attending the Institution: Resolved that in the opinion of the Faculty it is due all concerned that the editors of the *Review* make a public and full disavowal of any endorsement of the offensive language of the said articles.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, the faculty explicitly state that the language Templar and alumni employed in the *Asbury Review* was offensive not only to the women of the institution but also the Methodists ministry which supported coeducation. The faculty believed that coeducation was supported by and came out of religion – it was not contradictory. After the motion was passed, four men of the newspaper appeared in front of the faculty to apologize and express their willingness to comply with the faculties' requests.<sup>63</sup> In the February 5, 1868 issue of the *Asbury Review*, the editors published a public apology that stated,

We are sorry to learn that certain articles which have appeared in recent numbers of the *Review*, have been construed as personal, but some of the members of the institution. It

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 22.

certainly is not the design of the editors to publish anything that would reflect upon the personal character of any one, and we are assured that such was not the intention upon the part of our contributors. We trust this will be sufficient apology for anything that may have occurred thus far, and that, by proper care, all will go on prosperously and pleasantly hereafter.<sup>64</sup>

While the institution supported free speech, the writers of the *Asbury Review*, had been “overzealous” in exercising their rights from the perspective of the faculty.<sup>65</sup> By publicly disciplining the offenders, the faculty publicly showed their commitment to the education of women.

Lottie C. Hill responded to Templar by defending coeducation and the premier status of Indiana Asbury as a competitive institution. In the February 27, 1868 issue of the *Asbury Review* Lottie C. Hill wrote, “It matters not where or when a man may be educated if he is truly good and great, in the applauses won for noble actions the name of the university is swallowed up.”<sup>66</sup> She was directly responding to the notions that because Harvard and Yale do not have female students, Indiana Asbury was less of a prestigious institution and had a lesser ability to produce bright minds. She asked skeptics to give more time to the Asbury women to prove their excellence – six months was not a significant amount of time.<sup>67</sup> Lottie Hill was a proponent of coeducation and advocate for the women of Asbury.

Furthermore, Lottie Hill stressed how women’s access to higher education would allow women to better fulfill their role in home. She stated,

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<sup>64</sup> *Indiana Asbury Review*. February 5, 1868. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

<sup>65</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 21.

<sup>66</sup> Lottie C. Hill, “Why Not?” *Indiana Asbury Review*, February 27, 1868, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

We can only plead for *female* education. It has been admitted that woman's work is a vast one – not as a legal voter, but as a teacher and trainer of the human race. We ask nothing more for her than that she may be fitted for her work . . . She is rendering efficient service now all over the United States as a teacher and the call for her services is multiplying daily. But how can she work unless she is qualified; and how is she to be qualified if she is debarred from the privilege of an education just because she is a woman?<sup>68</sup>

Lottie employed the notion that females had a moral right to be educated in order to fulfill their sex-specific role in society. The admittance of women to Asbury was not for the purpose of women being capable of working in men's sphere. She did not endorse radical ideas that women were equal to men or that women should have the legal right to vote. Rather, she simply supported the notion that female education made women more fitted and qualified to fulfill their work duties. They become more qualified to carry out the duties within their own sphere, that of teaching the moral principles and values to the next generation. She affirmed,

As a Methodist, I would advocate nothing that would lower the standard of a Methodist college; but if one of the best Methodist colleges in the West can be so magnanimous as to freely throw open her doors to this 'foreign element,' as our friend [Templar] styles it, then should benedictions be drawn towards her instead of ridicule. And if the students and alumni, instead of groaning and crying out under this heavy burden, would cheerfully encourage their frail sisters, and inspire them with some of their self-reliance, then would they be displaying that magnanimity that they have always displayed toward the weak.<sup>69</sup>

Hill employed Methodist values in her article because she argued that people should display acts of "magnanimity" – compassion, generosity, and kindness – to everyone but especially those

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

who are weak or on the outskirts of society.<sup>70</sup> Thus, she demonstrated that coeducation and the acceptance of women at Indiana Asbury University hinged on upholding Methodist standards and values found in the Beatitudes and Catechism.<sup>71</sup> Throughout her article, Hill also connected coeducation and the fair treatment of women to Victorian ideals of separate spheres. Both Methodist ministers and the administrator of Asbury believed, like Hill, that women needed access to education in order to fulfill their sex-specific role.

