Educating the modern woman: Girls’ college preparatory schools in Virginia, 1900-1930

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Educating the Modern Woman:
Girls’ College Preparatory Schools in Virginia, 1900-1930

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JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY
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This work is dedicated to my mother, whose passion for girls’ education will always inspire me.
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Abstract

In the early 1900s, women pursued higher education and employment outside of the home in growing numbers. As women’s educational opportunities expanded, the need for college preparation also increased. This study examines the development of four all-girls’ college preparatory schools in Virginia from 1900 to 1930, focusing on the ways in which notions of gender influenced the creation and execution of the schools’ guiding visions and curricula. It also examines the roles students played in the development of these programs and shows students’ wide range of responses to the purpose and goals of their own education. Through the academic curricula, athletic programs, efforts at character education, and social preparation, administrators presented students with contradictory messages about what it meant to be a modern woman in the early twentieth century. Administrators promoted active and assertive leadership in many areas of school life, but they also encouraged women’s commitment to domesticity, passivity, and service to others. Students responded to the missions and programs in many ways, which included promotions of the administrators’ goals for girls’ education and challenges to their visions. The contradictions in the administrators’ views and the diversity in the students’ responses demonstrated the complexities surrounding definitions of proper femininity in the early twentieth century.
Introduction

On a beautiful spring day in 1925, the students and faculty at St. Catherine’s School in Richmond, Virginia, gathered on the green in the middle of campus for the annual commencement ceremony. After the awarding of certificates and diplomas, Louisa Bacot Brackett, serving in her first year as Headmistress at the school, addressed the crowd about the accomplishments of the senior class. She stated, “We are delighted to announce that (almost) every one of the girls in the graduating class of 1925 has each a definite aim in view. Each girl enters upon some course that takes her further in her preparation for life.”\(^1\) Acknowledging that many other classes of graduates had also accomplished this goal, Mrs. Brackett reinforced the benefits that she saw in the continued education of young women in the early twentieth century. She concluded, “We wish to urge all the girls and their parents to make their plans in time and comprehensive enough for it is so disheartening when a girl wakes up to latent desires for college or other work to find she has not the preparation she needs to fit her for her choice.”\(^2\) By encouraging her audience to make early and detailed preparations, Mrs. Brackett left open a wide range of possibilities for these young women’s futures, which included college and other types of work. While she was speaking to both parents and students, the headmistress’ emphasis on “her choice” suggested that she thought the ultimate decision about young women’s futures should be left to the students themselves. In her sendoff to the graduating class, Mrs. Brackett sent the message to these young women that they could be responsible for the decisions regarding their futures.

\(^1\) Commencement Program, 1925, 1-2, St. Catherine’s Archives, Richmond, Virginia.
\(^2\) Commencement Program, 1925, 1-2, St. Catherine’s Archives.
As more women pursued higher education at the beginning of the twentieth century, the demand for college preparatory schools for women increased. A number of private girls’ schools emerged during this time in the state of Virginia, and each institution dealt with the complex issue of forming a mission and guiding philosophy. As the founders of these schools contemplated the purpose and goals of their programs, each had to confront the question of what type of women they wanted their schools to produce. School administrators gave the young women who attended these schools conflicting messages about what it meant to be a proper woman in the early twentieth century. While girls were encouraged to be competitive both academically and athletically and were placed in important leadership roles in extracurricular and social activities, these schools also reinforced traditional notions of femininity, including a focus on women’s passivity and domestic duties. Although administrators put forth their own visions for the purpose and content of girls’ education, students also thought about and responded to the established goals of their schools’ programs. These young women wrote about their experiences in yearbooks, student newspapers, and personal scrapbooks, and many of them both supported and challenged different aspects of the administrators’ views and school programs. The contradictions inherent in the missions, curricula, and programming of these schools as well as the efforts by educators and students to comprehend their roles within school life demonstrated the shifting dynamics of the goals for women’s education and the definitions of femininity in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

The debate over the potential benefits and drawbacks of rigorous education for women had been occurring in many areas of public discourse, including medical and
other academic journals, popular magazines, and newspapers since the late nineteenth century. Educators discussed the goals of women’s schooling alongside many other proposed changes in the American education system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the activists of the Progressive Movement sought to reform many areas of American life, educators also advocated a wide range of changes in the schooling of young men and women. Historian Lawrence Cremin described these efforts in his seminal work, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*, as “a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals.” Cremin identified efforts to expand the function of the school to include health, family, and community life as a key aspect of these reform movements. He also pointed to the inclusion of psychology and other social sciences in the development of curriculum and pedagogy and the attempts to tailor instruction to many kinds of learners as two defining characteristics of education reform during this time. While there were some unifying themes that connected the many reform efforts, scholars have also noted the multiple agendas of the Progressive Education Movement, as different reformers advocated for a wide range of changes and programs for the American education system. For example, some educational philosophers like John Dewey called for the school to become a “social center” that prepared children for citizenship. In response to the

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growing industrialization and urbanization of the country, vocational education also took hold in many of the public school systems in the United States. Educators in both private and public education turned to new pedagogical tools that promoted child-centered education. Scholars have concluded that the wide variety of efforts had lasting significance for the American education system, shaping curricula and programming development for much of the twentieth century.

In the process of initiating these and other reforms, activists and educators also faced other specific questions about the content, quality, and goals of education for girls. In particular, Americans discussed the proper expectations and preparations for women’s futures, showing the changing definitions of femininity in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Proponents of more conventional notions of femininity that limited women’s higher education ranged from leaders in the medical community and academia to average men and women who wrote editorials and letters in magazines. One of the leading and most vocal opponents of the changes in women’s education in the late nineteenth century was Boston physician Edward H. Clarke. In *Sex in Education; or A Fair Chance for the Girls*, originally published in 1873, Clarke based his arguments on the assumption that men and women were fundamentally different and possessed inherently separate strengths and weaknesses. Arguing from a physiological standpoint, Clarke suggested that while these differences did not signify the inequality of the sexes, women should not try to enter into traditionally male fields, including extensive or rigorous educational

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pursuits, as they were not physically fit for such tasks. Similarly, G. Stanley Hall, a prominent psychologist, shared Clarke’s concerns over the transformation of women in American society. Hall characterized the woman of the turn of the twentieth century as “just now in danger of lapsing to mannish ways, methods, and ideals, until her original divinity may become obscured.” This threat to a woman’s “divinity,” meaning her ability to reproduce, echoed arguments made by Clarke that tied female social roles to physical health. Medical personnel used biological and physiological arguments about threats to femininity in their efforts to restrict women’s access to higher education.

Other authors tended to stress the idea that women did not need higher education because it was not practical for their future social roles as mothers and wives. One woman articulated this sentiment in an article for The Ladies’ Home Journal in 1900, arguing, “Tens of thousands of anxious mothers to-day, uncertain what to do with their daughters, are bewildered with the public clamor of admiration for college education.” The perceived abandonment of women’s roles as mothers for the pursuit of education frightened the author. She articulated this concern by stating, “the man eternally remains the man, and the woman the woman; and…education is most profoundly wise which recognizes the difference and trains a girl thoroughly for her own womanly work and her own place in life.”

Other women from elite backgrounds in the early twentieth century wrote in magazines and journals with similar arguments warning about the negative

11 Clarke, Sex in Education, 13-14.
15 “Is a College Education The Best For Our Girls?,” 15.
consequences for women’s domestic roles if they spent too much time on their education in academic subjects. Questions about women’s social roles as wives and mothers led many authors to voice concerns about the relative importance of rigorous education in the early twentieth century.

Although men and women made both biological and social arguments against women’s education, others put forth counterarguments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries advocating for women’s educational capabilities and pursuits. As early as 1874, Julia Ward Howe published a direct response to the claims made by Edward Clarke. She argued that people should not see him as the authority on the subject of women’s education, and she identified benefits of educating women particularly in preparing them for their roles as wives. While Howe did not necessarily see education leading to women’s work outside the home, other women responded to critics with arguments about equality in education and advocated giving women the choice to pursue careers. One of the most influential voices in this debate was M. Carey Thomas, a leading educator and one of the founders of Bryn Mawr College. In her defense of women’s education, she put forth many arguments about the benefits of educational equality:

16 Edith Hamilton, “Schools and Daughters,” *The North American Review* 214, no. 791 (October 1921): 518-526. Hamilton argued that any woman who “has shown special aptitude for household arts” should not pursue college preparatory work. While she argued against rigorous academics for many women, she also acknowledged that those “rebellious” women who did not want to have a family could pursue academic work. Anne Morgan expanded on these arguments in a book published in 1915 about the role of education in women’s lives. She argued that women needed strong character education and warned women about the consequences for society if they did not take responsibility for the development of strong families and communities. See Anne Morgan, *The American Girl: Her Education, Her Responsibility, Her Recreation, Her Future* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915). Both Hamilton and Morgan came from wealthy backgrounds. Morgan was from the elite J.P. Morgan family and a reformer and philanthropist. Hamilton was from a wealthy German family, and she attended Miss Porter’s School and Bryn Mawr before becoming a well-known author. These women’s backgrounds would have been similar to many of the students at girls’ schools in Virginia at the time.

17 Julia Ward Howe, *Sex and Education: A Reply to Dr. E.H. Clarke’s “Sex and Education”* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874).
This college education should be the same as men’s, not only because there is, I believe, but one best education, but because men and women are to live and work together as comrades and dear friends and married friends and lovers, and because their effectiveness and happiness and the welfare of the generation to come after them will be vastly increased if their college education has given them the same intellectual training and the same scholarly and moral ideals.\(^{18}\)

By arguing that educational equality was necessary because men and women would become partners in both work and home life, Thomas articulated a vision of femininity that gave women a significant role in many areas of society. By the early twentieth century, these questions and debates were still contested and unresolved with many different perspectives that attempted to both expand and limit women’s involvement in education.

Despite these growing discussions within academic and popular mediums at the beginning of the twentieth century, historians have not adequately addressed many aspects of girls’ education during this time. However, historians have explored the changing nature of women’s roles in the United States during this time period.\(^{19}\) Women’s growing roles outside of the home and their increasing political activism demonstrated the changing and uncertain nature of women’s place in society. The changes and continuities in definitions of femininity are critical to fully understand the history of girls’ schools, because they highlight the pressures, questions, and issues that many of these students faced both in school and in their lives after graduation. Nancy

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Cott’s *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* examines the origins of the word feminism in the 1910s, arguing, “Women’s efforts in the 1910s and 1920s laid the groundwork and exposed the fault lines of modern feminism.” Describing this period as one of “crisis and transition,” Cott shows the paradoxes and challenges to those fighting for women’s rights during the early twentieth century. Cott demonstrates the diversity of women’s rights activists by outlining the competing expectations about economic independence, sex rights, and political participation. The study provides useful context in demonstrating the diversity within and opposition to women’s activism during this time, showing the changes and issues women faced as they navigated twentieth century society. Cott’s work is helpful in fully understanding the various issues and questions students at girls’ schools faced as they confronted their futures and thought about the role of education, work, marriage, and motherhood in their lives as women in the early twentieth century.

Existing studies on women’s roles in the American South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries illuminate the political, economic, and social factors following the Civil War that influenced women’s access to education and expectations about their future roles in society. In *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, Jane Turner Censer examines the impact of the Civil War on women’s lives throughout the South. She concludes that younger generations of women at the turn of the century sought to reshape women’s purpose in society often by connecting traditional duties of home life to their growing public roles. In particular, Censer examines the

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21 Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 5-10.
22 Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 6. She argues that the first generations after the Civil War were forced into the public sphere and work outside the home by the circumstances of the war. As younger generations grew, they more readily accepted these new public roles, creating some generation tensions among women in the South.
growing number of women who became schoolteachers, civic volunteers, and authors in the late nineteenth century and argues that these opportunities made women more comfortable in the public sphere, shifting the dynamics of gender roles in southern society.\textsuperscript{23}

Another way historians have explored questions of change and continuity in definitions of femininity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was by looking at how contemporaries talked about women, youth, and issues in adolescence.\textsuperscript{24} Jane Hunter examines the experiences of young middle-class women during the late nineteenth century, arguing that school attendance and participation in consumerism and city life led to greater independence and freedom for girls.\textsuperscript{25} These changes challenged Victorian norms, as girls were able to participate in schooling and leisure activities on an equal footing with their male peers often without parental supervision. Hunter argues that these experiences had lasting impacts on American society, concluding, “‘New’ girls of the late-century high school, carrying fresh memories of their right to full membership in their generation, could not go home to become ‘family possessions’ or parlor ornaments…In so doing, they changed not just themselves but American culture.”\textsuperscript{26} Paula Fass also notes the changes in American adolescence and the transformations youth culture brought to American society, but she places these developments in the 1920s rather than the late nineteenth century. She cites the sudden emergence of a “youth

\textsuperscript{23} Censer, \textit{The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood}, 153-243.
\textsuperscript{25} Hunter, \textit{How Young Ladies Became Girls}, 2, 5.
\textsuperscript{26} Hunter, \textit{How Young Ladies Became Girls}, 6.
problem” in the 1920s as the reason for her periodization. Fass concludes that the media and American adults used youth as “a symbol for the strains of a culture running headlong into the twentieth century,” which included changes in “family nurture, education, sex roles, leisure habits, as well as social values and behavioral norms.” As both agents and products of change, Fass finds that the 1920s were a critical time in the development of adolescence in American society. Crista Deluzio also examines the early formulations of adolescence as a distinct period of life, which she places in both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She focuses on the use of science in the construction of adolescence, which “privileged maleness, whiteness, and middle-class status as its normative characteristics.” Deluzio argues that ideas about sexual difference often caused girls’ marginalization; however, she also concludes that people did not completely ignore white middle-class adolescent femininity, for it strengthened racial and class hierarchies. Although there is contention in the literature about when adolescence as a construct emerged, examinations of American youth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show the changes and challenges to traditional norms of femininity. These studies can place the development of women’s education into greater context, as girls would bring many of these issues and fears with them to school. At a time when public education was expanding and there were more opportunities for women to enter college, the early twentieth century provides a compelling time frame in which to examine women’s roles in education. Some scholars have looked at individuals or groups of female reformers in the Progressive Education

27 Fass, The Damned and the Beautiful, 5-6.
29 Deluzio, Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 5.
30 Deluzio, Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 5, 56.
Movement. One work of note is *Founding Mothers and Others*, which explores the roles women played in education reform during the Progressive Era. While each chapter gives a detailed account of the contributions of individual women, the work largely fails to analyze how ideas about gender impacted the experiences of these educators and the female students they taught. Kathleen Weiler notes this gap in the literature and encourages scholars to apply gender as a method of analysis in looking at women, education, and Progressivism in the United States. An important exception to this gap is Sari Biklen’s article, “The Progressive Education Movement and the Question of Women,” in which Biklen assesses the absence of feminism in the Progressive Education Movement. Biklen examines vocational education, core curriculum, and women’s colleges as her major examples to argue that many new programs reinforced traditional notions of femininity rather than promoting change to secure greater rights for women. More work is needed on the impact of gender on educational reforms during the Progressive Era to fully explore the ways ideas about femininity influenced the curriculum and programs available to female students at all levels of schooling.

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34 Biklen, “The Progressive Education Movement and the Question of Women,” 323-325
The emergence of women’s colleges and their impact on women’s place in society has received more attention than secondary education in the historical literature.\(^{35}\) For example, Helen Horowitz explores the development of the “Seven Sisters” women’s colleges, their design, and their connection to other colleges in influencing the overall experience of students through the 1930s.\(^{36}\) While the guiding visions of the schools varied, women’s colleges created new standards for femininity that included expectations about academic and social success. Professors and students often challenged many of the ideals of the colleges’ founders, which showed the changing and debated notions of femininity within each of these schools at the time.\(^{37}\)

Other scholars have examined the development of women’s colleges in the South, looking particularly at the periods before and after the Civil War. Christie Farnham studied colleges for women in the South in the nineteenth century and concluded that “a college education became emblematic of class, a means to a type of refinement that labeled one a lady worthy of protection, admiration, and chivalrous attention.”\(^{38}\) Since schools did not see women’s education as a stepping stone to a career and therefore threatening to men, administrators in the South during the nineteenth century set up formal curricula in the liberal arts that mirrored those at boys’ schools. However,

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\(^{36}\) The Seven Sisters Colleges were Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Radcliffe, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, and Smith College.


\(^{38}\) Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 3.
women’s colleges in the South during the nineteenth century also exposed their students
to an informal program of “instructing in ladylike values and etiquette,” creating a dual
curriculum in many of the schools.\textsuperscript{39} Also looking at higher education in the South, Amy
Thompson McCandless examines the impact of the Civil War on the educational
opportunities for women in the twentieth century. She argues that cultural norms
developed in the Old South, including the ideal of the “lady on the pedestal,” continued
to impact the education and expectations for young women.\textsuperscript{40} Despite the continuities in
traditional expectations for women’s education, McCandless argues that female
experience at southern institutions was not entirely negative. She concludes, “For some
women, the culture of deference and dependence that pervaded Southern institutions did,
unfortunately, stifle aspirations and reinforce the status quo. For others, however, higher
education provided the wherewithal for them to expand their intellectual and social
horizons.”\textsuperscript{41} McCandless uses ideas about class, gender, and race to show the educational
opportunities and limitations for southern women in the twentieth century.

While scholars like Horowitz, Farnham, and McCandless have begun to examine
the experiences of women’s colleges, very few historical studies have looked at how
women were prepared to enter college. Of the current studies that do examine girls’
experiences in high school, many of them focus either on a specific co-educational public
school system or on vocational programs that prepared girls for homemaking or blue-
collar jobs.\textsuperscript{42} For example, Karen Graves examines the public school system in St. Louis

\textsuperscript{39} Farnham, \textit{The Education of the Southern Belle}, 1.
\textsuperscript{40} McCandless, \textit{The Past in the Present}, 12.
\textsuperscript{41} McCandless, \textit{The Past in the Present}, 14.
\textsuperscript{42} For a study on girls in the St. Louis public school system, see Karen Graves, \textit{Girls’ Schooling during the Progressive Era: From Female Scholar to Domesticated Citizen} (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998). For an examination of opportunities in vocational education for girls, see Jane Bernard Powers, \textit{The ‘Girl
during the early twentieth century and argues that the creation of the differentiated
curriculum diminished female intellectual pursuits by promoting vocational education
and home economics.\(^{43}\) Although Graves provides well-documented evidence and
statistics about the different tracks that were implemented at schools in St. Louis, she
does not adequately examine or analyze the impact of gender on the content of the classes
offered to women. While Graves and others provide intriguing discussions on the
changes made to many academic programs during this time, these projects analyze co-
educational schools. Therefore, they cannot offer insight into the ways single-sex schools
played a role in the preparation of women for their futures.