The battle over women's rights to higher education at Indiana Asbury not only took place on the pages of the *Asbury Review*, but also occurred daily at chapel, in classrooms, and in extracurricular societies. Every day the students gathered in chapel at 7:30 am, and each day male students attempted to prevent women from entering by forming a human wall at its entrance. President Bowman noticed the obstacle women faced attending chapel, so he escorted them to chapel each day for their entire first year.<sup>72</sup> The young women reasserted their right to be present at chapel and more importantly the college, by taking a front row seat each day.<sup>73</sup> By President Bowman, a Methodist minister, protecting the rights of women to attend chapel, he was showing the Methodist ministry's commitment to women's education. In the classroom, women theoretically had equal rights to male students, but women's rights not realized. Many boys were Civil War veterans who showed "ridicule, disapproval, [and] indifference;"<sup>74</sup> gentleman would indulge in exchange of knowing winks and insinuating nudges under the very noses of the professors who had opposed coeducation."<sup>75</sup> Women's peers and faculty dissuaded

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *The Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Numbers 1, 2, and 3, in one volume, designed for consecutive study in Sunday Schools and Families*. New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1852. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Donna Kay Cunningham, "Bowman – The Man," 1956. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Neiswanger, "First Coeds," 15 – 16.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

women from actively participating in class by making them feel ostracized. Asbury women were also snubbed walking back to their homes and local boarding houses by local women and former friends at the Greencastle Female Seminary.<sup>76</sup> Indiana Asbury women were also excluded from literary societies, Platonean and Philological, which were central to university extracurricular life. There were also male fraternities at Indiana Asbury dating back to 1845 with the establishment of Beta Theta Pi. By 1870, there were six male fraternities that excluded women from becoming initiated members (Beta Theta Pi, Phi Gamma Delta, Sigma Chi, Phi Kappa Psi, Delta Kappa Epsilon, and Phi Delta Theta).<sup>77</sup> Barred from participating in University organizations, women were effectively excluded from leadership positions. Unless women founded their own groups and societies they would have no access to membership or leadership in co-curricular groups on campus.

### **The Establishment of Exclusive Female Organizations at Indiana Asbury**

The histories of women's fraternities are closely intertwined with that of coeducation in higher education. An editorial in the *Lawrenceburg Gazette* claimed, "[I]t was the organization of these societies that assisted in more way than can be estimated to make the coeducational movement what it now is in university life."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the establishment of Kappa Alpha Theta was significant for coeducation's success at Indiana Asbury University. By instituting an organization equal to men's literary societies and fraternities, men slowly accepted the idea of coeducation as a reality rather than a temporary experiment. By winter of 1870, there were fourteen young women at Indiana Asbury; all of whom were excluded from college life and

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>77</sup> Jack L. Anson and Robert F. Marchesani Jr, *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Baird's Manual Foundation, 1991), II – 50 – II – 51.

<sup>78</sup> "Much Loved Lady: After a Lingering Illness Passes to her Final Reward," *The Lawrenceburg Gazette*, XCIX, No. 49. Lawrenceburg, IN, Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN.

participation in student organizations.<sup>79</sup> However, on January 27, 1870, Bettie McReynolds Locke, Alice O. Allen, Bettie Tipton, and Hannah Fitch established the first female fraternity – Kappa Alpha Theta. Lilian Neiswanger describes how on the first day following initiation the women of Kappa Alpha Theta donned their kite shaped badges and “Men crowded around after class to ask innumerable questions and a spirit of camaraderie developed between the men and women students.”<sup>80</sup> Kappa Alpha Theta was not readily accepted by all of the men or faculty at Indiana Asbury, but their establishment gradually fostered acceptance and friendship between the sexes because men and women now had parallel organizations. Dr. Ridpath, Indiana Asbury Professor of English Literature and Normal Instruction, articulated in May 1890, “After the establishment of Kappa Alpha Theta’s Alpha Chapter, it was never seriously questioned at DePauw University that the women would hold their place, that they would be admitted henceforth to all the advantages and honors of the institution, and would share equally in all particulars the benefits which it gave.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the establishment of Kappa Alpha Theta helped ensure the survival and success of coeducation at Indiana Asbury because women were no longer outsiders, but peer students with their own organization, secrets, and inherent friendships.