Besides individual official school histories, which typically give an overview of a
school with little analysis and examination of historical context, there have been only a
handful of monographs that look at private all-girls’ schools. Ilana DeBare, a journalist
who helped found a girls’ school in California in the 1990s, examines the history of girls’
schools from the early nineteenth century through the early 2000s. While she correctly
observes the radical beginnings of some of these girls’ schools, *Where Girls Come First*
emphasizes the conservative forces that remained in some schools in the early twentieth
century without adequately examining some of their aspects that were forward-thinking.\(^{44}\)
By focusing primarily on the more traditional aspects of schools, such as May Day events
and cooking classes, and not analyzing the college preparatory curriculum of any
institutions, DeBare provides a misleading picture of the state of girls’ schools and their

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\(^{43}\) Graves, *Girls’ Schooling during the Progressive Era*, xii.
\(^{44}\) Ilana DeBare, *Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools* (New
more complex history at the beginning of the twentieth century. Andrea Hamilton takes a different approach by looking at the curriculum and programs of Bryn Mawr Preparatory School in Baltimore, Maryland, from its founding in the 1880s to the early 2000s. Her analysis tracks the ideals of the founders of Bryn Mawr and then examines subsequent changes in the direction, programming, and curriculum of the school. Hamilton’s work provides important themes to consider when analyzing other girls’ schools, particularly the struggle between ideals and reality in the guiding visions and curricula of schools.

This study takes a different approach than either DeBare or Hamilton by examining four girls’ schools in the state of Virginia within a relatively short time period from 1900 to 1930. The institutions, St. Catherine’s School, Madeira School, St. Anne’s School, and Foxcroft School, represent some of the first major attempts in the state to educate girls for college through private education. All four schools have been privately owned and operated for at least one hundred years, and each had selective admissions processes during the early twentieth century. Therefore, the student populations at the schools mainly came from wealthy, white families across Virginia and in some cases, other parts of the country and world. All of the schools offered both day and boarding

45 DeBare, Where Girls Come First, 75-86.
47 This does not mean that there were not private schools for girls in the state prior to this time period; however, they represent some of the first girls’ schools in Virginia that were formed with the specific purpose of preparing girls for college. Each school in the study has an official school history book. These texts are helpful in gaining a basic understanding of the founding of the schools and major landmarks in their histories. They include Katherine Walker Butterfield, Teach Them Diligently: A Centennial History of St. Anne’s-Belfield School (Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 2010), Nancy Gerry Bedford, Pickett Randolph, and Steve Matthews, Foxcroft School Centennial Memory Book, 1914-2014 (Middleburg, VA: The Foxcroft School, 2014), Mary Custis Lee DeButts and Rosalie Noland Woodland, eds, Charlotte Haxall Noland (Middleburg, VA: Foxcroft School, 1970), Susan Klaus and Mary Porter Johns Martin, A Part of Us Forever: A Centennial History of St. Catherine’s School, 1890-1990 (Richmond: St. Catherine’s School, 1989), and Paula Skallerup Osborn, ed, Strong in Her Girls: The Madeira School Centennial History, 1906-2006 (McLean, VA: The Madeira School, 2005).
programs, and some of them offered elementary, middle, and postgraduate departments in addition to the upper school sections. While some schools started with only a few students and others started with a larger population, by 1930 the four schools had a student body that ranged from seventy to almost three hundred students.⁴⁸

In many of these cases, the founders of these schools played a critical role in the initial development of the ideals and programs at the institutions. Virginia Randolph Ellett, known as Miss Jennie, founded a small school in 1890 in her home in downtown Richmond, which later became St. Catherine’s School.⁴⁹ As the school continued to grow, Miss Jennie moved the school to three different locations in downtown Richmond before purchasing land in Westhampton, a few miles outside of Richmond, in 1917. In 1920, the school officially affiliated with the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.⁵⁰ In 1906, Lucy Madeira, who was a Vassar graduate and a teacher at Sidwell Friends School in Washington D.C., decided to found her own school for young women. The Madeira School operated in Dupont Circle from its founding until 1929, when Miss Madeira moved her school to a tract of land she and her husband had purchased in McLean, Virginia.⁵¹ St. Anne’s was founded in 1910 by a group of vestrymen at Christ Church in Charlottesville. The school had previously been a finishing school named the Rawlings

⁴⁸ Some schools experienced rapid growth in enrollment during this time period. St. Catherine’s began with just twelve students in 1890, but grew to 284 by the 1929-1930 school year. Madeira began with twenty-eight students in 1906. The school grew to 170 students by the 1931-1932 school year. Other schools’ enrollments fluctuated throughout the period, but did not experience rapid growth. St. Anne’s enrolled 165 students in 1913 and then experienced a major slump in the early 1920s. However, by 1925 the school’s enrollment increased to over one hundred students. Foxcroft enrolled forty students in its second year in 1915 and grew to seventy students by the 1925-1926 school year. See Klaus and Martin, A Part of Us Forever, 10; Enrollment Files, St. Catherine’s Archives; Butterfield, Teach Them Diligently, 39, 55; Osborn, Strong in Her Girls, 101, 104; Tally-Ho!, 1915-1916, 7-8, Foxcroft Archives; and Tally-Ho!, 1925-1926, 7-14, Foxcroft Archives.

⁴⁹ The school was originally named The Virginia Randolph Ellett School. The name was changed in 1920 when the school was sold to the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. For consistency and to limit confusion, this study will refer to the school as St. Catherine’s throughout.

⁵⁰ For early history about St. Catherine’s, see Klaus and Martin, A Part of Us Forever, 10-24.

⁵¹ Osborn, Strong in Her Girls, 8-16.
Institute, but in 1910 the school reopened as a college-preparatory institution. Unlike the other schools, St. Anne’s did not have a single female founder who was a major influence throughout the entire time period of this study. Instead, St. Anne’s employed five different headmistresses from 1910 to 1930.52 Charlotte Haxall Noland founded Foxcroft School in 1914 in Middleburg, Virginia, believing that schools needed to be more fun and enjoyable for young girls. She established a day and boarding school that had extensive athletic opportunities for girls, with the academic department developing at a slower pace.53 While the schools had different missions, philosophies, and programs, they all provide excellent opportunities to analyze the impact of gender on the content of and goals for young women’s education in the early twentieth century.54

In order to explore the impact that ideas of femininity had on the formation of the missions, curricula, and programs at girls’ schools, this study used a wide variety of primary source material located in each school’s archives to examine both administrators’ and students’ perspectives.55 School catalogues, promotional materials, and administrative records and personal writings helped construct the official school mission and guiding philosophies. Student publications, like yearbooks, newspapers, and literary magazines, and personal diaries and scrapbooks, demonstrated the wide variety of student responses and opinions about their own education. The conditions of each school’s

52 Butterfield, *Teach Them Diligently*, 31-41. The headmistresses during the first twenty years of operation were Mary Hyde Duval from 1910 to 1920, Emma Yerby from 1920-1922, Elizabeth Winegar from 1922-1923, Laura Lee Dorsey from 1923-1929, and Margaret Love Porter from 1929-1942.
54 In an effort to be transparent, my motivations for picking these schools as case studies largely result from efficiency and ease of finding sources. I attended St. Catherine’s School, and my mother is the Head of Foxcroft School. While I do have personal connections to two of the four schools, which that helped me to get access to their archives, I have tried to not let my own experiences at these schools cloud or distort my analysis.
55 In addition to the archives located on the campus of each of the schools, St. Catherine’s has an extensive collection of documents at the Virginia Historical Society that will be used in the project.
archives varied greatly, and the schools made available a varying amount of source material to researchers. Some schools have documents from some but not all years during the era; however, the absence of archival sources, when a school has not produced or preserved documents on a subject, can also be beneficial for historians, because it could reveal either intentional omissions or it could indicate that a school judged a certain subject or event unimportant to its mission or program. Despite these limitations the available sources did indicate broad trends across the schools as well as points of difference and dissention within these institutions. Ideas about femininity and gender roles shaped the discourse surrounding the goals of women’s education at each school, but their influence in the development of programs and in students’ responses to them varied among the schools.

In order to delve more deeply into these discussions surrounding the goals and content of women’s education, each chapter takes one aspect of school life and analyzes how ideas about proper femininity affected its development and execution. The first chapter examines the academic curricula of the four schools in order to explore how gender played a role in the content and methods of educational instruction. St. Catherine’s, Madeira, and St. Anne’s all set up extensive college preparatory curricula that promoted women’s intellect and academic capabilities. Foxcroft does not have any records of the curriculum from 1914 to 1930, making it much more difficult to know the exact nature of its academic program. Other sources indicate that the school’s academic rigor increased over time. However, while these schools offered students curricula that attempted to mirror many of the programs at boys’ schools, students often had the ability to opt out of the more rigorous course of study to pursue more traditionally feminine
subjects like music and art. Administrators’ incorporation of gendered language and expectations into the design of the academic life demonstrates that schools became places where administrators developed competing curricula for young women. These programs both challenged popular conceptions about women’s intellectual capabilities and reinforced the place of traditionally feminine subjects in girls’ education.

The second chapter looks at the development of athletic programs at girls’ schools and the ways sports promoted certain expectations of femininity for students. Each of the four schools in this study stressed the importance of health and exercise in order to maintain a strong mind, body, and spirit. Therefore, athletic programs and sports teams became significant aspects of the visions of all of the schools. The schools promoted a sense of competition within their student bodies, something that challenged traditional notions of femininity that characterized women as demure and meek. At the same time, administrators at these schools put limitations on the acceptable amount of athleticism for young women and reinforced concerns about women’s health common at the time.

The third chapter examines the efforts schools made to shape and mold the characters of young women during the early twentieth century. Administrators saw character development as a critical piece of girls’ complete education, and the schools set up numerous programs promoting certain virtues including religion courses, community service and philanthropic work, and student government organizations. Each of these programs sent contradictory messages to students, encouraging active, assertive, and independent leadership, while also promoting passive nurturer roles and commitment to domestic duties. The fourth chapter continues these examinations with an in-depth look at the social education of young women at these schools. While not an official part of the
guiding vision or curriculum, social events and traditions played a significant role in the school experience, and the time and energy spent on them suggest that school administrators saw them as beneficial to their students. Students often looked at these events with great excitement and also connected them with their futures. Evidence from student writings suggests that many of them thought about the prospect of being a debutante and finding a husband, topics which brought both anticipation and anxiety. Student expectations about their own futures indicated that many saw a strict choice between pursuing further education and a career and finding a husband and starting a family. Social preparation, conversations about debutantes and husbands, and concerns about the future demonstrated the complexities surrounding ideals of proper femininity and the ultimate goals of women’s education at girls’ schools.

Girls’ schools in Virginia developed missions and philosophies that tried to define the type of education that administrators deemed appropriate for their female students. As the twentieth century began, there were concerns about the changes occurring for women across society. More women pursued higher education and worked outside the home, and women’s growing presence in public began to shift traditional definitions of femininity. Through their academic curricula, athletics programs, and character and social education initiatives, educators in Virginia struggled to define a clear and consistent set of expectations for their female students. In many areas of school life, schools encouraged women to participate in rigorous and demanding programs. These initiatives, which included the college-preparatory tracks, athletic requirements, and leadership positions in a variety of extracurricular activities, promoted a strong vision of womanhood that valued feminine assertiveness, independence, and leadership. However, many of the same
programs also limited women’s behavior and ability to challenge traditional expectations. Many encouraged women’s commitment to domesticity, their passivity, and their deference to others. The focus on duty, personal responsibility, and service to others reflected some of the limitations and complexities that girls’ schools faced in realizing their stated goals and missions.

The interests of the schools’ founders also had to compete with and accommodate the changing expectations and values of students, as they grappled with their own ideas of femininity. Students displayed many varying opinions towards their schools’ programs, sometimes supporting administrators’ views and at times challenging and opposing them. While it is impossible to have a complete record of exactly what the entire student body thought of each type of program, the divisions within student opinion show that these issues surrounding femininity, education, and women’s futures were far from settled. At girls’ schools, administrators aimed to shape the development of young women, but students in turn shaped and molded the goals of these institutions, ultimately showing the role that gender played in the development and execution of girls’ schooling. The complexities and contradictions in the discussions that occurred at girls’ schools in Virginia about the appropriate role of education for young women demonstrated the unresolved expectations and definitions of femininity in the early twentieth century.
Chapter 1

Competing Curricula: Balancing College Preparatory and Non-Preparatory Courses of Study

The 1912-1913 school year was ending, and the date of final examinations rapidly approached. Parents picked up their daughters from St. Anne’s School in Charlottesville, Virginia, anxious to hear about their experiences and hopeful for their academic success. Giving them a unique window onto the work at St. Anne’s, such reunions inspired parents to send testimonials to the school. Surprised by her daughter’s accomplishments, Mrs. W. O. Harrison wrote a letter to the principal Mary Hyde DuVal expressing her gratitude for the extensive preparation her daughter had received. Mrs. Harrison proudly reported her daughter’s progress: “She is now reviewing for the examinations. I was going over them with her yesterday and I was really surprised to see how well she knew and understood what she studied.”

While Mrs. Harrison’s letter praised the academic preparation and rigor of the school, administrators at St. Anne’s also published parent testimonials that described a much different aspect of the institution’s instructional program. For example, Mrs. C. B. Woodley of Kinston, North Carolina wrote, “We were very much pleased with my daughters [sic] looks, as well as with other great improvements—among which the most remarkable was sewing. I never dreamed she would develop that talent at short notice and our thanks are due [to] you.” The differences between Mrs. Harrison’s focus on academic preparation and Mrs. Woodley’s praise of domestic education highlight the competing visions of many academic programs established at girls’ schools during the early twentieth century.

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56 St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 31, Student/Alum 1910-1920 File, STAB Archives, Charlottesville, Virginia.
57 St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 31, Student/Alum 1910-1920 File, STAB Archives.
Girls’ schools in Virginia created demanding curricula with the goal of preparing students for the leading women’s colleges. Set up to emulate the best boys’ schools in the nation, administrators at St. Catherine’s, Madeira and St. Anne’s quickly developed challenging courses of study. Foxcroft developed its academic curriculum at a slower pace than the other schools, implementing a college preparatory program by the 1920s.58 These programs offered classes traditionally reserved for male students, including mathematics and the classics. They also trained girls for demanding college entrance examinations, particularly those offered by Bryn Mawr College.59 At the same time, these schools promoted courses that were considered feminine like art and music, and some offered various domestic-based classes like cooking and sewing. Schools typically allowed parents to choose the course of study for their daughters, along with input from the student, and this decision was largely based on whether or not they wanted their daughters to attend college after graduation.60 While the relative emphasis on these traditional subjects varied among the schools, the competing academic curricula at these institutions contributed to the discussions over the appropriate place of academics in a young woman’s education at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In order to explore the ways in which questions and issues of gender influenced the development of the academic curriculum, an examination of the founding visions of

58 The archives of Foxcroft School do not have catalogues that outlined the course of study until the 1930s. Therefore, it is difficult to know the exact nature of the academic program at the school from its founding in 1914 until 1930. However, from the sources available, it is clear that Miss Charlotte did not place much emphasis on academics, as compared to athletics and the moral developments of her students. Instead, she brought in other teachers to run the academic unit of the school, which eventually reached the academic rigor of the other schools by the late 1920s.
59 Founded in 1885 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, the college aimed to give women a rigorous higher education that was equal to the programs at the best men’s colleges.
60 Mary Tyler Freeman McClenahan mentioned this process in her published memoirs about her days growing up in Richmond and her experiences at St. Catherine’s. Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek McClenahan, *Southern Civility: Recollections of My Early Life* (Richmond, VA: Donnan Publishing, 2003), 47.
these schools is necessary, as they help uncover the fundamental goals of education for these young women. Although each founder had a particular vision, in practice, curricula reflected those visions and added new challenges and contradictions to the original intentions of the schools. Examining both the rigorous college preparatory curriculum and the lasting influence of more traditionally feminine studies highlights the tensions and contradictions within the academic programs offered to young women in these Virginia schools. Students at these schools also responded to the changing definitions of femininity. Through student publications such as yearbooks, newspapers, and literary magazines and in personal diaries and journals, girls both embraced and challenged aspects of the academic programs at their schools. Students’ voices were a critical part of the ongoing discourse about the proper role and purpose of women in education in the early twentieth century.

While some schools had visions that truly challenged traditional notions about female intellect, other schools developed missions that both praised women’s capabilities and reinforced the idea that women did not necessarily need to pursue intense higher education. St. Catherine’s mission statement, first developed when the school opened in 1890, represented a complete commitment to the rigorous education of young women.

From as early as 1903, the school’s catalogue stated, “The principle of the School

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61 The curriculum and the educational philosophy of a school are two different, yet important terms. Educational philosophy refers to a core set of beliefs about the goals and purpose of education, which are often part of a school’s mission statement. A curriculum is the actual course of study developed for each grade level in a school. A curriculum is systematic and contains certain requirements concerning the content covered in each subject area. Both the formation of a philosophy of education and the creation of a curriculum present an opportunity for an administrator to determine the overall goals of a school.

62 At each of the four schools, student editorial boards ran all the student newspapers, yearbooks, and literary magazines. Usually there was also at least one faculty representative that helped to approve content for each publication. The records do not indicate the exact nature of the approval or editing process at the schools.

63 The mission statements were often included in the catalogues that were sent to prospective and current families.
throughout is to increase the power and develop the individuality of each pupil."64 This vision was further articulated in the catalogue from the next year: “This school proposes to give, under carefully trained teachers, thorough and well-ordered instruction from kindergarten to college.”65 The focus on the development of individuals into strong scholars showed Miss Jennie’s dedication to the academic thoroughness of the program. The decision to use the word “power” to describe the purpose of the program also indicated a commitment to challenging the notion that women were incapable or unfit for sustained and demanding education. The focus on individual ability also implied that these educators believed that when young women received a strong education, they would be able to contribute to society in a variety of ways.66 Finally, nowhere in the mission statement did the educators at St. Catherine’s mention girls who did not go to college. While the school offered a separate curriculum to girls who were not college-bound, which will be discussed later in the chapter, this separate program’s absence from the school’s mission statement indicates the primary focus on academic preparation for college.67

64 Miss Ellett’s School For Girls, 1903-1904, 3, St. Catherine’s Archives, Richmond, Virginia.
65 Miss Ellett’s School For Girls, 1904-1905, 3, St. Catherine’s Archives. A similar vision is highlighted in an article for the Richmond News Leader in 1912 also located in the archives at St. Catherine’s.
66 The 1923-1924 catalogue focused on the development of strong and powerful individuals as a goal of the academic program. It stated, “St. Catherine’s, therefore, gives its girls freedom—the essential for any choice—and seeks to inspire initiative and self-control. For right discrimination, to freedom must be added the guide of high standards to keep girls from too easy contentment, from personal prejudices, whim, or the illusion of temperament. The privilege of choice must be based on broad and searching knowledge.” The development of initiative and self-control was critical to the overall academic program at the school, suggesting that administrators thought these would be useful traits for young women. See St. Catherine’s School, 1923-1924, 3, St. Catherine’s Archives.
67 By the mid-1920s, Miss Jennie still maintained a focus on academic knowledge and preparation. The continuity of these goals throughout the early twentieth century indicated that Miss Jennie strongly believed in the promotion of academic challenge for young women. For a discussion of Miss Jennie’s goals in the 1920s, see Virginia Randolph Ellett to Louisa Coleman Blair, Sept. 10, 1925, 2, Ellett-St. Catherine’s Alumnae Association Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
Both St. Anne’s and Madeira outlined the rigor of their schools while also indicating some alternative visions for their programs, reflecting the changing and contested nature of the goals for women’s education at the beginning of the twentieth century. The catalogue from Madeira’s opening year in 1906 showed these multiple philosophies behind its program, first by explaining, “The aim of the school is to give systematic and thorough training in all subjects and to develop to the utmost the powers of each individual.” 68 Although this statement is very similar to the views expressed by educators at St. Catherine’s, Miss Madeira quickly followed up this bold claim about women’s power through education with a more moderate goal for the school. She stated, “The courses of study have been so planned as to prepare any pupil for college and at the same time to provide a liberal education for those who do not wish to go to college.” 69 While Lucy Madeira clearly promoted the goal of sending students to college, her inclusion of an alternative vision for girls reinforced traditional notions that women did not need to pursue higher education beyond their time in high school. The phrasing of the mission statement also implied that women could choose for themselves whether or not they wished to pursue higher education, giving women more control and responsibility over their own futures. St. Anne’s used similar language, claiming that the school was for “the modern girl” and that the primary educational purpose was to prepare girls for college. 70 However, the board at St. Anne’s also presented multiple goals for the academic program, some of which maintained conventional notions about what women

68 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 8, Madeira Archives, McLean, Virginia.
69 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 9. The visions and statements of goals for the academic program remains relatively the same throughout the time period covered in this study. For examples of the similarities in mission statements, see Miss Madeira’s School, 1909-1910, 9, and Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 10, both in Madeira Archives.
70 St. Anne’s School, 1925-1926, 9, STAB Archives. Also see St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 9, and St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 5, STAB Archives.
should do with their education. For example, the school catalogue claimed in 1913, “In this day of demand for specialization in all departments of life, it is absolutely essential that girls shall be thoroughly prepared for any position which they may be called to fill in after life.” By expanding the purpose of preparation to any role that a woman could play, the school suggested that a variety of possibilities, including careers or domestic life, could await young women. The dual nature of the academic visions of both St. Anne’s and Madeira reflected the multiple perspectives on the purpose of education for women at the time.

When Charlotte Haxall Noland opened Foxcroft School in 1914, she did so with similar aims as the other schools. While there is no official record of the exact mission statement of the school during its early years, Miss Charlotte contemplated her vision for the school in the later years of her life. While intellectual development was not the only major founding purpose of Foxcroft, Miss Charlotte did intend the school to become a prominent place for girls’ education. In a letter written for the alumnae magazine in the 1950s, she reflected, “Foxcroft’s standards, religion, discipline, a will to work, moral and intellectual honesty, have given the girls a sense of honor and a joy of living that has been clearly reflected in their after-life.” Miss Charlotte stressed the importance of both intellectual and moral development, showing that the goal of this education was much broader than just college preparation. Some Foxcroft students also echoed this sentiment

71 St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 10, STAB Archives.
72 The school does not have copies of catalogues that were published during this time, making it impossible to know what the school made public about their program in its earliest years of operation.
73 “Miss Charlotte’s Letter,” Gone Away: Foxcroft Alumnae Bulletin, 20 (1954), Foxcroft Archives, Middleburg, Virginia. In a letter that Miss Charlotte wrote in 1929, but was sealed until her death in 1969, she also outlined a similar view of the purpose of the school. She charged her students with the rules that she tried to live by while establishing the school: “Don’t be narrow. Have two rules: hard, good work and much fun.” Charlotte Haxall Noland to Kitty Van Merle Smith, February 6, 1929, Foxcroft Archives.
about the ability of girls’ schools to mold their future actions.\textsuperscript{74} The mention of the life beyond graduation indicated that schools believed that their academic training would have long-term benefits for students, making the programs all the more critical for young women’s achievements.

In addition to using mission statements to communicate their guiding philosophies and visions, administrators often used their physical locations as tools for marketing their schools as an ideal place for learning and growth. For example, Lucy Madeira advertised her academic program by highlighting the benefits of studying in Washington, D.C. The catalogue from 1906 showcased this idea in a section dedicated to explaining to parents and students the educational benefits of the city. It stated, “The important scientific work done under the government and by various scientific associations in the District of Columbia, together with the three universities and many colleges in the city and its vicinity have brought together libraries and collections of rare value which are easily accessible.”\textsuperscript{75} The catalogue also described in great detail the museums, concert halls, and other cultural attractions that student would experience at Madeira.\textsuperscript{76} St. Catherine’s used a similar approach in promoting its location in Richmond, claiming that it was conducive to better academic learning through access to libraries, universities, and the culture of the South.\textsuperscript{77} The types of programming at both schools also indicate that

\textsuperscript{74} For a Foxcroft student’s promotion of the school’s ability to shape the future roles of students, see \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1920-1921, 11, Foxcroft Archives. Administrators at St. Catherine’s also put forth the idea that the school could shape students’ lives in the future. In the 1925 commencement address, the school was “delighted to announce that (almost) every one of the girls in the graduating class of 1925 has each a definite aim in view. Each girl enters upon some course that takes her further in her preparation for life.” By praising the fact that girls have decided upon a life course, St. Catherine’s also implied that the skills developed at school would help guide them after graduation. St. Catherine’s Commencement Program, 1925, St. Catherine’s Archives.

\textsuperscript{75} Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 7, Madeira Archives.

\textsuperscript{76} Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{77} St. Catherine’s School, 1922-1923, 8, St. Catherine’s Archives.
administrators and students took advantage of their locations to expose young women to different educational opportunities. The student government at Madeira voted to allow students to go hear the Boston Symphony while they were in Washington in order to expose girls to professional musical performances. St. Catherine’s also used its location to bring prominent speakers to campus, many of whom encouraged girls’ involvement in politics. During the 1928 to 1929 school year, Dr. Norman Thomas, who was a socialist candidate for president, spoke to students. While he did not talk about socialism, he encouraged students to take interest in politics and to express their beliefs. The school also brought in Lady Astor, who was an alumna of the school and prominent in British politics. She encouraged women to use their newly established right to vote to get involved and influence government. Both of these examples indicated that St. Catherine’s used its location in the state’s capital to bring lectures to campus in order to increase students’ exposure to academic and political discussions occurring at the time.

Madeira and St. Catherine’s urban environments made these connections to museums and other attractions more readily accessible; however, St. Anne’s location in Charlottesville did not stop the school from making similar assertions about the impact of its surroundings on academic offerings. St. Anne’s promoted its location as the best of both the country and the city, claiming that girls would thrive from the “freedom of country life” and still have the opportunity to benefit from the “advantages of a metropolis” in nearby Richmond. The school also stressed its connections to the University of Virginia, claiming, “…Its magnificent library, its museum, its public

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78 Court of Equity Minutes, Nov. 2, 1912, 7, Student Government File, Madeira Archives.
79 The Quair, 1929, 118 and 122, St. Catherine’s Archives.
80 The Quair, 1929, 118 and 122.
81 St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 9, STAB Archives.
lectures and its intellectual life, creates a cultural and inspiring atmosphere.”

The catalogue also noted the wide variety of fine arts performances in the region. By advocating for women’s access to these institutions at both colleges and museums, these schools insisted that female students should participate in scholastic opportunities outside of the classroom.

Although founders of girls’ schools had visions of establishing schools where individual girls would get the attention and preparation needed to become scholars and moral citizens, they all faced the task of turning these guiding philosophies into actual academic programs. Madeira, St. Anne’s, and St. Catherine’s all quickly established academically challenging curricula in their schools with the main purpose of preparing women for higher education. The courses of study represented efforts to not only prepare students for the rigor of college life, but also to place value on women’s intellect. Administrators at Madeira presented their dedication to academics in the yearly catalogue, stating, “The studies are not confined to the entrance requirements of college, but the curriculum is controlled to some extent by these requirements. Pupils are required to take four full subjects each year, unless they are prevented by reasons satisfactory to the principal.” By making public the policy that college-preparation was the main factor in the determination of the curriculum, Miss Madeira and her teachers placed greater value on this type of education over programs that did not focus on intellectual preparation. Educators at Madeira stressed the importance of college preparation further by encouraging students in that track to spend five years in high school so that they could adequately train for college and also participate fully in athletics.

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82 St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 10, STAB Archives.
83 St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 10-11.
84 Miss Madeira’s School, 1914-1915, 9, Madeira Archives.
and extracurricular activities.\textsuperscript{85} The board at St. Anne’s made a similar claim in its public materials for prospective and current families. The school stated, “Educationally the aim of St. Anne’s is college preparatory. Its curriculum is adapted to the requirements of Randolph-Macon, Vassar and other colleges of equal rank.”\textsuperscript{86} Both schools emphasized the demanding nature of their academic programs by stressing the purpose of education for women as preparing them for college. In addition to just training students for the demands of higher education, St. Anne’s also wanted to cultivate an intensive scholastic program “where able students are prepared to enter any woman’s college and to do successful work while they are there.”\textsuperscript{87} By wanting to prepare girls not only for the admissions process, but also for the demands of college-level work, these schools challenged notions that women could not handle strenuous or prolonged exposure to education and helped to advance the intellectual capabilities of young women in Virginia.

Beyond stating the general goals of the college-preparatory curriculum in pamphlets intended for current and prospective families, administrators at Madeira gave detailed and explicit guidelines that outlined the course of study at the school. By the late 1920s, Madeira stressed to parents and students that the program was intense and intended for committed students. The catalogue stated, “It is of paramount importance that the girl who wishes to go to college should offer herself for admission thoroughly prepared and mentally mature.”\textsuperscript{88} Indeed, the Madeira course offerings showcased this requirement of dedication and discipline. Starting in the school’s opening year in 1906, students at Madeira took at least four academic subjects each term including English;

\textsuperscript{85} Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 10, Madeira Archives.
\textsuperscript{86} St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 9-10, STAB Archives.
\textsuperscript{87} St. Anne’s School, 1929-1930, 3, STAB Archives.
\textsuperscript{88} Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 10, Madeira Archives.
mathematics; history; a choice of Latin, French or German; and a variety of science and other elective classes. By the 1928-1929 school year, Madeira still required students in the college-preparatory track to take fifteen units of classes, including four years of English, three years of mathematics, credits in two foreign languages, and various history and science classes. The inclusion of multiple years of mathematics and a study of the classics is especially important, as these subjects were historically a major part of boys’ higher education. Justifying this curriculum, the pamphlet then explained, “These requirements are equivalent to the various entrance requirements of Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley.” By connecting their requirements again to the standard of elite women’s colleges, Miss Madeira promoted a strong and rigorous academic program and signaled future pathways in higher education for women.

St. Anne’s placed similar emphasis on academic requirements throughout most of its early history. Although principals Elizabeth Winegar and Laura Lee Dorsey did not stress college preparation in the early 1920s as much as their predecessors, St. Anne’s did remain committed to strong academic study. Catalogues from the era demonstrated this commitment by outlining the types of classes and the content covered, and the school offered all major subject areas including Latin, mathematics, and science. Furthermore, St. Anne’s set up a rewards system based on academic achievement for its students,

89 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 13, Madeira Archives.
80 Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 10-11, Madeira Archives.
91 Nash, Women’s Education in the United States, 1780-1840, 39.
92 Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 10-11.
93 Kay Butterfield, Teach Them Diligently: A Centennial History of St. Anne’s-Belfield School (Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 2010), 33-53. During the tenures of both Winegar and Dorsey, the focus of St. Anne’s programs shifted more towards athletics than academics.
94 For example see St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 14-18, and St. Anne’s School, 1924-1925, 15, STAB Archives.
allowing girls who excelled in their studies certain privileges, contingent on continued academic progress.\textsuperscript{95} The school also had almost identical graduation requirements as Madeira with the exception that students did not have to take as many units of foreign language classes.\textsuperscript{96} The academic requirements of the college-preparatory curriculum at both St. Anne’s and Madeira gave priority to stringent academic pursuits in the early part of the twentieth century. By promoting these rigorous programs, these schools sent the message that young women were capable of demanding intellectual work and that they could be successful scholars.

Students reflected on their experiences and goals for school through poems, stories, and articles written for their own personal use as well as for school publications. Some students reinforced the ideals of the college preparatory programs and discussed their academic progress with excitement and anticipation for the future. For example, in the 1917 yearbook, a St. Anne’s student reflected on the school experience: “When the little Freshman [sic] start down the path of knowledge, dreaming of their future part on their way to college. First they dream of conquering French, and of Latinizing, conjugations everyone, likewise Anglicising…. Down they sit to work once more, future days still beckoning; for to be a sophomore, each one still is reckoning.”\textsuperscript{97} The poem described the anticipation and desire to reach the goal of college education. By “conquering” foreign languages and the classics among other subjects, the poem implied that the students were mastering and thriving in the rigorous academic environment.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1913-1914, 18, STAB Archives. The catalogue does not mention the specific privileges that could be earned by students with excellent academic records.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1913-1914, 18 and \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1917-1918, 14, STAB Archives. Students at St. Anne’s also could only graduate if they had an attendance rate higher than 75 percent, which showed the school’s effort to keep women in school for longer periods of time. \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1917-1918, 15, STAB Archives.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{The Jinger Jar}, 1917, 57, STAB Archives.
Therefore, this type of student response promoted a similar vision to those of school founders concerning the purpose and goal of women’s education.

Some students actively participated in and responded to contemporary discussions surrounding the goals and content of women’s education. For example, Harriet Gunn, a student at St. Catherine’s, wrote a 1911 editorial in response to John Ruskin’s lecture, “Of Queen’s Garden,” which was originally published in 1865, but had been cited in articles on girls’ education in the early twentieth century. Ruskin argued that women’s education should always serve the purpose of preparing them for their roles as wives, concluding, “Speaking broadly, a man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly, while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only in so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband’s pleasures.” Although Gunn saw some benefits to Ruskin’s arguments, particularly on women’s health, she sharply criticizes his assumptions about the goals of women’s education. She wrote, “Girls are not waiting to be shaped and molded like clay; they have very decided ideas of their own…. Ruskin’s woman has no intuition because she is too much of a theory.” Other women activists shared Gunn’s conclusions about Ruskin’s assumptions of the mental capabilities of women, including Gertrude Martin, the Advisor of Women at Cornell University, who argued in 1914 that Ruskin’s plan would be inadequate and unsuccessful. These editorials showed the ways that students at girls’ schools at times shared directly in

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100 Frills and Frizzes, 1911, 28-29, St. Catherine’s Archives.
101 See Martin, “The Education of Women and Sex Equality,” 40. She criticizes Ruskin’s plans for women’s education, concluding, “Even granting Ruskin’s underlying assumption in regard to the relation of the sexes—‘He for God only, she for God in him’—the sort of education he outlines would be wholly inadequate for the purposes indicated.”
discussions about the ultimate purpose of women’s education and promoted women’s own independence in their intellectual pursuits.

Unlike the girls who shared in the administrators’ faith in the value of intellectual stimulation, some students at girls’ schools responded to their academic course work with dread, apathy, or boredom. Some students at Foxcroft debated the necessity of studying in the student newspaper, ultimately concluding that the question “is entirely a matter of different points of view,” with some students seeing the benefits and others dreading all school work.\textsuperscript{102} In another poem written for the 1908 yearbook, two St. Catherine’s students penned an “Ode on the Education of Youth” that demonstrated the multiple interests of the school’s girls outside of the classroom. They wrote, “Miss Jennie dreams of Harvard A’s, and thinks her girls are bright; the maidens dream of matinees, and dances Friday night. If they had thought of English work, instead of coming plays; If they had put more time on Burke, they might have got those A’s.”\textsuperscript{103} This poem established the commitment of Miss Jennie and the school to prepare girls for college, but it showed that students also had other interests like plays and dances that often distracted them from their academic work. A story published in St. Anne’s literary magazine also highlighted this tension between student interests and academic commitments. In “A Study Hall Meditation,” a student described her jealousy of friends exempted from study hall to practice for a school play. She wrote, “Lucky dogs, getting out of studying. People keep on telling me that there’ll be a day when I’ll wish I were back at school, but I’d like to meet that luckless day.”\textsuperscript{104} Similar to the St. Catherine’s students’ complaints about work, this student’s boredom and desire not to study demonstrated that in spite of the

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{The Snooper}, February 17, 1927, 1, Foxcroft Archives.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Frills and Frizzes}, 1908, 17, St. Catherine’s Archives.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Facets}, January 1914, 94, STAB Archives.
centrality of academic rigor to schools’ stated missions, students sometimes challenged this vision.

Although students’ writings from St. Anne’s and St. Catherine’s suggested that these young women did not connect plays and theatrical productions with their other work, administrators often times connected the opportunities that dramatic performances could bring students with academic success. For example, the catalogue at St. Catherine’s stated, “A number of plays are acted during the year as an essential part of the English course.”105 The importance of dramatics to success in English demonstrated the educational benefits administrators saw in plays. St. Anne’s echoed St. Catherine’s approval of using theater to promote academics, stating in a catalogue, “The dramatic instinct in all human beings is developed and made the means of improvement in grace, poise and interpretative power. The imagination is stimulated and shyness and self-consciousness disappear.”106 By connecting the dramatic arts class with the development of other skills that would help students grow and mature, educators at St. Anne’s and other girls’ schools placed academic value on these types of experiences.107 Therefore, although some students may have seen plays and shows as a way to avoid schoolwork, educators did see some benefit to using theater and dramatics as a method to further girls’ education.