There has been a substantial amount of research published that describes fraternities as social societies bringing together people of similar interests to mingle with the opposite sex; however, little research has explored the empowering nature and moral basis of women’s fraternities and the contributions these women’s fraternities had on higher education.<sup>82</sup> Frances Becque’s dissertation “Coeducation and the history of women’s fraternities, 1867 – 1902” takes

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<sup>79</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 31.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>81</sup> John Clarke Ridpath, “Beginnings of Kappa Alpha Theta, May, 1890,” Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Frances De Simone Becque, “Coeducation and the History of Women’s Fraternities 1867 – 1902,” PhD diss., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, April 2002, 3 & 180.

a historical perspective on the establishment and early development of the first seven female fraternities. She identifies several trends including that the majority of women's fraternities were founded at coeducational institutions, where they served as "safe havens of encouragement, fellowships, and adherence to the common ideals and values worthy of the noble womanhood."<sup>83</sup> She also identifies that six of the original seven women's fraternities had Methodist roots.<sup>84</sup> The first two trends have been explored by several historians, but the later has not. For example the histories of Kappa Alpha Theta that have been written – Estelle Dodge's *Sixty Years in Kappa Alpha Theta 1870 – 1929*,<sup>85</sup> Carol Wilson's *We Who Wear Kites*<sup>86</sup>, or Diana Turk's *Bound by a Mighty Vow*<sup>87</sup> – do not comprehensively explore the Methodist bases of Kappa Alpha Theta's mission and developments, seeing as it was established at a Methodist school by Methodist and Christian women. Therefore, the research done on the influences of Methodism at Indiana Asbury and the establishment of Kappa Alpha Theta (1870) is an important contribution to the field.

Dr. Locke and Dr. Ridpath encouraged and helped the founding of Kappa Alpha Theta. Dr. Locke was Indiana Asbury Professor in Mathematics and the father of Bettie Locke, the founder of Kappa Alpha Theta; Dr. Ridpath was Professor of English Literature and Normal Instruction. Dr. Locke introduced the idea that Bettie Locke should establish a women's secret society after Bettie declined Phi Gamma Delta's pin because they would not initiate her to be a

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<sup>83</sup> Frances DeSimone Becque, "Coeducation and the History of Women's Fraternities 1867 – 1902." PhD diss., (Southern Illinois University Carbondale, April 2002), 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>85</sup> Estelle Riddle Dodge, *Sixty Years in Kappa Alpha Theta: 1870 – 1929* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1930).

<sup>86</sup> Carol Green Wilson, *We Who Wear Kites: The Story of Kappa Alpha Theta 1870 – 1956* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Company, Inc., 1956).

<sup>87</sup> Diana B. Turk, *Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870 – 1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

full member.<sup>88</sup> Dr. Ridpath, Bettie's professor and Dr. Locke's Beta Theta Pi fraternity brother, gave Bettie the contact information to a jeweler, John F. Newman, in New York who made fraternity badges. Through Dr. Locke and Dr. Ridpath's instruction, Bettie Locke and Alice Allen learned Greek and Latin, as well as how to run a Greek organization. Dr. Locke and Dr. Ridpath were influenced by their own fraternity experiences as Beta Theta Pi brothers, in addition to their academic expertise. These relationships and free guidance helped Bettie and Alice successfully establish a women's fraternity. Dr. Ridpath describes, "It was plain that those who were protected by such a relation [fraternity] fared better, and perhaps lived longer in College, than they could otherwise have done . . . The women perceived they might as well have the advantages of organization and sisterhood as those who were at the time their persecutors."<sup>89</sup> But in the end, it was the women who developed the badge, chose the members, and wrote the constitution and secrets – women originated and started the first secret women's fraternity and those who joined thrived at Asbury.