The academic program at St. Catherine’s School showed administrators’ efforts to develop a rigorous curriculum and to connect the institution with the leading women’s

105 St. Catherine’s School, 1924-1925, 9, St. Catherine’s Archives.
106 St. Anne’s School, 1924-1925, 21, STAB Archives.
107 Although not directly related to theater, Foxcroft held a series of annual debates during which students could argue over political questions of both the past and the present. While not a play, there was a performance-based nature to these exercises that administrators identified as beneficial to the education of young women. See Tally-Ho!, 1915-1916, 31, Foxcroft Archives.
colleges of the time. Throughout the first few decades of the school’s history, Miss Jennie and other administrators were not afraid to advertise their college preparatory curriculum and took every opportunity to market the national recognition the program received. As a local newspaper wrote,

The work of the school is all directed to satisfy the highest possible standard for girls in this country—the Bryn Mawr College Entrance examinations. For nearly twenty-five years these ideals of freedom and high standards have born rich fruitage in young women of character, thoughtfulness and dignity, capable of meeting the severest university—and life—tests.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, many considered the Bryn Mawr examinations the most demanding and prestigious tests for girls, mainly because the college’s founder M. Carey Thomas believed that women’s entrance requirements should match the standards applied to men.¹⁰⁹ By insisting on equal standards for women’s enrollment, the women’s colleges of the day stressed the importance of the entrance examination requirements for female students.¹¹⁰ Mostly due to the hard work of Miss Jennie, Richmond became the eighth city in the world and first in the South to be eligible to host the Bryn Mawr Examinations in 1904.¹¹¹ Students in the preparatory track at St. Catherine’s participated in the testing day each spring, usually taking multiple examinations in a building in downtown Richmond.

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¹⁰⁸ “The Virginia Randolph Ellett School,” The News Leader, ca. 1912-1913, St. Catherine’s Archives.
¹¹⁰ The focus on testing and the ability to pass the examinations became a way for female students to prove their worth in academic settings. This was interesting considering that schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton often granted male students from elite backgrounds acceptance even if they could not pass the examinations. These schools also looked increasingly to both social and academic measures in their enrollment processes as a way to keep the elite nature of their student body and exclude African Americans, Jewish students, and other immigrants. The considerable laxness of actual admissions standards for elite men showed that despite efforts of women’s colleges to mirror the practices of these institutions, there were still different standards for men and women in gaining access to higher education. See Harold S. Wechsler, The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admission in America, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014), 3-5; Jerome Karabel, The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 21-23.
¹¹¹ Klaus and Martin, A Part of Us Forever, 22.
Richmond. Miss Jennie’s role in securing Richmond as a location for this exam showed how she dedicated much of her time and resources to securing these rigorous programs. M. Carey Thomas even acknowledged these qualities in Miss Jennie when she wrote of her, “I feel a personal debt of gratitude to her for what she has done in arousing enthusiasm for study and enforcing high standards of study in her school.” Thomas’ praise for Miss Jennie’s efforts demonstrated that both of these women shared similar groundbreaking ideas about the ability of young girls to succeed in higher education.

Administrators at St. Catherine’s also set up the curriculum for students to correlate with preparation for the tests and for the rigor of college life. During their four years of high school, students in the college preparatory track participated in courses in nearly every major academic field. The yearly outlines of work provided evidence that many of these classes were centered on preparation for the Bryn Mawr tests. For example, history teachers commented on selecting tests and map quizzes based on some of the Bryn Mawr examination questions from previous years. Emphasizing algebra and geometry, math teachers also relied on example questions from the Bryn Mawr exam to structure course evaluations. The school included the Bryn Mawr reading list in the yearly catalogues, and English classes were based on the literature for the examination as well as the development of writing skills. According to the catalogue, throughout all

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112 Miss Ellett’s School for Girls, 1904-1905, St. Catherine’s Archives. After 1904, most of the pamphlets included information about the Bryn Mawr Examination.


114 These outlines were hand-written notebooks, which compiled notes from each teacher and often gave an account of the course goals, textbooks, and sometime issues that occurred throughout the year. They start in 1924, and unfortunately, some subjects are covered more extensively than others. However, they are still useful tools in looking at what was taught each year.

115 Outline of Work, 1924-1925, St. Catherine’s Archives.

116 Outline of Work, 1926-1927, St. Catherine’s Archives.

117 The Virginia Randolph Ellett School, 1916-1917, St. Catherine’s Archives.
classes, “the greatest emphasis is placed on clear thinking,” and the girls at St. Catherine’s were graded on the same scale as the colleges of the day. Miss Jennie even sent students’ English papers to John Macy, a professor at Harvard University, who would grade them with the standards of the university. Students recalled the anticipation of receiving grades from John Macy, and Miss Jennie encouraged students to put forth their best efforts in order to impress the university professor. These efforts indicated that Miss Jennie actively sought to build relationships with the leading colleges of the day and structured her classes around university standards.

Examining copies of the entrance examinations published by Bryn Mawr also indicated that St. Catherine’s curriculum reflected similar content to the overall goals and questions on these exams. Bryn Mawr and other colleges provided outlines of course expectations, suggestions for textbooks, and sample exams. Comparing these tests to the course of study of St. Catherine’s showed that the school was promoting a rigorous and modern curriculum for girls. While impossible to do a complete comparison or get a reliable success rate for the girls of St. Catherine’s, the school did begin to publish the names of the students who passed the Bryn Mawr Exam in the yearly catalogues. These lists do not indicate how many girls actually were accepted to college or how many went; however, the fact that the school wished to advertise these girls’ accomplishments implied their confidence that students’ preparation for college represented success for the program.

118 St. Catherine’s School, 1929-1930, 13, St. Catherine’s Archives.
120 Bryn Mawr College Entrance Exam, 1892, Albert Greenfield Digital Collection, Bryn Mawr College, accessed March 17, 2014, http://brynmawr.edu/items/show/3000. While this exam is from the 1890s, it was relatively comparable to examinations from other colleges including Mount Holyoke’s 1910 Entrance Exams which were also on the Albert Greenfield website.
121 The Virginia Randolph Ellett School, 1916-1917, St. Catherine’s Archives.
While the focus on examinations showed schools’ commitment to academic preparation, some students struggled with the pace of course work and the focus on testing. Some students were required to work individually with faculty members if they struggled with a particular subject area, and sometimes these situations ended with a positive result for students. Due to her failing grades in geometry, St. Catherine’s School required Katharine Thomason to complete a summer study with George Fitzgerald, who was a former teacher at the school. After eight weeks of intense preparation, Mr. Fitzgerald happily reported to the headmistress that Katharine would be adequately prepared to take the prestigious Bryn Mawr Entrance Examination within the next school year. Describing Katharine as “conscientious” and “studious,” Mr. Fitzgerald called upon the headmistress to give her as much encouragement and support as possible before her exam. While her test results are not known, this story was an example of the accountability the administration encouraged as students dealt with the academic pressures of girls’ schools. In another example, St. Catherine’s alumna Henrietta Runyon Winfrey recalled how a late paper as a senior got her into serious trouble with Miss Jennie just a few weeks before her Bryn Mawr tests. While it was unclear how she felt at the time, she later recalled, “She was more than displeased with me; why, I now understand completely. My best friend and I were to be her second contribution to Bryn Mawr in the fall, and that nothing should interfere with that—certainly no laxness on my part—was the vital matter in the world for her at that moment.” Although she later recognized why Miss Jennie pushed her to take her academic work seriously, the fact that

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122 George Fitzgerald to Virginia Randolph Ellett, September 11, 1926, Ellett-St. Catherine’s Alumnae Association Papers, Section 10, VHS.
123 Henrietta Runyon Winfrey, Reminiscences, 2-3, Miss Jennie File, St. Catherine’s Archives.
some of the most promising students overlooked school assignments demonstrated how they sometimes resisted the focus on academics.

In addition to student recollections, other girls wrote about the dread and fear as the yearly tests approached in various school publications. In 1917, S.J. Sanford, a Foxcroft student, wrote a poem entitled “The Torture of Tests,” in which she characterized the tests with agony and anxiety. Describing the “sinking feeling” and the “muffled curses” students muttered as they entered a classroom for a test, Sanford’s poem represented one response by students to the academic pressure of the curriculum at girls’ schools. Students at St. Catherine’s described similar fears about taking the Bryn Mawr Entrance Examinations. Louis Cadot Catterall remembered, “The terrors of the annual examination periods were great. Miss Jennie always accompanied us to the dreaded spot and provided smelling salts and ammonia when needed.” Although these poems and recollections only represented the opinion of a few students, the anxiety and fear surrounding the test may also indicate that the tests were rigorous and demanded girls to use their academic skills.

The discussion over regular school testing at Madeira served as an example of the ways in which students and faculty sometimes debated the role evaluations and schoolwork played in the day-to-day life of the school. In 1908, students sent Miss Madeira a petition asking her to let them have the Friday after Thanksgiving for a vacation day, and in exchange, hold school the Saturday before so that students could

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124 Tally-Ho! 1917-1918, 105, Foxcroft Archives.
125 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 105.
126 Louise Cadot Catterall, Reminiscences, Semi-Centennial Folder, 13, St. Catherine’s Archives. Edmonia Lancaster Metcalf, who graduated from St. Catherine’s in 1910, also recalled the fear surrounding the annual Bryn Mawr Exams. She wrote, “The way was long and arduous and our nerves were none too stable. We were given to fainting spells and tremors: some had to be fortified by raw eggs and aromatic spirits of ammonia.” See Edmonia Lancaster Metcalf, “Reminiscences—Miss Jennie,” Semi-Centennial Folder, 3.
have four consecutive days off but not miss any instructional days.\footnote{The Tatler, December 1908, 7, Madeira Archives.} Although Miss Madeira ended up denying the proposal, citing the lack of sufficient time in between Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks to maintain academic standards, the fact that girls felt comfortable enough to approach the principal to ask for these measures indicated that students believed that they could bring their grievances to the administration. Sometimes girls’ wishes were honored when, for example, Miss Madeira cancelled exams in 1919 when she thought girls had not had enough time to adequately prepare.\footnote{The Madeira Searchlight, 1919, 57, Madeira Archives.} These discussions between the administration and students at Madeira showed that decisions over academic content and evaluation were at times a collaborative process with both perspectives playing a role in shaping girls’ education.

Unlike St. Catherine’s, Madeira, and St. Anne’s, there are fewer sources describing the academic program at Foxcroft during its early years; however, it was clear that administrators developed the college-preparatory curriculum at a slower rate. Although it is impossible to know exactly why Miss Charlotte did not immediately create a challenging academic plan, by 1930 Foxcroft’s academics had reached a comparable level of those at other girls’ schools in Virginia.\footnote{The school does not have copies of the academic curriculum in catalogues or other documents from these years, but other sources like yearbooks, student accounts, and press clippings support this claim. It is also unclear why Miss Charlotte did not want a rigorous academic program. Perhaps it is because she, herself, didn’t like school when she was younger and wanted to create a school that would be fun for the students as described in her biography. See Mary Custis Lee DeButts and Rosalie Noland Woodland, eds., \textit{Charlotte Haxall Noland, 1883-1969} (Middleburg, VA: Foxcroft School, 1970), 20-21. While this could partially explain Miss Charlotte’s motivations, without further evidence in the archives of the school it is unclear whether or not her own experience at school had an impact on the development of her curriculum at Foxcroft.} Student writings support the claim that Foxcroft was not as dedicated to college-preparatory academics during its early years, but each account also stressed that the curriculum was a work-in-progress. For
example, Catherine Louise Crunden Wade, who graduated in 1921, later recalled how “our education was somewhat spotty in those beginning days of Foxcroft, but it wasn’t long before it obtained and [sic] excellent reputation scholastically among the colleges.”\textsuperscript{130} She also argued that despite the school’s relaxed approach to academics, she had good teachers throughout her time at Foxcroft who valued their subject areas.\textsuperscript{131} Catherine Wade was not the only Foxcroft student to notice the changing nature of the school’s academic program in the early years. Dorothy Hibbard commented in the 1918 yearbook that the school’s academic standards had dramatically increased, and the school held its first college entrance examinations in the spring of 1921.\textsuperscript{132} By the late 1920s, the school also posted a blue list each month identifying the ten students with the highest grades in the entire school and set up a system of rewards and privileges for academic achievement.\textsuperscript{133} The student newspaper also published a list of the best students in each subject area monthly.\textsuperscript{134} These developments, among others, suggested that educators at girls’ schools did value their students’ intellectual pursuits. Some even altered the academic program to bring new theories and ideas about education to their schools in the early part of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130} Catherine Louise Crunden, “Foxcroft Manuscript,” Box 25, Folder 0008, 59, Foxcroft Archives.
\textsuperscript{131} Crunden, “Foxcroft Manuscript,” 60.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1917-1918, 7, and \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1921-1922, 5, Foxcroft Archives.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{The Halter}, Foxcroft Archives. This was Miss Charlotte’s book of school rules and behavior. There is no listed date, but it appears to have been kept over many years starting around the time the school was founded.
\textsuperscript{134} For example, see \textit{The Snooper}, March 9, 1927, 1, Foxcroft Archives.
\textsuperscript{135} One example was Miss Jennie’s efforts to bring the Montessori Method to St. Catherine’s in the 1910s. She reached out to John Macy, who was a Harvard professor and mentor, and he approached Dr. Montessori while he was in Italy to work on bringing these new methods to the school. These efforts ultimately led to the hiring of a teacher who had trained directly under Dr. Montessori. This example shows the willingness of administrators to respond to and adapt to new theories about education. See John Macy to Virginia Randolph Ellett, June 25, 1913, July 21, 1913, and October 1, 1913, Ellett-St. Catherine’s Alumnae Association Papers, Section 10, VHS.
In order to demonstrate their commitment to rigorous academics, girls’ schools in Virginia often readily promoted their association with and endorsements from academic organizations like the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States as well as from presidents of colleges, in particular the “Seven Sisters” women’s colleges.\textsuperscript{136} The promotion of the networks and relationships formed with elite colleges showed that administrators advocated for an ambitious and challenging course of study that would mirror institutions of higher education. The goals of the program at St. Catherine’s represented an additional challenge, as teachers had to combat not only ideas that women could not handle higher education, but also that women from the South should not pursue education in the North due to sectional tensions that persisted long after the Civil War. Bessie Bosher Purcell, a member of the class of 1900, recalled the difficulties Miss Jennie faced in convincing Richmond parents that their daughters should go to college, and ones in the Northeast in particular.\textsuperscript{137} One way that schools could advertise these connections to institutions of higher education was through disclosing the number of their graduates currently in college. For example, in 1920 St. Anne’s boasted that they had “representatives this year at Smith College, Wellesley, Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Hollins, George Washington and Randolph Macon, all of whom are reflecting credit upon the school.”\textsuperscript{138} Madeira used similar tactics by publishing the number of students currently enrolled in colleges in the yearly catalogues starting in the 1920s. For instance, by 1928 the school had one-hundred-and-thirty-one alumnae in college at the

\textsuperscript{136} St. Catherine’s School, 1924-1925, 6, St. Catherine’s Archives, and The Virginia Randolph Ellett School, 1914-1915, 5, St. Catherine’s Archives. Also see St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 29, STAB Archives, and Miss Madeira’s School, 1915-1916, Madeira Archives.

\textsuperscript{137} Bessie Bosher Purcell, “Reflections,” Miss Jennie File, 1, St. Catherine’s Archives.

\textsuperscript{138} St. Anne’s Episcopal School, 1920-1921, 24, STAB Archives.
time and over four hundred alumnae having attended college in the school’s history. The publication of these numbers indicated that these schools wished to promote their students’ success in achieving academic honors in high school and college.

While St. Catherine’s, St. Anne’s, Madeira, and Foxcroft developed strong academic programs that encouraged college preparation and attendance, each school also maintained aspects of traditional education for women that reinforced conventional notions of femininity. Students could opt out of the more demanding course of study in favor of a curriculum that emphasized subjects like English, music, art, drama, and the history of art, all of which were consistent with more traditional education for women in the United States. Some of the girls’ schools in Virginia even offered classes in the domestic arts and sciences, which prepared girls for homemaking duties as wives as mothers. Although each school emphasized these traditional aspects of education in varying degrees, these curricula that promoted both rigorous college training and traditional skills associated with “finishing schools” reflected the shifting meanings of education for women. While schools determined the relative importance of domesticity in their curricula, many Americans also discussed these same issues, with some advocates for women’s education stressing the importance of preparation for careers outside the home, while others continued to focus on the need for domestic preparation.

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139 Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 11, Madeira Archives.
141 For example, M. Carey Thomas advocated that regardless of individuals’ opinions about women’s employment, all women should have access to rigorous academic preparation so that they would have the opportunity to compete with men if they chose to enter a profession. However, other women activists argued that there was still a continued need to focus on women’s domestic education. Gertrude Martin argued that educators needed to adapt to the modern times to develop new efficient techniques to teach “organization of the household.” An anonymous American mother echoed sentiments in The Ladies’ Home Journal, claiming that college educators, “in their anxiety to develop her brain as fully as that of a man,
schools dealt with similar issues in determining the purposes of their programs, and the competing curricula demonstrated the differing views about the preparation women ultimate needed to succeed in society. The different curricula were also attempts to prepare these women for a variety of tasks and paths that they could choose to pursue in the future. While schools promoted change through the content and breadth of girls’ education, some continuity remained, particularly in the subjects historically associated with an elite woman’s education, which mirrored the scholarly and popular discussions about women’s schooling at the time.

Throughout the catalogues girls’ schools published, school leaders emphasized the study of the English language over all other subject areas. Although English was considered a major academic subject during the early twentieth century, the subject also had a long history in traditional women’s education. Elite society viewed literature and writing skills as important for young women to learn, and at girls’ schools, English was consistently characterized as a top priority. English was often the only academic subject that was a requirement for all students during each of the four years of high school. For example, the 1906 Madeira School pamphlet stated, “English is regarded as the most important part of the entire school work. It is taught daily through-out the whole course…correct idiomatic English is required in all classroom work whatever the

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subject taught and whether the work be oral or written.”