Kappa Alpha Theta, the first Greek-letter fraternity known among women, also has religious roots. In Article IV, Section 1 of its first amended constitution, the five original officers were listed: President, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Treasurer, and Chaplain.<sup>90</sup> The June 19, 1872 minutes stated,

After the minutes had been read and adopted the subject of devotional exercises was discussed, the universal opinion prevailing that we include them in our opening exercises.

Thereafter, a motion was made and carried that the constitution should be amended by

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 30 – 32.

<sup>89</sup> John Clarke Ridpath, "Beginnings of Kappa Alpha Theta," Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 2.

<sup>90</sup> "Constitution and By-Laws of K.A.O Society," College Chapters Early Chapter Minute Books: Alpha DePauw 1870 – 1876 (transcript copy), Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN, 177.

adding to the list of officers a Chaplain whose duties will be to read a chapter from the Bible and offer a prayer at the beginning of each meeting.<sup>91</sup>

It is notable that the members of Kappa Alpha Theta voted unanimously to make religion and prayer an integral part of ritual and tradition. This action and the belief held by all its members demonstrate that the founders and early members' were greatly shaped and inspired by their religious faith. For most it was Methodism, and for one or more it was another Christian denomination. Consequently, they made "devotional exercises" a priority in their organization.

Kappa Alpha Theta also was founded on the vision of fostering educated ministers' wives and learned mothers, which upheld Methodists' vision for coeducation, the Victorian idea of domesticity, and the values of many rural women. In Kappa Alpha Theta's Constitution Article II, Section 1, the objectives of the society are stated thus: "To advance the interests of its members; to afford an opportunity for improvement in composition, elocution and debate; to cultivate those social qualities which become women, and to provide for its members associates bound by a common interest."<sup>92</sup> Kappa Alpha Theta strove to encourage the highest achievements academically while remaining in the sphere of womanhood. In the nineteenth century, women were recognized for establishing and governing over kinship system. According to nineteenth-century historian Nancy Osterud, "Women extended the norms of reciprocity which governed relationships among kin to their neighborhoods and the entire community. They upheld the principle of kinship as the basis for social interest groups."<sup>93</sup> Therefore, it only

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<sup>91</sup> "June 19, 1872 Minutes," College Chapters Early Chapter Minute Books: Alpha DePauw 1870 – 1876 (transcript copy), Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN, 68.

<sup>92</sup> "Constitution and By-Laws of K.A.O Society," College Chapters Early Chapter Minute Books: Alpha DePauw 1870 – 1876 (transcript copy), Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN, 176.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 2.

seemed natural for collegiate women to seek out and establish a group of their own united in mutual exchange and support.

Furthermore, Article V, Section 3 described qualifications for membership; it stated that new members “sustained a good moral character, evinced a social disposition and received high standing in her studies.”<sup>94</sup> Notably, Kappa Alpha Theta did not see a contradiction between feminine moral characteristics and high academic achievement. They were not contradictory but rather complimentary. All members also had to pledge or affirm that they would “promote their intellectual and moral welfare, and likewise to have a due regard for their temporal wants if occasion.”<sup>95</sup> Thus not only was good moral character and academic achievement requirements for membership, the same characteristics were fostered and encouraged concurrently as members. Kappa Alpha Theta supported women’s high academic accomplishments in the name of fostering learned, moral women. They therefore, lived out the Methodist value and purpose of educating the laity precisely for the reasoning of fostering moral people through learning.