St. Anne’s and St. Catherine’s also stressed English classes, emphasizing the importance of students’ strength in reading and writing. While the promotion of English was consistent with ideas that women should be educated in all major subject areas, the special attention on the subject did not challenge the traditional roots of women’s education that already focused on the spoken and written word.

The yearly internal outlines of courses at St. Catherine’s highlighted the considerable time and effort put into the study of English in the curriculum, especially in preparation for the college entrance examinations. Typically, the English teachers gave a much more detailed overview of what they had covered, what skills they had taught, and what books they had read. These teachers also described specific assignments more frequently than teachers of other subjects. For example, ninth grade students endured daily tests and evaluations of their reading ability. In addition to these assignments, “oral and written quizzes and descriptive and narrative themes were required on each book.”

By the eleventh grade, students focused on vocabulary and critical writing in order to learn skills in constructing and supporting written arguments. By the Christmas of their senior year, the girls in the college track were expected to have read the entire book list that covered the Bryn Mawr reading requirements. The inclusion of works from authors like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Burke, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Scott, among others, not only showed the focus on British Literature, but also that these

\[143\] Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 14, Madeira Archives.
\[144\] Examples include St. Anne’s School, 1924-1925, 20, STAB Archives, Miss Ellett’s School For Girls, 1904-905, 4, St. Catherine’s Archives, and St. Catherine’s School, 1925-1926, 2, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\[145\] This is the case for all of the outlines from the years 1924-1929. St. Catherine’s Archives.
\[146\] Outline of Work, 1925-1926, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\[147\] Outline of Work, 1925-1926, St. Catherine’s Archives.
readings were consistent with the academic rigor of the programs.\textsuperscript{148} The descriptions of the English courses for non-preparatory courses in the catalogues indicated that the reading lists were similar to the college level and included novels and works that connected content from history classes to the reading assignments. This suggested that perhaps administrators saw academic value in English even for non-college-bound students.\textsuperscript{149} Seniors also worked on “constant writing with the aim to develop independent thinking and clear original expression.”\textsuperscript{150} This level of detail about the ways teachers implemented overall goals through specific assignments was not clearly outlined for the other subjects. While the intent behind this focus was not explicitly stated, it is possible that the school was more comfortable promoting English as it was traditionally considered an appropriate subject for female students. Regardless of the exact motivations, English was clearly given not only ample space in the promotional materials and internal documents outlining the curriculum, but it was also allotted the most instructional time of any subject.\textsuperscript{151}

The focus on English over other subjects also caused some internal divisions about instructional time and methods, particularly with the math department at St. Catherine’s. In the 1929 outline of work, a math teacher wrote a thorough and critical note about the year’s experience. She wrote, “this class as a whole has done unusually poor work in algebra,” citing an overcrowded classroom, discipline issues, poorly prepared students, and a reduction in the amount of class time as the main reasons for the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[148] Miss Ellett’s School for Girls, 1905-1906, 15, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\item[149] Miss Ellett’s School for Girls, 1905-1906, 12-13, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\item[150] Outline of Work, 1929-1930, St. Catherine’s Archives. The emphasis is maintained from the original document.
\item[151] Instructional time was outlined in each of the yearly outlines.
\end{footnotes}
problems. While she failed to discuss the specific nature of the discipline problem, the lack of student preparation for high school math and the reduction of instructional time implied that she was criticizing the overall school policy towards math. Her class met three times a week for only forty minutes, which was significantly less time than many other subjects. The reduced instruction time implied that math was not considered as vital as other subjects to the overall preparation of students. The following year, the tenth grade teacher followed up by expressing similar concern that this same group of students had made little progress in their study of math, and she was doubtful about the ability of individual students to be adequately prepared for future years of math or the entrance examinations. The fact that English remained the focus of the curriculum over other subjects typically associated with boys’ education, despite these pleas from faculty, revealed some of the limitations of St. Catherine’s curriculum in challenging traditional content of girls’ education.

Although all students regardless of their track took English, students who did not plan to attend college after high school could transfer relatively easily into the non-preparatory courses within each school. Music was one subject that received considerable attention at girls’ schools in Virginia during this time. At Madeira for example, students in the music program did not participate in many of the same course work as their classmates who were pursuing higher education. Music students took English, History, Art History, and they were able to substitute French and German

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152 Outline of Work, 1928-1929, St. Catherine’s Archives.
153 For example, history classes met four times a week, with three thirty-minute classes and one sixty-minute class. English typically met five days a week.
154 Outline of Work, 1929-1930, St. Catherine’s Archives.
instead of studying the classics and any mathematics beyond basic arithmetic. This new schedule allowed these young women to partake in a more dedicated curriculum in musical theory and performance, helping some of the students to pursue entrance into music conservatories and others to fulfill their parents’ educational wishes. Other schools in the state set up similar programs, allowing students to either pursue careers in music or participate in a “finishing” type of music curriculum that did not tie into a future educational experience or career. Many schools also emphasized art for those who did not want to attend college. By allowing students to engage in different programs that reinforced students’ participation in traditionally female subjects like music and art, administrators at girls’ schools presented multiple and often contradicting visions of what type of woman they wanted their students to become. Although some of these young women presumably went on to study music or art elsewhere, the opportunity to avoid academic subjects in favor of the arts showed a willingness to drift away from their founding visions.

Some programs in girls’ schools during the early twentieth century explicitly stressed the preparation for women’s roles in the home as mothers and wives. These curricula were similar to home economics classes that were occurring in public schools at the time, because they taught young women skills like sewing, cooking, and decorating, and did not promote academic pursuits as a stepping stone for further education or careers.

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155 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, separate insert, Madeira Archives.
156 Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 20, Madeira Archives.
157 See for example, St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 19, STAB Archives; and St. Catherine’s School, 1923-1924, 2, St. Catherine’s Archives. Both schools offered special music programs with different sets of requirements in other academic subject areas.
158 For descriptions of schools’ art programs, see St. Anne’s School, 1917-1918, 19, STAB Archives, and St. Catherine’s School, 1923-1924, 19, St. Catherine’s Archives. St. Anne’s also stressed the dramatic arts among its students, claiming, “The dramatic instinct in all human beings is developed and made the means of improvement in grace, poise and interpretative power” in St. Anne’s School, 1924-1915, 21, STAB Archives.
outside of the home. For example, at St. Anne’s in the 1920s, students could participate in needlework, sewing, and household economics classes.\(^{159}\) Students who were not bound to the strict curriculum of the college track had more opportunities to take these electives. These options were significant because they indicated the school’s acceptance of women’s domesticated duties as well as the view that education as a means to pursue higher education or a career. Madeira had similar courses in place including a popular class in household decoration in which “attention is given to periods of decoration, principles of decoration, types of furniture, design and color, all of which are illustrated by lantern slides and by fabrics.”\(^{160}\) While students were encouraged to expand their scholastic abilities through rigorous academic courses in all major subject areas, schools also exposed these girls to ideas that played down their intellect in favor of more traditional notions of the purpose of women’s education.

Not all girls’ schools in Virginia maintained strict adherence to traditional methods of education that emphasized home life. Some girls’ schools promoted all academic fields, even for girls not attending college. Miss Jennie made it clear throughout her personal writings and St. Catherine’s printed materials that academic preparation was the main goal. Insisting that the work of the school was “…not at all to be regarded in the old sense of a ‘finishing course,’” Miss Jennie set up a curriculum for non-college bound girls that resembled the preparatory study in many ways.\(^{161}\) Like the college-bound cohort, these girls also took classes in all of the major academic subjects like English, history, foreign languages, mathematics, and science, but many of them had

\(^{159}\) St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 18-20, STAB Archives.

\(^{160}\) Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 17, Madeira Archives.

\(^{161}\) St. Catherine’s School, 1924-1925, 8, St. Catherine’s Archives.
the opportunity to complete more work in Latin, music, and art. The school did not offer domestic education courses as a part of the curriculum. These high standards, even for those girls who would not be attending college, showed Miss Jennie’s strong dedication to a firm and solid foundation of learning for all girls. She reaffirmed this belief by stating, “the studies are not confined to those needed for college entrance, but the curriculum is largely controlled by these requirements. The ability to pass these has a definite and distinct meaning, with a most important bearing on the future life of the student, whether she actually attend college or not.” Clearly confident in her philosophy about the importance of preparation, Miss Jennie created a curriculum for all of her students that emphasized academic strength and rigor.

The Madeira School also placed certain limitations on the exposure of its students to traditional content and goals of women’s education, even while accepting the notion that not all students would attend college. During this early period of the school’s history, Lucy Madeira set up a graduate department specifically for those students who had already graduated high schools, but did not plan on going to an undergraduate institution. Miss Madeira argued that there were many non-college-bound women who should still have the opportunity to pursue additional education beyond the typical high school experience. The school claimed that the graduate studies “have been arranged corresponding in a great measure to the work of the freshmen and sophomore years of college.” Students in this program took subjects in all academic areas including

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162 St. Catherine’s School, 1924-1925, 8, St. Catherine’s Archives.
163 The Virginia Randolph Ellett School, 1914-1915, 5, St. Catherine’s Archive.
164 Miss Madeira’s School, 1907-1908, 16, Madeira Archives.
165 Miss Madeira’s School, 1907-1908, 16.
English, history, Latin, French, German, mathematics, science, religion, and music.\textsuperscript{166}

The inclusion of a program targeted directly at students who did not want to pursue college that still exposed them to all sorts of academic subjects and courses demonstrated that girls’ schools did not always completely break away from the importance of academics, even in their non-preparatory curricula. Madeira and St. Catherine’s maintained the programs that were most dedicated to the idea of academic preparation no matter the ultimate purpose or goal of an individual’s education.

Studying the curriculum of a school and the educational philosophy of its leaders allows historians an opportunity to investigate some of the ways individual schools reinforced or challenged traditional beliefs about girls’ capabilities to pursue higher learning. The act of creating a curriculum often forces schools to prioritize certain subjects, place less emphasis on others, and outline overall goals of their programs. Girls’ schools in Virginia during the early twentieth century established courses of study which valued women’s intellectual capabilities and also limited the scope of their studies. The content and rigor of the preparatory tracks of these curricula demonstrated the serious commitment of the schools’ founders to women’s scholastic potential and the desire to place their students in the elite women’s institutions in higher education.

However, these schools also offered programs that did not prepare women for college and maintained common beliefs that higher education was not necessarily appropriate for all women. These competing academic visions and the roles both faculty and students played in shaping the programs demonstrated how girls’ schools became places to discuss the proper purpose of women’s education. The fact that the schools in the state maintained both demanding academic and more traditionally feminine curricula indicated

\textsuperscript{166} Miss Madeira’s School, 1907-1908, 20.
that there was not a consensus about the definition of a woman’s proper education in the early twentieth century.

Academics represented only one aspect of the experience of these girls’ schools. The next chapter explores the athletic programs that administrators developed, focusing in particular on the ways gendered expectations about sports and health shaped the education of modern women. As in the academic programs, administrators expected women to pursue rigorous and demanding athletic requirements. These educators also encouraged girls to put forth great effort through a variety of competitions. However, traditional concerns about female health and behavior led school leaders to limit students’ athleticism and to promote sportsmanship and humility. While school administrators sought to challenge some aspects of girls’ education, conventional standards remained that reinforced assumptions about women’s athletic abilities and character. Both academics and athletics at girls’ schools demonstrated the promises and limitations of the administrators’ visions for the education of modern women.
Chapter 2
The Female Athlete: Sports, Wellness, and Definitions of Femininity

On a brisk November morning in Middleburg, Virginia, the girls of Foxcroft School were busy with preparations. The year was 1917, and after sending off the Middleburg Hunt and enjoying the delicious brunch at Miss Charlotte’s house, the girls began to assemble for the big event of the day, the Fox and Hound basketball game that occurred every Thanksgiving.167 As the girls gathered in their respective team’s meeting spot, a decorated basketball court awaited. One student recalled, “Both goals were festively bound, one in red and green, the other in tan and white; in addition printed copies of the songs and cheers of both sides were ready to be given out to the spectators soon to arrive.”168 The Foxes and the Hounds each made their grand entrance into the full gymnasium with cheering and singing. After “brilliant playing” that students described as the “hardest kind of fight,” the Foxes emerged victorious in this annual tradition.169 Although the Foxes had won, “The Hounds gave the winners a hearty cheer, and then everyone crowded on the field to congratulate the players.”170 The Thanksgiving game demonstrated the school’s efforts to promote competition and sportsmanship as key aspects of the athletic program at Foxcroft.

As administrators at girls’ schools in Virginia developed academic curricula at the beginning of the twentieth century, they also faced the task of creating other programs for their students. Events like the Thanksgiving basketball game demonstrated how athletics became an important area of interest at girls’ schools as teachers sought to develop

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167 The Middleburg Hunt was the local fox hunting organization. The Hunt began the event each Thanksgiving on Foxcroft’s campus.
168 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 18-19, Foxcroft Archives, Middleburg, Virginia.
169 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 19, Foxcroft Archives.
170 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 19.
modern young women. Schools worked to structure physical education courses that incorporated social norms of femininity, created interest in athletics, and taught competition and sportsmanship to young women. Often incorporated into the mission statements and guiding philosophies, sports and a healthy lifestyle became significant and influential components to the overall goals of girls’ schools, and the programs that schools implemented often linked a healthy body to a strong mind and character.

Physical education classes and sporting events at girls’ schools in Virginia encouraged athleticism and competition, traits that challenged expectations that girls remain passive and meek. Through activities like hunting and horseback riding as well as through the organization of teams and clubs that would play each other and other schools, administrators sought to promote daily exercise for young girls. However, administrators also limited students’ competiveness and athleticism to fit notions of proper femininity, which often meant focusing on the value of sportsmanship over all other traits. In addition to the limits on competition, educators also had concerns about female health that reinforced traditional notions about girls’ physical capabilities. The promotion and limitations of athletics and health reflected some of the ways that ideas about gender and femininity impacted the content of girls’ education in the early twentieth century.

School administrators saw athletics as a way to build not only strong bodies, but also sharp minds and formidable characters. Examining the mission statements and goals of these programs in school catalogues showed that these educators hoped to shape their students not only during school, but also to instill values that would promote healthful habits throughout their lives. As with the development of academic programs, administrators and teachers were not the only members of school communities who
commented on and discussed the appropriate role of athletics for young women. In yearbooks, scrapbooks, and other school publications, students at girls’ schools described both the joy of participating in sports as well as the fear and anxiety athletics and health requirements brought to their school days. These perspectives, while not a complete representation of the entire student body, provide important insight into the ways the missions and goals of these athletic programs impacted girls’ thoughts about their own athleticism and health.

Educators across the country had participated in a debate about the role of physical activity for young women since the nineteenth century. Some men and women advocated for women’s participation in exercise and proposed academic and athletics programs that would still fit traditional gender conventions. As early as the 1860s, women like Catharine Beecher stressed the need for fresh air exercises for men, women, and children, especially in schools. She argued that these conditions would not only strengthen the physical body, but also help to stimulate the mind. Other female proponents of women’s physical education emphasized the benefits girls could gain from sports, but they still operated under nineteenth century assumptions of femininity by warning women of the consequences of abandoning their gender roles. For example, Helene Saxe MacLaughlin, the director of women’s athletics for the public schools of New York City, argued in 1911 that athletics benefitted women’s health and morality. She claimed, “Today the athletic girl has prominence, not the loud, masculinely dressed, man-apeing individual, but the whole-hearted, rosy cheeked, healthy girl who exercises

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because she loves it and who plays for the joy of playing.”

MacLaughlin argued for girls’ access to sports, but also promoted an image of the ideal female athlete who was neither aggressive nor assertive. MacLaughlin feared that if women were too competitive or strayed away from the “joy of playing,” their femininity would be compromised or lost. By focusing on the positive health value of exercise and placing sports within a clear definition of femininity, MacLaughlin perhaps hoped to ease fears that women were becoming too masculine.

Other women during this time published work that advocated for women’s pursuit of sports and education, but many encouraged restraint and moderation and argued against any rapid change in women’s roles. Lucille Hill, the Director of Physical Training at Wellesley College, praised women’s growing interest in athletics, but also outlined some concerns in a book written in 1903. She wrote:

This awakening of girls to the delights of athletics, together with an aroused intelligence in the desirability of possessing a strong and beautiful body for both use and ornament, makes imperative a corresponding knowledge of the practical laws of health and the relations of proper food, sleep, bathing, and clothing, as well as exercise, to the welfare of the body. Otherwise, through ignorance and lack of self-direction and control, a great power for good will becomes a source of evil.

Hill clearly supported women’s participation in athletics and believed that health and sports could function as positive forces in their lives. However, she also advocated increased education for women on strategies for maintaining a healthy lifestyle that included nutrition, hygiene, daily habits, and athletics. Although Hill actively promoted


MacLaughlin, “Field Hockey Girls,” 277.


women’s involvement in sports, her concerns about women’s health demonstrated lingering assumptions that without proper training and self-control women’s bodies could not handle rigorous physical training. These examples reflected the contradictions in arguments that simultaneously embraced women’s new interests in athletics and held onto fears about the implications of more active women.

Despite these debates, studies on the development of physical education tend to be broad in nature, usually covering thousands of years of world history in short volumes. Texts targeted to athletics teachers and the general public constitute the majority of publications about the development of sports. Most of this literature starts with the history of ancient Greece and then focuses primarily on the rise of the competing forms of gymnastics developed in the late nineteenth century. These accounts outline the techniques and specific exercises that were taught, but they do not analyze why more women were participating in sports or the overall goals of these programs. Scholarly historiography provides important alternative narratives. Historian Patricia Campbell Warner’s When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear analyzes the connections between women’s involvement in sports and developments in women’s fashion and explores the ways women’s colleges promoted changes in both of these areas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Warner argues that these shifts

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in women’s athletics and styles demonstrate “the slow emergence from the close restrictiveness of early Victorian age to the acceptance of women’s participation in a broader society.” 178 Although Warner’s work provides important contributions in understanding the role education and athletics played in women’s changing societal roles, she does not consider whether these changes were also occurring in secondary schools for women in addition to colleges and universities.