In addition to Kappa Alpha Theta’s constitution revealing the link between intellectual achievement at college and good moral character, one of the college papers by Hannah Fitch, a Kappa Alpha Theta’s founder, showed the complimentary role between a university education and motherhood. In Hannah’s paper, graded by John Clark Ridpath, she explained the challenges and the different paths one might take in choosing an occupation. Throughout her essay she stressed the importance of making “an honest effort” to earn a living and possessing “diligence and perseverance.”<sup>96</sup> Specifically to women, she wrote, “While some are waiting for the ‘ballot’ or clamoring about ‘rights’ let those who expect to succeed in any vocation pursue the work of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>95</sup> “Constitution and By-Laws of K.A.O Society,” College Chapters Early Chapter Minute Books: Alpha DePauw 1870 – 1876 (transcript copy), Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN, 179 – 180.

<sup>96</sup> Hannah Fitch, “Choosing an Occupation,” Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN, 1.

preparation quietly, steadily, and with true womanly grace and dignity.”<sup>97</sup> Hannah was not a leader of the women’s rights movement fighting for the right to vote; she simply supported the right of women to have a vocation without sacrificing the qualities and dignity women innately possessed. In her paper, she directly responded to critics who argued that a college education was only for those pursuing learned professions, which is outside of the possibility for Victorian woman, when she said:

‘What advantage will calculus be in housekeeping’ what use will Astronomy and Geology be in cooking? And what good will Greek or Latin do a young lady in society . . . . Whatever tends to develop the nobler faculties, to strengthen the reasoning powers or to cultivate and refine the taste is of practical importance and it should be the constant aim of every student to acquire an education as liberal and extensive as circumstances will permit. <sup>98</sup>

Hannah recognized that many women, including herself, would pursue life in the home, but she argued that the learning done in college was advantageous for men and women alike. In the nineteenth century the dominant gender relations paradigm was separate spheres meaning that there was a “difference between women’s and men’s work, place, and character; relations between the sexes were seen in terms of complementarity rather than commonality.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, women were not seen as subordinate or secondary to men, but altogether different. By promoting women’s education, Hannah was not over-turning the status quo. Her core argument was that women benefited from higher education because a formal education refined their culture and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>99</sup> Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4.

taste; this learned finesse would then be taught to their children. Furthermore she explained in detail the influence a college education had on women's role as Christian mothers and nurturers:

If influence of domestic life is molding character and giving love to society has been correctly estimated, surely nowhere does a liberal education promise a richer harvest than within the sacred precincts of home. Good wholesome cooking and a well regulated house are items too important to be overlooked or neglected, yet a knowledge of books need not and does not conflict with domestic duties, but on the contrary, rather tends to make them pleasanter and in every way adds to the sum of happiness at home.<sup>100</sup>

In Hannah's paper, "Choosing an Occupation," she demonstrated her own education through her eloquent use of language and witty style. She was a learned woman who fervently believed that her education would help her better fulfill her role in domestic life and find personal happiness. Like Hannah, the trustees and faculty of Indiana Asbury supported the education of women because only through formal education and training could the laity, males and females, best fulfill their separate vocations. Through the acquisition of knowledge Hannah would be better able to regulate the home, shape her children's moral character, and create a warm and loving environment. Therefore, Hannah Fitch successfully made the argument that women's higher education supports women fulfilling their role in the domestic sphere.

Similarly to Hannah Fitch's Paper, the opening article in *The Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine* Volume II (September 1887) defended women seeking a higher education. Epsilon chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta at the College of Wooster published an article that explains, "It was the old-time idea, that of education for utility alone, which so long barred woman from a liberal culture . . . The flaw is that we do not perceive the spiritual law that mental power in one

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 4.

direction is mental power in another . . .”<sup>101</sup> The critique had been that women’s college education would not translate into power or influence in their roles as housewives. The author of “Education for Girls” acknowledged that most women will pursue domestic, wifely duties in the home but advocated that “Knowledge is power” in any and every direction, even domestic.<sup>102</sup> She made the religious argument that men and women are made in the likeness of God, and thus have a right to pursue a higher education.<sup>103</sup> Epsilon used religious rooted arguments to defend women’s education without arguing that women should pursue roles outside of the home.

Women at Indiana Asbury were never admitted to the literary societies Philological or Platonian, but by their own initiative, the women of Indiana Asbury established a female literary society – Philomathean. According to historian Andrea Radke Moss, “Most college students after the Civil War considered participation in a literary society a necessity for both academic and social success.”<sup>104</sup> Literary societies typically met weekly and conducted business the first half, followed by literary activities including performances of memorized recitations, poetry, and speeches on various topics.<sup>105</sup> Just like Kappa Alpha Theta, the Philomathean Society fostered the highest academic achievements and moral character. The *Banner*, the local paper in Greencastle, Indiana, described the opening meeting of the literary in the following way: “The ladies certainly did themselves no discredit on this, the first public performance of their Society. On the contrary their performance was an honor to Asbury; a credit to the Society and their sex.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, women gained access to both a female fraternity and female literary society

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<sup>101</sup> Epsilon. “Education for Girls.” In *Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine* II, no. 3 (September 1887), Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Alpha Chapter, Greencastle, IN, 85.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 80.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>106</sup> Neiswanger, “First Coeds,” 38.

that fostered academic excellence and leadership, and more importantly, they improved their standing at the collegiate institution and in Greencastle.

### **Early Asbury Women Post-Graduation**

The early women of Indiana Asbury University embodied Methodist values of missionary and charity in their pursuits after college graduation as well. For example, Hannah Fitch Shaw was described as “the able and interesting teacher of the Woman’s Class of Hamline Methodist Episcopal Church.”<sup>107</sup> She was both a mother and active church participant. Similarly Bettie McReynolds Locke Hamilton became a wife and mother after graduation, but she also became an instructor at the Illinois Institute for Deaf and Dumb serving those less fortunate than herself.<sup>108</sup> Alice Allen Brant received her teaching certification, and she served as a high school principle in Attica, IN, taught at Plymouth, IN, and was the superintendent of Essex, IA. Moreover, she served in church offices of Trust and Responsibility and was a mother of two.<sup>109</sup> These three women’s post-graduate work suggest that educated women did not overturn the notion of separate spheres but pursued work in the Church, community outreach and education.

Indiana Asbury statistics suggest that educated women married less often, bore fewer children, and worked outside the home more often than women who did not pursue a higher education; however, more research could solidify such conclusions. According to Annie Noland’s analysis in 1995, sixty-eight of the first one-hundred women of Indiana Asbury/DePauw University married.<sup>110</sup> Sixty-eight percent was significantly lower than the

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<sup>107</sup> “Our Golden Wedding Anniversary,” Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Indianapolis, IN.

<sup>108</sup> Martha Ridpath, ed., *Alumni Record: DePauw University*, (Greencastle, IN: DePauw University, 1920), 45.

<sup>109</sup> “History of Alice Allen,” Archives of Kappa Alpha Theta, Alpha Chapter, Greencastle, IN, 2 – 4.

<sup>110</sup> Annie S. Noland, “Strength, Spunk, and Spirit: DePauw University’s One Hundred Women Graduates, 1874 – 1889,” December 14, 1995, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 5.

average overall marriage rate in 1867 which was ninety-six percent.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore of the sixty-eight who married, only thirty-two had children between 1874 and 1889.<sup>112</sup> Again the childbearing rate was significantly lower than national statistics.<sup>113</sup> The large differences between Asbury and national rates could be partially accounted for by premature death, unrecorded miscarriages, or infant mortality, but more research would be necessary to make such explanations. Furthermore, almost half, forty-eight, of the first one-hundred women graduates of DePauw University described themselves as teachers.<sup>114</sup> This large statistic demonstrates that many women used their education to teach the next generation arithmetic and rhetoric as well as good moral character. Even though more Indiana Asbury women were working outside the home than the general adult women's population at the time, they were typically not working in occupational fields that were categorized as male. As a result, coeducation did not radically destroy the practice of gender spheres; however, it did usher in a greater acceptance of women working outside of the home serving the community in addition to being housemakers.