Another example of a more promising approach to studying women’s roles in athletics is Martha Verbrugge’s *Active Bodies: A History of Women’s Physical Education in Twentieth Century America*, which takes an in-depth look at the role female physical education teachers in the early twentieth century played in shaping the experiences of students in athletics. Verbrugge argues that instructors used scientific research to create physical education curricula that segregated students by race and sex. This system marginalized women by reinforcing a social hierarchy based on sex difference and women’s perceived physical inferiority. 179 While her examination of the meaning of an active womanhood contributes much to the literature, Verbrugge’s account is still rather broad, covering many types of schools and the experiences of girls and women from all backgrounds. More focused and narrow studies are needed in order to tease out the distinct experiences of young women throughout the United States and the goals or missions of physical education classes and athletics teams in different types of schools. Examining the athletics curricula at single-sex institutions provides an opportunity to expand on Verbrugge’s work and complicate her argument about educators’ roles in maintaining a social hierarchy based on sex. In particular, instructors at girls’ schools in

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178 Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play*, xix.
Virginia challenged this hierarchy by promoting women’s participation in team sports and gymnastics classes, but they also reinforced some assumptions about female physical weakness.\(^{180}\)

Founders of girls’ schools in Virginia placed great emphasis on the importance of health and athletics for young women, and they often incorporated these ideas into the guiding visions of their schools. Schools developed missions that connected the physical benefits of outdoor activity to increased academic performance in the classroom. For example, St. Catherine’s founder promoted the benefits of outdoor learning for girls, providing explicit motives for emphasizing physical education. The 1922-1923 school pamphlet claimed, “The heads of the School lay great stress upon the physical activities; they believe that sound and happy bodies make for sound and happy minds. They strive to make the play-hours as enjoyable as possible.”\(^{181}\) Connecting the body and the mind through the physical education curriculum, Miss Jennie and the teachers at St. Catherine’s encouraged an active lifestyle for the benefit of their students. Some students documented this administrative philosophy in their written recollections. Natalie Blanton, a graduate of St. Catherine’s recalled, “Miss Ellett, from the beginning of her career, appreciated the value of dramatization, of learning by doing, of a change of pace and place. Active and restless herself, she knew the physical necessity of movement in the life of children, and the stimulus to their minds of improvisation and imagination.”\(^{182}\)

\(^{180}\) Verbrugge argues that in the early twentieth century, physical education instructors segregated boys and girls into different types of physical activity based on scientific assumptions about men’s perceived physical superiority to girls. Boys did military drill and sports and girls participated in calisthenics and gymnastics. Girls’ schools in Virginia offered both of these types of activities for their female students. This example shows how more work needs to be done to consider how single-sex institutions were similar to and differed from coeducational and public institutions. See Verbrugge, *Active Bodies*, 3.

\(^{181}\) *St. Catherine’s School*, 1922-1923, 12, St. Catherine’s Archives, Richmond.

belief in an active and physical environment at school showed that administrators thought that sports and the outdoors would benefit instruction in the classroom.

Administrators at other girls’ schools also placed great emphasis on the benefits of health and athletics in their mission statements. Lucy Madeira made the connection between a healthy body and positive academic growth in the school’s opening catalogue in 1906. When describing the different outdoor athletic programs offered, she wrote, “Every encouragement is given to these activities as the school believes that nothing is more conducive to health and to sound mental and moral development than regular and systematic exercise in the open air.”183 The inclusion of athletics in these sections of catalogues was significant, as it suggested that administrators believed that women’s health should be a key priority in their education. Although the records at Foxcroft did not include catalogues from its earliest years, other sources indicated that athletics still played a key role in the development of the school. Miss Charlotte greatly enjoyed both basketball and horseback riding, and she promoted these programs actively.184 The school’s motto, “Mens Sana in Corpore Sano,” translated to mean “a healthy mind in a healthy body,” also suggested that Miss Charlotte showed a strong desire to make health and athletics critical parts of her students’ education.185 The connections made between academics and athletics showed the conscious decisions by administrators at girls’ school to promote sports and healthy lifestyles in the overall vision for girls’ education.

183 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 9, Madeira School Archives, McLean.
184 Yearbooks from 1914-1929 covered all athletic events held at the school. In letters written by Miss Charlotte later on in her life for the alumnae magazine, she emphasized the role athletics played in shaping the development of Foxcroft. Miss Charlotte’s background and studies at the Sargent School of Physical Education also indicates that she held athletics in high regard. See Nancy Gerry Bedford, Pickett Randolph, and Steve Matthews, eds., Foxcroft School Centennial Memory Book, 1914-2014 (Middleburg, VA: The Foxcroft School, 2014), 95-97.
185 Bedford, Randolph, and Matthews, Foxcroft School Centennial Memory Book, 9.
Some educators also believed that values taught through athletics, such as strength, assertiveness, sportsmanship, and humility could also be used to promote a healthful and beneficial lifestyle that women could carry into their future lives. Administrators at St. Anne’s in Charlottesville set out goals similar to other girls’ schools’ in regards to athletics by establishing a threefold mission statement that included strengthening the body, mind, and soul in order to prepare women for “all departments of life.” By 1920, St. Anne’s was even more explicit in its promotion of athletics for girls, stating in the catalogue, “The Principal is an earnest advocate of the benefits resulting from properly directed exercise; a sound body is of the first importance in fitting a girl for the responsibilities and duties of after life.” The focus on the positive impact of a healthy lifestyle for young women, not just in school, but throughout the course of their lives, indicated that administrators believed that they had the ability to shape future decisions made by their students. Administrators at girls’ schools set up strenuous athletic programs that taught confidence and competition, even though there were limitations to what was considered appropriate and proper behavior for female athletes and students. While educators often gave students contradictory messages about what exactly it meant to be a proper female athlete, they believed that training in physical education would impact young women’s futures.

Before examining the contradictions in the values taught and promoted through athletics, an examination of the types of programs offered at girls’ schools is necessary. Athletic requirements and programs created by administrators included gymnastics classes, a wide variety of sports teams, and other extracurricular activities. Most schools

186 St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 10, STAB Archives, Charlottesville, Virginia.
187 St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 13, STAB Archives.
had some sort of daily athletic requirement, which some students enjoyed while others viewed it with dread and anxiety. At Madeira, students were required to participate in two hours of outdoor activity or physical exercise each day. In addition to these requirements, the school stressed the wide range of activities available to students. Administrators claimed in the 1906 catalogue, “The physical care of the girls is in charge of the instructor in gymnastics, the school physician and the head of house. Great attention is given to outdoor life, which includes tennis, golf, and other outdoor games and sports. A special feature is cross country walking.” By offering many different sports and classes, Madeira officials may have hoped to find a sport or type of exercise that would appeal to and benefit each student. Regardless of whether or not they favored athletics, girls had to pass courses in gymnastics in order to graduate, unless they could not participate because of “special orthopedic work,” which showed the importance of these requirements to administrators. By making athletics one of the few necessary requirements for all students, administrators at Madeira demonstrated their commitment to educating young women about the benefits of good health.

The athletic programs put into place at St. Anne’s also reflected educators’ strong faith in the benefits of exercise and health. In the 1920s, new principals Emma Yerby, Elizabeth Winegar, and Laura Lee Dorsey implemented programs that emphasized the outdoors and exercise in new and stronger ways, calling athletics “an essential factor in

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188 See St. Catherine’s School, 1919-1920, St. Catherine’s Archives, and Tally-Ho!, 1914-1915, Foxcroft Archives for examples of the types of athletic requirements at girls’ schools.
189 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 19, Madeira Archives.
190 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 9-10.
191 Miss Madeira’s School, 1928-1929, 10, Madeira School Archives.
the curriculum of St. Anne’s.” Educators believed that athletics would not only bring healthful physical and mental benefits, but they also believed that it would provide a fun outlet for students. One catalogue stated, “The old adage that ‘All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’ holds good for Jack’s sister, too. Accordingly fun, recreation and athletics receive their full share of time at St. Anne’s.” Educators at St. Anne’s used this recognizable saying in order to claim for women a place in athletics and to justify the right and ability of girls to have fun. As with the other schools, St. Anne’s set up many different choices for students’ athletic requirements through sports such as tennis, volleyball, basketball, soccer, and golf and through gymnastics and calisthenics classes. Students also had the opportunity to participate in the hiking club, which the school thought, “though distinctly social, supplies one of the most important forms of exercise.” These activities served the purpose of not only providing a sense of fun and relaxation on campus, but also serving as an outlet for students to maintain and improve their health.

Although administrators created programs with these particular goals, students themselves also responded to these requirements with a mix of excitement and anxiety. Many girls looked forward to sporting events and games, and some used student publications to voice their opinions about the focus on athletics and health. In the St. Catherine’s newspaper, The Scrap Basket, students gave overviews of the upcoming sports seasons, sometimes describing them with anticipation and optimism. In an announcement about the basketball team, one student wrote, “The chief school sport has

193 St. Anne’s School, 1925-1926, 15, STAB Archives.
194 St. Anne’s School, 1923-1924, 12, STAB Archives.
started again, with the addition of two out-door basketball courts, so that more people can play at once. Basketball season has always been popular here, and now that we have this new advantage, everyone should stay out and try seriously for the squad.” The encouragement to join the team reflected, in this case, an attempt to gather more support for athletics. This student also suggested that the school had a thriving basketball program for many years that they had been working to improve. The new facilities served as a way to advance and build upon the athletic program at the school, showing that students in addition to faculty members sometimes took active roles in promoting sports.

Other students wrote poems or stories about their own experiences playing sports, showing a positive response to educators’ focus on athletics and health. In a poem titled “Ambition,” Mary, a student from Foxcroft, discussed her feelings regarding dedication and commitment to athletics. She wrote, “Always struggling, striving, trying, / with a mighty goal in sight; / Prodding forward, hope undying, / Toward achievement’s dawning light.” By describing the constant struggle of her ambition, Mary also kept a positive tone through her choice to call her task a “mighty” one as well as through her association of achievement with the light. Furthermore, it was significant that this young woman promoted athletic ambition as a positive trait, because it showed that some students accepted the school’s efforts to teach these values through athletics. Beth North, a student at St. Catherine’s, explored her emotions after the annual tryouts for the basketball team.

195 “Basketball,” Scrap Basket, 4, no. 2 (December 1930): 5, St. Catherine’s Archives.
196 Another example of students’ promotion of athletics was the efforts by the student-run Athletic Association at Madeira to raise money to support the school’s sports teams. The students argued that this money was critical since “a school is known by its athletics,” and they urged more girls to donate to the cause and participate in the new teams. See The Tatler, Dec. 1908, 9, Madeira Archives.
197 Tally-Ho!, 1924-1925, 18, Foxcroft Archives.
After much practice and hard work she described “the joy when the teams list of forward players included my name! Never did my name become so well, a proud lift.”\textsuperscript{198} The sense of accomplishment and joy that Beth felt from her acceptance on the team reflected the administrators’ goals that students would enjoy participation in athletics.

While students like Mary and Beth wrote about their experiences in sports with positivity and focused on the ambition, determination, and pride athletics brought them, not all girls spoke about exercise in these terms. Others described the athletic requirements with anxiety and dread, indicating that some students may have also resisted school efforts to promote these active outdoor activities. This was especially true when some students discussed the school athletic requirements for graduation. For example, one student at Madeira wrote in the 1920 yearbook, “The fall athletics started off with an announcement which struck terror to the souls of some unfortunate mortals, and was greeted by others with a philosophic calm. Alas! either hockey or tennis was required twice a week.”\textsuperscript{199} The comparison in this example between those students who embraced the new athletic regulations and those “mortals” who looked towards these sports with fear demonstrated that not all students were comfortable with the focus on exercise. This division within the student body based on athletic ability appeared in an article written for the St. Catherine’s student newspaper on spring sports. The article stated, “With spring comes the peculiar outdoor sport known as track. It is a very versatile amusement, including tennis, archery, running, jumping, throwing, and sitting or lying in the shade and laughing at your athletic friends. This year all branches of track

\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Frills and Frizzes}, 1910, 44, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Yearbook}, 1920, 67, Madeira Archives.
have flourished nobly.” Using humor to demonstrate the fact that not all girls wished to participate actively in sports, this article was another example of student dialogues about the role of athletics in school. Despite the differences in student enthusiasm towards sports, the author suggested that students’ love of sports could happily coexist with others’ dread and anxiety towards athletics. As a spectator and non-athlete, this author’s opinions showed that some students saw both types of lifestyles acceptable for young women and compatible with one another. While some of the students did indicate that they were not in favor of these types of athletic requirements, others agreed with and shared educators’ views that athletics could bring sound physical and character development and a sense of fun and excitement.

Educators did not always agree on exactly what should be taught or promoted through athletic programs. Girls’ schools in Virginia often promoted athleticism and a sense of competition in their students through the wide variety of athletics offered. These traits challenged some aspects of traditional femininity that stressed women’s complacency and characterized them as weak and passive. Evidence from girls’ schools in Virginia suggested that educators did attempt to promote a sense of competition in students through participation in nontraditional activities for women like hunting and cross country riding, school teams, and games against other schools. Schools used a system of rewards in order to promote active participation in these types of athletic events. This sense of competition and athleticism challenged popular assumptions about

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200 “Spring and the Athletic Field,” *The Scrap Basket*, 4, no. 4 (June 1931): 6, St. Catherine’s Archives.

201 Even some students who liked to participate in athletics complained about the physical activities that the school required. Girls at St. Catherine’s recalled the “curses” and “maimed knees” at the beginning of each track and hockey season. While these students may not have always enjoyed the sports, their opinions showed that some students thought that it was acceptable to both praise and criticize the athletics requirements of the schools. See *The Scrap Basket*, 4, no. 1 (November 1930): 5; and *The Scrap Basket*, 4, no. 4 (June 1931): 6, St. Catherine’s Archives.
women’s involvement in athletics.\textsuperscript{202} It also disrupts the historiography claiming that these school environments did little to promote these traits in girls.\textsuperscript{203}

Students’ involvement in nontraditional activities for women represented one of the ways that girls’ schools promoted a sense of athleticism that challenged conventional gender norms. At Foxcroft, students had the opportunity to participate in a variety of forms of hunting, each of which provided them with a thrilling and daring experience that required a level of athleticism, bravery, and confidence. In 1916 some girls participated in the newest form of hunting available to the girls, called drag hunting.\textsuperscript{204} Drag hunting is a form where hunters place the scent from a fox on a course prior to the hunt. A group of riders and hounds then follow the scent with the purpose of simulating a live hunt on a more controlled course.\textsuperscript{205} As one student wrote, “Not everyone, however, had nerve enough to ride on these expeditions when the idea loomed up before them that they were practically the same as hunting.”\textsuperscript{206}

Although not all of the girls were keen on the idea of drag hunting, the availability of this type of activity, which required riding and hunting skills, signaled administrators’ beliefs in student capabilities. This type of equestrian activity also gave girls an opportunity for athletic involvement through riding without

\textsuperscript{202} The promotion of these activities challenged the notion that women should participate in sports for just the thrill of the game alone, as people like Helene Saxe MacLaughlin had argued for in the early twentieth century. While schools wanted girls to enjoy sports, they also saw the benefits of some competition and rivalry for girls. See MacLaughlin, “Field Hockey Girls,” 277. Schools rewarded those students who excelled in these competitions and classes with athletic awards and monograms of distinction at annual events such as Field Days. For overviews of the types of awards given, see Field Day Program, 1918, Athletics file, St. Catherine’s Archives; “Commencement at St. Anne’s School,” June 7, 1927, Commencement 1920-1929 file, STAB Archives; and \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1915-1916, 29-30, Foxcroft Archives.\textsuperscript{203} Ilana DeBare, \textit{Where Girls Come First} (New York: Penguin 2004), 96-98, 194-195. DeBare uses one example from a girls’ school and claims that all girls’ schools deliberately avoided fostering competition in any aspect of school life. The only time she brings up athleticism and competition as traits promoted by schools was after the passage of Title IX. By generalizing about all girls’ schools across the country, DeBare provides a misleading picture about the nature of some athletic programs in places like Virginia.\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1916-1917, 16, Foxcroft Archives.\textsuperscript{205} Masters of Foxhounds Association & Foundation, “Foxhunting Glossary,” accessed January 19, 2015, http://www.mfh.org/foxhunting-glossary.html.\textsuperscript{206} “Foxhunting Glossary.”
participating in the live hunts. Another form of hunting that was increasingly popular at Foxcroft was the annual raccoon hunt, where Miss Charlotte would take students dressed in boots and overalls into the woods in the middle of the night to hunt a raccoon with a team of hounds for guidance. After one such night of traipsing through woods and creeks, one student recalled,

    It was then about twelve thirty, and as Mr. Coon had given us such a jolly good time we decided to let him have his liberty and gladly turned our weary steps toward home. Our wanderings had taken us about fourteen miles and we reached Foxcroft tired, indeed, but greatly rejoiced to find a delicious Welsh Rarebit awaiting us.  

“Coon hunting,” as students called it, was different than other forms of hunting since the girls were not on horseback. It also involved getting dirty and tired, and it required young women to be active and physically fit enough to walk almost fourteen miles in one night. The food at the end of the hunt showed the use of establishing a system of rewards to encourage participation in athletics. Hunting at Foxcroft was just one of the different ways schools promoted visions for women’s involvement in athletics through challenging physical activities that encouraged women to be active.

    The annual Foxcroft horseback-riding trip to Luray, Virginia, was another example of an activity that both promoted athleticism and defied traditional definitions of appropriate physical exercise for women. Each year, Miss Charlotte selected an elite group of riders to go with her on the over one hundred and ninety mile round trip, where

207 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 14, Foxcroft Archives.
208 Although there was not a direct reference in the yearbook to race beyond the terminology used in the name of the event, the ways students described the hunt suggest its racial connotations. The students gave the raccoon an identity by calling him “Mr. Coon” and they constructed the raccoon as a character whose purpose was their entertainment. For example, during the hunt one student recalled, “The men had built a blazing fire in the wall, just to give Mr. Coon a bit of a hot time and let him know that we wanted to see some action on his part.” See Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 14. For a scholarly interpretation of the development of racial stereotypes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Mark Smith, How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 48-66.
girls got to experience the sites from horseback and explore the caverns.\textsuperscript{209} Being selected for the trip was seen as a great honor, and students described the girls who were not able to participate as the “envious ones.”\textsuperscript{210} Miss Charlotte and other teachers selected only the girls who had demonstrated strength and athleticism, as the multi-day event was physically demanding for all riders. The students on the 1916 trip were determined that despite the physical challenges this trip would bring, that they “should be gay.”\textsuperscript{211} After the trip, girls recalled their experiences in the yearbook, and one girl remarked, “As our party of seventeen rode merrily through the little Virginia villages, people rushed out from all sides, and we heard many hot arguments as to whether or not we were boys.”\textsuperscript{212} The fact that bystanders debated the gender of these riders implied that the activity itself carried gendered expectations, and that the spectators were thus surprised to see a group of schoolgirls on such a trip. The Foxcroft girls did not seem upset about this ambiguity, which may indicate that students understood that people associated athleticism with males rather than females. The physical nature of hunting and riding suggested that schools urged female students to develop a type of athleticism that tested strength and endurance, and Foxcroft used a system of rewards and honors to pursue this part of its mission.

Another way girls’ schools promoted athleticism and competition was through the creation of school teams that would compete with one another in intramural type events. These activities fostered a sense of ambition and competition that encouraged girls to be confident leaders and athletes. St. Anne’s set up the Lions and the Tigers as the school’s

\textsuperscript{209} \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1915-1916, 31-32, Foxcroft Archives.
\textsuperscript{210} \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1915-1916, 32.
\textsuperscript{211} \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1915-1916, 32.
\textsuperscript{212} \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1915-1916, 32.
tennis teams and the Entente and Alliance to play soccer.\textsuperscript{213} The Athletic Association would arrange games between the teams, and girls would get the opportunity to compete with each other for school prizes.\textsuperscript{214} St. Catherine’s established the Gold and White teams, which competed in various athletic activities throughout the year and also held singing and cheering competitions. As the school teams developed, many more areas of school life, including community service fundraisers and academic contests, also became a part of the annual school rivalry.\textsuperscript{215} As mentioned earlier, Foxcroft created the Foxes and the Hounds, which competed in many athletic events each year. The songs created by both teams showed the level of competitiveness that administrators encouraged. In one song from the Foxes, the team claimed, “Oh, Foxes, we’re out to win the victory, at Basket Ball, at Basket Ball, We’ll trick the little Hound dogs by our playing, we’ll fool them all, we’ll fool them all.”\textsuperscript{216} While the Foxes focused on trickery to outsmart their opponents, the Hounds’ song urged its members to demonstrate athletic strength. The song stated, “Hounds, Hounds, Hounds, We’re here to win today, no matter how hard to Foxes play; Team, Team Team, If we’re going to win this game play hard and fast so at the last the victory we may claim.”\textsuperscript{217} The themes of trickery and athletic prowess in these songs demonstrated how the Foxes and Hounds became an area of school life where students could express athleticism and a competitive spirit.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{213} The Jinger Jar, 1916, 57, STAB Archives.
\textsuperscript{214} The Jinger Jar, 1916, 57.
\textsuperscript{215} For examples of the types of events in which Golds and White participated as well as some of the cheers they created, see the teams’ sections in editions of The Scrap Basket 1930-1931, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\textsuperscript{216} Tally-Ho!, 1915-1916, 16, Foxcroft Archives.
\textsuperscript{217} Tally-Ho!, 1915-1916, 16.
\textsuperscript{218} Students also recalled being able to demonstrate their “athletic prowess” during the annual Field Day competitions. Students were rewarded for their athletic abilities in a wide range of activities, including high jumping and relay races. Schools encouraged women to develop this athletic ability and to demonstrate their skills in this competitive setting. See Tally-Ho!, 1921-1922, 28, Foxcroft Archives.
In addition to intramural types of teams, girls’ schools in Virginia also began to compete with other girls’ schools in both hockey and basketball. Although there are no records showing that any of the schools in this study played each other in this time period, many of these schools traveled out of the state to play sports. At Foxcroft, the first time the basketball team traveled to Baltimore to play Roland Park Country School was in 1921, and students showed great excitement and anticipation for the game. One student claimed that the game was “indescribable, first Foxcroft made a goal, then Roland Park. Excitement reached a frenzied state and everyone just stood up and yelled!”\textsuperscript{219} With Foxcroft’s first victory against another school, students indicated the thrill and excitement these games brought. While not indicative of the entire student body, these games represented a way for women to be actively involved in fierce competition with other athletes. These experiences at games against other schools, which were similar to those expressed by athletes at St. Catherine’s when they played their rival the Collegiate School, also showed that these athletic competitions became a way for schools to promote their mission of exercise and competition for women.\textsuperscript{220}

An examination of student publications from this time period indicated that many students felt pride in their competition and athleticism. For example, Foxcroft students recalled the excitement when they overheard people speaking positively about their classmates’ performance in a local horse show. In response, these girls stated, “Where upon our pride getting the best of us, we began talking ‘Foxcroft’ loudly in order to show that we at least knew the ‘ridin’ gals.’”\textsuperscript{221} Wanting to share in the attention of the riders, these students felt pride in their school being represented as a place for excellent and

\textsuperscript{219} Tally-Ho!, 1921-1922, 26-27, Foxcroft Archives.  
\textsuperscript{220} Quair, 1923, 68-69, St. Catherine’s Archives.  
\textsuperscript{221} Tally-To!, 1924-1925, 55, Foxcroft Archives.
competitive athletes. The excitement and pride felt by students at Foxcroft reflected Miss Charlotte’s intentions for girls at her school to both work hard and enjoy play and the outdoors. In another example, a student at St. Catherine’s penned a short story for the yearbook, where she described the experience of Dorothea Carew, a typical society girl who “had determined to change her pretty, modest, and loving self into a brilliant girl. At first she had not known how to accomplish her desire; but finally deciding that the healthy, athletic girl had taken the place of the trustful, timid, and dainty creature of former times, she directed all her efforts toward sports.” Although a fictional story, the positive representation of the female athlete in this story suggested this author’s belief that modern girls of the twentieth century needed to leave behind the traditional notions of femininity that prevented them from reaching their full potential as “brilliant” girls. While these examples cannot show what each individual in the student body believed, they reflect visible examples of support for women’s athleticism. The description of Dorothea Crew in this story reinforced the importance of health, academic achievement, and fun that were central to the administrators’ goals for athletics and sports.

While girls’ schools actively promoted a sense of competition and athleticism through sports teams and other extracurricular activities, educators also believed that it was more important for women to be good sports and maintained that they should not become too competitive. This focus on sportsmanship limited women’s ability to be fierce competitors and reflected the lasting legacies of the view that women should be at

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222 Charlotte Haxall Noland to Kitty Van Merle Smith, Feb. 6, 1929, Foxcroft Archives. This letter was sealed and only opened after Miss Charlotte’s death in 1969.
223 Frills and Frizzes, 1902, 8, St. Catherine’s Archives.
224 For examples of administrators’ visions for athletics programs that included physical health and order, see St. Catherine’s School, 1923-1924, 1, St. Catherine’s Archives; and St. Anne’s School, 1923-1924, 10, STAB Archives.
a certain level both meek and gracious. For example, St. Anne’s outlined its expectations for athletes in its catalogue. While the school promoted women’s involvement in all types of physical activity, “Good sportsmanship, responsibility, and co-operation are cardinal points emphasized in all athletic work.” The choice of the word “cardinal” was significant as it suggested that these values would be promoted above any others, which would have included competiveness, confidence, or assertiveness. School officials signaled that athletic work would be promoted with limitations to the acceptable amount of pride and confidence one could exhibit on the court or field.

The idea of being a good sport and possessing grace and poise in both victory and defeat was a common theme in the Foxcroft yearbook. In fact, in the first edition during the 1914 to 1915 school year, there was a special article entitled, “Definition of a ‘good sport,’” which emphasized the ability to make others happy and to be a force of cheerfulness and joyfulness no matter the circumstances. The article concluded, “…for he who can stand up strong and noble under life’s burden, happy and giving happiness to others, is indeed in its truest and best light ‘a good sport’.” This definition not only suggested that students were expected to uphold these values on the field or court, but that these standards applied throughout many aspects of life. The use of the male pronoun in this definition may reflect students’ reinforcement of the traditional association of athletics with masculinity; however, these same students also encouraged their fellow female classmates to aspire to this sportsmanlike ideal, indicating that they saw sportsmanship as compatible with femininity as well. By using athletics and

225 St. Anne’s School, 1923-1924, 12, STAB Archives.
226 Tally-Ho!, 1914-1915, 22, Foxcroft Archives.
227 Tally-Ho!, 1914-1915, 22.
the idea of sportsmanship as an integral part of their curriculum, Foxcroft educators attempted to mold the values of their students for a lifetime.\footnote{Another example of Foxcroft’s focus on sportsmanship was in the description of the Fox and Hound basketball games. See, \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1915-1916, 17, and \textit{Tally-Ho!}, 1917-1918, Foxcroft Archives.}

St. Catherine’s also used student publications to acknowledge the sportsmanship and generosity of individual student athletes. The student newspaper, \textit{The Scrap-Basket}, created a “Hall of Fame” section situated in a prominent place on the front page that honored various students and faculty members for positively influencing the school. For the December 1930 edition, the newspaper recognized Catherine Klotz for her work as the captain of the school’s field hockey team. The article on Klotz not only praised her leadership on the team and her impressive athletic skills, but also her ability as “a good worker and a good sport, in every line of the day and boarding school, and because she really stands for that overworked term, a good example.”\footnote{\textit{The Scrap Basket}, 4, no. 2 (December 1930), 1, St. Catherine’s Archives.} The combined recognition of this student for both her athletic ability and her overall character reflected the conviction that schools’ academic and athletic programs exerted a broader influence on students’ values.\footnote{St. Anne’s also emphasized the development of sportsmanship for young women as a critical part of its athletic program. See \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1923-1924, 12, STAB Archives.}

In addition to the limits placed on competition, concerns and fears about women’s health remained in girls’ schools in the early twentieth century that reinforced the notion that women’s bodies needed protecting and that there were appropriate and inappropriate standards for young girls’ exercise. Citing “bodily culture” and “restful recreation” as reasons to educate girls in physical education from a young age to their teenage years, administrators at St. Catherine’s advocated for these programs in school catalogues.\footnote{“The Virginia Randolph School,” \textit{The News Leader}, ca. 1912-1913, St. Catherine’s Archives.}
Used to assure parents and students that the school was equipped with adequate and safe buildings and that the school was in communication with physicians in the Richmond area to look after the students, these publications again showed an awareness of the importance of the health of students.\textsuperscript{232}

Playing a central role in promoting a sound body and a sound mind, the “open-air” plan called for prolonged exposure to the outdoors and incorporation of physical activity in the daily schedule of the school. Miss Jennie acknowledged in a personal note that during the early years of her school, there was an insufficient amount of outdoor activity for her students.\textsuperscript{233} Indeed, the desire for access to the open air was one of the main reasons why Miss Jennie wanted to move her school from the cramped and urban downtown Richmond to a plot of land four miles outside of the city known as Westhampton.\textsuperscript{234} Once the school made the move to the country, the “open-air” plan became a major marketing tool. In numerous school pamphlets, great credit was given to the “sufficient space” and “open air exercises” that allowed the school to pursue this intensive physical education program.\textsuperscript{235} Both St. Anne’s and Madeira used similar marketing tools, each advertising their spacious buildings with modern amenities that

\textsuperscript{232} School Catalog, \textit{The Virginia Randolph Ellett School}, 1914-1915, 5, St. Catherine’s Archive, Richmond.
\textsuperscript{233} Virginia Randolph Ellet, “Encouraging Facts,” undated, Ellett-St. Catherine’s Alumnae Association Papers, VHS. While this source does not have a date, it is likely that this source was written before the 1917 move to the Westhampton campus. This is because it mentions the cramped school buildings and surroundings, which was characteristic of the early school in downtown Richmond. However, even in the school’s urban location during its early years, Miss Jennie found a way to engage her students in physical activity through holding hockey games in nearby Monroe Park. See Louise Fontaine Cadot Catterall, “More Recollections in an 81st Year”, 2, Ellett-St. Catherine’s Alumnae Association Papers, VHS.
\textsuperscript{234} Klaus and Porter, \textit{A Part of Us Forever}, 30.
\textsuperscript{235} School Catalogs, \textit{St. Catherine’s School}, 1924 and 1925, St. Catherine’s Archives.
would be beneficial to women’s health.\textsuperscript{236} This preoccupation suggested lingering concerns about women’ fragility.

Administrators at girls’ schools cited threats of ill health to justify regulations on student behavior. Reliance on regulations and goals suggests students’ inability to maintain healthy lifestyles themselves without the schools’ protection. St. Anne’s officials justified their strict rules on health by stating, “It has always been a healthful place for young women…There has never been a serious epidemic of any disease in the school. Many who have known the school for years cannot recall a single death occurring in the building during the years of its existence.”\textsuperscript{237} Using the school’s impeccable health record, St. Anne’s maintained that while athletics would promote healthy lifestyles for students, this activity required regulation to assure that the students did not overexert themselves. Madeira also established a series of rules and regulations regarding student wellbeing. For example, the school regulated the types of food that students could store in their rooms or receive in packages.\textsuperscript{238} Madeira administrators also strictly regulated the afternoon activities period and established a demerit system that penalized students for being late to their daily exercises or for inadequate work in physical education.\textsuperscript{239} These restrictions and rules demonstrated the continued fears about the fragility of women’s health and represented the limitations to the promotion of images of strong female athletes.

\textsuperscript{236} Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, insert, Madeira Archives, and St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 7, STAB Archives.
\textsuperscript{237} The Jinger Jar, 1920, 8, STAB Archives.
\textsuperscript{238} Miss Madeira’s School, 1909-1910, 19, Madeira Archives, and Constitution and By-Laws of the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1910, 9, Student Life and Activities Folder, Madeira Archives.
\textsuperscript{239} Constitution and By-Laws of the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1910, 8.
These questions regarding girls’ health also sometimes manifested themselves in concerns that not all women were capable of the type of physical activity that the schools promoted through their programs. For example, at Madeira school officials claimed, “The girls are encouraged to take part in athletic sports…but no girl is allowed to enter them until her physical fitness has been determined by a thorough medical examination.”\(^\text{240}\) St. Catherine’s also forced students “to stand a physical examination in the autumn, and close watch over their health is maintained throughout the year.”\(^\text{241}\) Madeira was the most explicit in voicing concerns about students’ physical weakness in one of its catalogues. The school stated, “Parents are asked not to make application for the admission of girls who from lack of health or mental ability cannot perform the full duties of the school. We make an effort to provide a wholesome and happy life for girls without overworking, but neither the school life nor the course of study is planned for girls who are below the average in health or ability.”\(^\text{242}\) By wishing to limit applications to only those students who were physically fit to participate in programs, the school also reinforced notions that women should not be overworked by extensive activity. This type of statement by a school showed that while educators believed in the ability of most women to participate in athletics and the benefits they could gain from that type of work, images of weak and unfit passive women still remained prevalent in the discussions over women’s health.

While Madeira, St. Anne’s, and St. Catherine’s voiced concerns over students’ health and their ability to pursue athletics in a serious manner, Miss Charlotte did not ever seem to question women’s capabilities in health and in sports. When Foxcroft was

\(^\text{240}\) Miss Madeira’s School, 1910-1911, 9-10, Madeira Archives.
\(^\text{241}\) St. Catherine’s School, 1919-1920, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\(^\text{242}\) Miss Madeira’s School, 1920-1921, 21-22, Madeira Archives.
founded, she did not even make plans to build an infirmary because, as one alumna wrote, “it never occurred to Miss Charlotte that anyone would be sick.” Although this idealistic vision of a school free from all illness would soon be challenged, Miss Charlotte never voiced concerns about her students’ involvement in outdoor activities. In fact, she used the school’s prominent location in the countryside of Loudoun County, Virginia, in order to advertise her athletic program. In a catalogue, the school boasted, “Foxcroft is a country school, situated in a neighborhood particularly suited to a healthy, outdoor life.” The emphasis on the outdoor environment of the schools shows the importance of an active lifestyle for the benefit of student health and academics. The lack of evidence showing any concern over the potential harm that this type of activity could cause made Foxcroft’s case an outlier, as other girls’ schools still reinforced assumptions that women’s health needed to be monitored by others as it could be weak or fragile.

In the early twentieth century as girls’ school developed athletic programs, administrators had to contend with competing ideas about the benefits and potential dangers of physical activities for women. Although the national debate was far from reaching a conclusion during this time, girls’ schools incorporated ideas about health and active lifestyles into their missions and guiding visions, and they all set up extensive physical education programs. Educators hoped that teaching students about the benefits of exercise and health would instill values that students could take with them in their future lives. While many students reacted positively to these requirements and spoke of athletics and sports with excitement and joy, others looked on the same classes with

244 Foxcroft School, 1938-1939, Foxcroft Archives.
anxiety and dread. Girls’ schools promoted the idea that women could be athletic and competitive through a variety of sports teams and extracurricular activities. However, there were limits to the schools’ promotion of competition and aggressive athleticism, as most of these educators valued sportsmanship above these traits. Schools also reinforced traditional concerns about female health at the time that viewed women as weak, feeble, and in need of supervision and guidance in order to achieve a healthy lifestyle. The contradictions in the messages sent to girls through these athletic programs reflected the broader lack of consensus in the debates about women’s capabilities both for success in school and in other areas of their lives. While girls’ schools challenged the traditional mold by actively promoting physical activity, the concerns that remained showed the limitations to the changing views of women’s physical and mental abilities.

Building off of the contradictions examined in both the academic and athletic programs at girls’ schools, the next chapter explores how administrators used a variety of extracurricular activities and classes to promote character development. Schools continued to send mixed messages about the boundaries of appropriate behavior for the modern schoolgirl, challenging certain assumptions about women’s place, while reinforcing other aspects of traditional femininity. In particular, schools continued to articulate contradicting ideas about the perceived acceptability of female leadership, independence, passivity, and service to others.
Chapter 3

Teaching Morality: Leadership, Duty, and Domesticity in Character Education

It was Lent at Foxcroft School, and students were busy running errands, selling pancakes, making beds, and preparing sandwiches, all for the sake of raising funds for the annual charity drive. In the 1924 yearbook, students wrote about the pride they felt in the work that had been accomplished that year. One student speculated how visitors to campus might misinterpret the behavior and actions of some of the Foxcroft girls, who had bought eight to ten sandwiches from their classmates. Instead of seeing the consumption of numerous sandwiches as unladylike, this student argued, “These noble girls are ruining digestions simply to swallow as many 10-cent pieces as possible for the good of mankind. They are neither hungry nor greedy; they are self-sacrificing!” Characterizing her classmates’ appetites as a demonstration of loyalty to the cause, this student praised her school’s efforts to contribute to the surrounding community. This annual tradition brought together many aspects of the school’s guiding vision of promoting a connection to Christian duty, a desire to serve others, and an opportunity to become active leaders in school events.