The academic success of women at Asbury helped promote Indiana Asbury/DePauw University to be the premier college in Indiana. In 1878, Indiana Asbury had 431 students enrolled and 37 graduates, thus surpassing other peer Indiana institutions in both total student enrollment and number of those who graduated. For instance, Wabash had 205 students and 18 graduates, Indiana University had 311 students and 23 graduates, and Butler had 204 students and 6 graduates.<sup>115</sup> By solely looking at these statistics, Indiana Asbury appears to be the most influential and premier higher education institution in Indiana because it reached the largest

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<sup>111</sup> U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *One Hundred Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics United States, 1867 – 1967*, December 1973, [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_21/sr21\\_02\\_4.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_21/sr21_02_4.pdf) (accessed December 10, 2012).

<sup>112</sup> Noland, "Strength, Spunk, and Spirit," 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>115</sup> Sweet, *Indiana Asbury-DePauw University 1837 – 1937*, 132.

amount of students. One of the trustees noted in 1887 that “[i]t has now become no uncommon thing to see the fair sex with the sterner kind struggling up the hill of science. It is sometimes hard to tell which will get there first. But anyhow the pathway is not so lonesome as it once was.”<sup>116</sup> By transitioning to coeducation in the late 1860’s and having its early women academically succeed and establish supportive women’s societies, women at Asbury became a strength and asset to the University. Both men and women benefited from collegiate women’s presence.

## **Conclusion**

DePauw University was significantly shaped by its Methodist roots especially in the early years of coeducation. As evidenced by student newspaper articles, women’s academic papers, and women’s collegiate establishments, religious values and the ideals of women as essential moral educators were reflected in Asbury women’s thoughts, actions, and future career choices. Indiana Asbury joined the national trend of admitting women into higher education institutions because of the desire for religious self-evaluation and the provision of religious and moral instruction to children. Despite women of Indiana Asbury not being readily accepted by male peers, faculty and staff, and former peers at the local female seminary, they fought to establish their equal right to higher education, but for profoundly different reasons than men. Proponents and opponents of coeducation were significantly influenced by their own religious interpretations; however the beliefs of the Methodist Ministers at Asbury proved to be more in line with advocates and defenders of women’s education. Thus, the large majority of Methodist Ministers in Indiana believed that coeducation came out of religion, not contrary to it.

The early women at Indiana Asbury embodied a flexible understanding of the Victorian woman who served the Church, kept the home, and taught the youth with collegiate training;

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 119.

they did not advocate for women to have the right to vote, become ministers, or practice medicine like men. However, Bettie McReynolds Locke, Laura Beswick, Alice O. Allen, Hannah Fitch, and other women still academically thrived at the University and often times exceeded their male peers in the classroom. The women wanted to be free from exploitation both during their time at Indiana Asbury and in their graduate years. Thus, some of the first women founded the first female fraternity – Kappa Alpha Theta – which reflected the values of religious exercises, provided leadership training, and strove for academic excellence. Therefore, the first women at Indiana Asbury did not completely depart from the Victorian era and ideals of womanhood, but they rather re-interrupted their role and added the necessity of being educated in order to pass on moral education to the next generation and exemplify the values of charity and generosity.

This article prompts further research especially in regard to whether the patterns witnessed at Indiana Asbury can extend to other religiously affiliated coeducational colleges and the colleges that established female fraternities in the late nineteenth century. Did Methodist backgrounds and values affect women's goals in higher education and participation in co-curriculars during their collegiate years? Did the early women at these universities completely break from the ideals of a Victorian woman or did they compromise the ideals in a manner similar to the Asbury women?

In addition to this explorative new research, additional research can be done on Indiana Asbury University. When did its Methodist origins diminish shaping faculty members and students' values and actions? Were internal factors – such as the rise in social partying, the adoption of new curriculum, or the expansion and diversification of the student body – or external factors – such as the spread of the progressive era's ideas, the beginning of World War

I, or the prompted struggles the Great Depression – responsible for the diminished influence of Methodism on collegiate campuses? This paper serves as an example or model for future research on religion and its influence on women in higher education, but the time period and scope of actions can be expanded nationally and locally on Indiana Asbury’s campus.

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