In addition to the creation of strong academic and athletic programs, administrators actively promoted character education as a critical part of a young woman’s education through the establishment of organizations and programs, including religion courses, philanthropic work, and student government. Administrators saw these programs as ways to shape young students’ character by emphasizing certain virtues that they saw as crucial to modern womanhood. Student responses indicated these young

245 Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 101, Foxcroft Archives, Middleburg, Virginia.
women’s awareness of the schools’ efforts to influence their development. Students reflected on these programs with a wide variety of responses that included praise of the schools’ visions for character education, challenges to the programs put into place in schools, and critiques of the virtues that administrators promoted. The differences in student reactions reflected the contradictory messages and expectations that these programs had for young women. Religion courses, community service, and student government promoted virtues like leadership, responsibility, and assertiveness that fostered a vision of strong and independent womanhood. However, these programs also reinforced notions of femininity that emphasized women’s duty, feebleness, and commitment to domesticity.

When creating the guiding visions of girls’ schools in the early twentieth century, administrators in Virginia often considered character development and morality critical in a complete education for young women. The mission statements in school catalogues indicated that administrators considered their schools to be a well ordered homes and communities that offered a unique opportunity to help shape the lives of young girls in the new century. For example, the 1920 to 1921 St. Anne’s catalogue stated that in addition to developing a strong mind and body in students, the school’s aim was “to develop their characters by creating in them a sense of duty, and thus to prepare them for useful womanhood.”

The emphasis on duty implied that young women should work towards fulfilling the needs of others, which was consistent with the traditional image of a caregiver. St. Anne’s actively sought out students who fit its moral standards and

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247 St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 14, STAB Archives, Charlottesville, Virginia.
families that would support this focus on character and duty, showing its commitment to this type of continuous development for young women.248

Other administrators argued that the development of character at school should mirror a well ordered home. For example, in Madeira’s 1906 opening year, the catalogue compared school life to that of any “normal home.”249 Along with the structure of the school, administrators focused on the goals and desired virtues students would gain from this environment. The catalogue claimed, “Each student is trained to exercise her own judgment and to base her conduct upon common sense. Cheerfulness and mutual forbearance are taught as essential factors in the happiness of family life.”250 Madeira’s goal for character growth was to develop strong individuals so that these women could help promote a healthy community. By committing its program to the development of both self-responsibility and duty to “family life,” Madeira signaled to students that they were expected to serve in roles as caregivers. Administrators promoted the idea that students were bound by duty to put their best efforts forward in the development of the school, suggesting a vision of femininity where young women put the needs and desires of the broader community before their own. The focus on duty, the development of personal responsibility, and the growth of thoughtful individuals suggested that administrators saw these traits as appropriate for young women.

Administrators and students at Foxcroft also promoted character development by creating a program that they argued would be a powerful force in the transformation of students into strong individuals. In an editorial in the 1925-1926 yearbook, the student editor-in-chief wrote, in reference to new students, “…by the end of their stay a great

248 St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 3, STAB Archives.
249 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 10, Madeira Archives, McLean, Virginia.
250 Miss Madeira’s School, 1906-1907, 10.
deal has been accomplished in the way of taking blinders off eyes and cotton out of ears, and iron casements off brains and hearts, and the leaving girls are generally live human beings and not dolls.”

This author took great care to stress the potential of the school to transform girls’ characters and to show the benefits of this experience for young girls. The author compared new students to lifeless dolls to argue that without the character development that Foxcroft provided, these young women could not become useful or strong individuals in their communities. The word choice was also significant, as the author juxtaposed the gendered terminology associated with “dolls” to describe the new students and the neutral term of “human beings” to describe the transformed students, perhaps suggesting that the author could have thought the school prepared students to assume a variety of roles open to both men and women. The editorial also outlined the overarching goals of the character education program at Foxcroft. The author claimed that the most important lessons that students could gain were “1, that we are parts of a community before we are individuals, 2, that ‘Honesty is the best policy,’ 3, that the best ideal of conduct is to be a good sport, and 4, that it’s the effort that counts.”

Although the editorial focuses on the transformation of individual characters, ultimately the school saw the ability of young women to help their communities as one of the goals of this development. Other editorials also indicated that administrators and students placed great emphasis on the creation of a school spirit that could lead to the development of strong and virtuous characters.

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251 Tally-Ho!, 1925-1926, 15-16, Foxcroft Archives.
252 Tally-Ho!, 1925-1926, 16.
253 Another example of a similar editorial was in the 1929 yearbook at St. Catherine’s School. The editorial focused on the school spirit that encouraged girls to live up to high ideals of character. See, Quair, 1929, 1, St. Catherine’s Archives, Richmond.
In addition to outlining the place of character education in girls’ schooling, administrators also stressed the roles they saw parents playing in this development. Both St. Anne’s and Madeira stressed the importance of parent cooperation and trust in the school in order to promote their programs for character growth. Administrators at Madeira recognized:

Parents make their choice of this school for their daughters because they understand that it works toward certain ideals, both in scholarship and the regulation of the girls’ lives while at the school. But the benefit of these ideals cannot be obtained without the observance of certain restrictions on the liberty of the individual girl, depriving her of some of the privileges she is allowed to have when at home.254

This example stressed that parents should not interfere in the school process, which might at times place the needs of the community over the desires of each individual girl. St. Anne’s published a similar letter in the school catalogue that argued for a limited role for parents in the school’s programs to develop character. The catalogue claimed, “Very few parents understand that a school is neither a nursery nor a centre for social pleasures but a well-ordered home, having for its sole object the interests of each member of its family and providing for them during their formative years the training necessary to fit them for life.”255 Administrators at St. Anne’s perceived their program as a productive home, which they acknowledged may not always match what parents envision for their girls’ schooling. The tensions between the role of the individual girl and the centrality of the community in these examples reflected the challenges schools faced when creating and promoting their programs. Administrators saw parents’ interference as problematic to the development of girls’ character and wished to have full control over this aspect of young women’s education. As a metaphor to support schools’ attempts to limit parental

254 Miss Madeira’s School, 1920-1921, 20, Madeira Archives.
255 St. Anne’s School, 1920-1921, 14, STAB Archives.
intervention, the home introduced a paradox. While the vision of their children in a home-like setting may have provided reassurance for parents, administrators simultaneously defined the school as an independent home, where parents should yield their authority to responsible educators. These paradoxes showed the complex relationships that administrators and parents built in their efforts to educate young women.

Similar to other areas of school life, student writings demonstrated that young women thought about the goals of the schools’ character development initiatives and the impact they perceived these programs to have on their education and futures. In a piece for St. Anne’s literary magazine, a student described her wish for the new school year. She wrote, “I wish my girls to become women, strong in body, broad of mind, tender of heart, responsive in soul; to be lovers of country, loyal to church, masterful in all things which affect the home, remembering that as are our homes so is our country; that as leads our country so moves the world.” This student saw the development of caring and responsive individuals as a desired outcome of her education. By focusing on the duty and loyalty she wished her classmates to have towards their homes, churches, country, and God, she suggested that schools could teach these lessons. This piece also emphasized the role of the community in school life, as her wish was intended for all of the girls, not just herself. This focus on duty and care for the community reinforced a notion of femininity where women were concerned with and cared about helping others.

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256 Examples include *Frills and Frizzes*, 1909, 9, St. Catherine’s Archives, and *The Tatler*, Nov. 1908, Madeira Archives.
257 *Facets*, January 1913, 47, STAB Archives.
258 *Facets*, November 1913, 47.
Valedictory speeches also showed some of the connections students made about the official purpose of character education and their own place in school and society. Commencement speeches typically applied the virtues or morals that the schools had taught students to the stages of life anticipated after graduation. In her 1921 valedictory address, St. Catherine’s student Pocahontas Wight Edmunds spoke about the values the school taught her and the benefits of those virtues. She wrote, “In this golden age it is not the little things that we do separately that count so much as great things that we do together. To me the most wonderful part about St. Catherine’s School is its cooperation. Each girl is a real part of the school and feels that she has a share in it…Surely we have a clearer interpretation of community spirit in the world from our school life.”

Edmunds drew connections between the community work and the virtues of cooperation and service that St. Catherine’s taught her, and she speculated on the value these traits would have throughout her life. Valedictorians at other schools echoed these sentiments about the benefits character growth in preparation for future lives.

In addition to the inclusion of character education in the guiding visions of girls’ schools, administrators and students established a variety of programs and organizations to promote the development of character and the schools’ values. Through ties to different Christian denominations, girls’ schools used religion as a way to promote a variety of values and morals for students. The religious programs presented young women with contradictory messages about the perceived definition of the ideal Christian womanhood. Some schools encouraged girls to be active in their displays of faith, while they also promoted the values of simplicity, purity, and passivity. Girls also responded to

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259 Scrapbook of Pocahontas Wight Edmunds, 67, St. Catherine’s Archives.
260 See the valedictory speech from the 1921 commencement exercises at Foxcroft for another example of student response to character development. *Tally-Ho!,* 1920-1921, 11, Foxcroft Archives.
the differing definitions of femininity that they encountered through religion programs
and often built on aspects of the schools’ desired goals. Religion became one way for
administrators to promote expectations of morality and character for students to embody;
however, the values presented to students often reflected the changing and contradictory
nature of roles for women both in school and in their future lives in society.

The religion programs at St. Catherine’s and St. Anne’s demonstrated girls’
schools’ efforts to use Christianity to promote character development in young women.
Both of these schools had official ties to the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, as a group of
vestrymen from Christ Church in Charlottesville founded St. Anne’s in 1910 and St.
Catherine’s affiliated with the Diocese in 1920.261 St. Anne’s and St. Catherine’s used
their connections to the Episcopal Church in order to promote the values of service and
duty. Administrators at St. Catherine’s claimed that religion was central to the overall
mission of character education, which was “to develop in girls a noble type of Christian
womanhood, equipped in body, mind and spirit for gracious service in home, church and
nation.”262 Furthermore, the school drew on the example of its patron saint, Catherine of
Alexandria, to provide students with a model of “spotless purity” they could emulate
through the values of duty, loyalty, and service.263 In order to accomplish these
initiatives, the school implemented rigorous religion requirements as a part of both the
academic and residential life of students, which included daily chapel and vespers

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261 For more information about the connections to the Episcopal Church, see Katherine Walker Butterfield,
Teach Them Diligently: A Centennial History of St. Anne’s Belfield School (Virginia Beach: Donning
Company, 2010), and Susan L. Klaus and Mary Porter Johns Martin, A Part of Us Forever: A Centennial
History of St. Catherine’s School, 1890-1990 (Richmond: St. Catherine’s School, 1989).
262 St. Catherine’s School, 1922-1923, 9, St. Catherine’s Archives. Similar descriptions about the ideal of
Christian womanhood included in St. Catherine’s School, 1924-1925, 3, St. Catherine’s Archives.
263 St. Catherine’s School, 1922-1923, 9, St. Catherine’s Archives.
services, religion classes, and mandatory church attendance on Sundays.\textsuperscript{264} Through each of these programs, the school promoted both the value of being an active participant and leader in church life, but also the expectation that women should display purity, obedience, and deference to others, thus showing the wide range of traits schools encouraged women to develop. By calling these virtues a part of a “noble” womanhood, the school indicated that these qualities were valued in young women.\textsuperscript{265}

St. Anne’s also established extensive religious requirements for students, which included classes and church services.\textsuperscript{266} Similar to St. Catherine’s, the values that St. Anne’s promoted through religion classes encouraged girls’ passivity and dutifulness, while also expecting them to take active roles in religious life. The school included “broad religious training” as a key goal of its program, which administrators argued would also lead the girls to “enjoy the benefits of a decidedly homelike atmosphere and environment.”\textsuperscript{267} This domestic environment encouraged the development of the values of service and duty to others.\textsuperscript{268} The homely atmosphere that St. Anne’s wanted to develop indicated that these administrators connected definitions of Christian womanhood with domestic duties. This link between women’s domesticity and Christianity represented one of the ways girls’ schools reinforced traditional notions of feminine character and morality. However, while the school used religion to encourage this passivity and obedience to others, St. Anne’s also urged its students to be active agents of Christianity. In the annual report of the school’s community service

\textsuperscript{264} For overviews of the religious requirements at St. Catherine’s, see \textit{St. Catherine’s School}, 1922-1923, 9, St. Catherine’s Archives, and Commencement Program, 1927, 2, St. Catherine’s Archives.

\textsuperscript{265} \textit{St. Catherine’s School}, 1922-1923, 9.

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1913-1914, 10-13, STAB Archives.

\textsuperscript{267} \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1925-1926, 9, STAB Archives.

\textsuperscript{268} \textit{St. Anne’s School}, 1923-1924, 9, STAB Archives.
organization, the Helping Hand Society, a student described the purpose of the organization:

Another motto is ‘Do, Get, Give,’ we have tried to follow this, to get more deeply graven in our hearts and minds the knowledge that by baptism we are members of the kingdom, with all its privileges and responsibilities. Give of our time and money to others to carry forward the Cross of Christ. Do some service for others at a sacrifice, so that we may be ‘Doers of the word, not hearers only.’

While St. Anne’s promoted the idea that good Christian morality meant that women were dutiful, obedient, and pure, the school also encouraged students’ active participation in their service to others. By stating that the school expected that students should be “doers of the word,” it implied that assertiveness and leadership in their Christian duties were valued traits for young women. The dual expectations of women’s passive duty to others and their active participation in this service demonstrated the contradictory messages that schools promoted about the virtues of feminine morality and Christianity during this time.

Administrators at both St. Catherine’s and St. Anne’s stressed the need for these types of religious programs by drawing on the fears and changes that modern society brought in the early twentieth century. To justify their programs, the schools placed value on women’s traditional domesticity, but also indicated room for a more active role in society. St. Catherine’s stated, “In our age and country it is the purpose of St. Catherine’s School to exalt the Christ. It interprets to girls ideals of purity, of grace, and of loyalty to every cause worthy of Him and calling for their devotion.” In response to the changes that the twentieth century brought in many areas of life, administrators at St. Catherine’s saw the benefit of teaching girls’ the virtues of purity and duty, which were consistent

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269 The Jinger Jar, 1926, 32, STAB Archives.
270 The Jinger Jar, 1926, 32.
271 St. Catherine’s School, 1924-1925, 3, St. Catherine’s Archives.
with more traditional definitions of femininity. St. Anne’s presented a somewhat different response to the challenges of the new century. In the 1925 valedictory speech, a student wrote, “In this time of change, we must find something to cling to, and what better than the Faith to which nothing is impossible.” While both schools believed that turning to religion and Christian values was critical, this student at St. Anne’s left open the possibility for new and different expectations for female involvement and religious leadership. Although other girls’ schools in the state did not have official ties to church organizations, many of them still drew on a type of Christian womanhood that promoted women’s loyalty and duty to others. Young women received a variety of messages that both encouraged their dutifulness and passivity while also presented the expectation of active leadership in faith and service to others.

In addition to religion classes, philanthropy became a means for administrators to promote character development in young women; however, the expectations about women’s involvement in community service were often contradictory in nature. Through student organizations and school-wide events, these projects taught young women leadership skills because they were responsible for identifying charity organizations, fundraising, and planning events on behalf of certain causes. These efforts promoted a sense of responsibility and placed value on financial education, which encouraged women to take on more assertive and prominent roles in school. However, philanthropic work also reinforced some notions of womanhood that stressed women’s roles as dutiful

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272 For a discussion about characterizations of Southern womanhood and changes that were occurring during this time, see Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 6-7. A study that discusses the changing notions of duty to family and domesticity for women is, Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 4-6, 305.

273 *The Jinger Jar*, 1925, 33, STAB Archives.

274 For an article that discusses Foxcroft’s promotion of Christian ideals for women, see 274 “Miss Chapin’s, Miss Walker’s, Foxcroft, Farmington,” *Fortune*, IV, no. 2: (Aug. 1931), 38-45, Foxcroft Archives.
and obedient nurturers, and schools promoted activities that did not challenge traditional expectations for women’s education.275

The leadership girls’ schools developed through community service sometimes stemmed from cooperation and work with other national organizations, such as the case with St. Anne’s and the Red Cross. St. Anne’s established the Helping Hand Society in 1912, and by the time the United States became involved in World War I, the school had an organized and active community service organization.276 The school created a Junior Red Cross chapter in 1917 to coordinate its war efforts and that year, students volunteered at least one hour each week with the organization.277 When the Red Cross reached out to local chapters in 1918 to increase participation in making war bandages for injured soldiers, the girls at St. Anne’s responded by electing Dorothy Browning as a student leader to coordinate the school’s work. As one student recalled, Browning “faithfully and conscientiously rounded us up on Wednesday afternoons, when we have

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275 Historians have not adequately studied the role of community service in girls’ education or the role gender played in the types of philanthropic work available to young women during the early twentieth century. Ilana DeBare’s Where Girls Come First is the only comprehensive study of private all-girls’ schools, and she focuses on broad patterns in girls’ education from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Although she provides a limited analysis on the efforts of a few schools to teach social consciousness and the values of simplicity and selflessness, DeBare fails to explore the specific service programs pursued by girls’ schools. See Ilana DeBare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools (New York: Penguin, 2004). Studies that examine women’s roles in other voluntary organizations provide a more promising approach to understanding how ideas of gender influenced women’s philanthropic work. See Marian Moser Jones, The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), Christopher Capozola, Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83-116, and Allis Rosenberg Wolfe, “Women, Consumerism, and The National Consumers’ League in the Progressive Era, 1900-1923” Labor History 16, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 381-382. Allis Wolfe’s work on Florence Kelley and the National Consumers’ League is especially helpful as it provides helpful context when examining women’s concepts of philanthropy in the early twentieth century. In particular, Wolfe offers detailed analysis of how Kelley made sharp distinctions between bourgeois philanthropy, which focused on raising money and did not solve deeper issues of poverty, and working class philanthropy, which she promoted.

276 For the establishment of the Helping Hand Society, see Facets, January 1914, 102, STAB Archives.

277 Facets, November, 1917, 40, STAB Archives.
gone round to the Red Cross rooms to do our bit in the big work going on there.”

Through coordination with the Red Cross and the organization of her fellow students, Browning’s work was one example of how schools used community service work to promote individual leadership. Since Browning was in charge of not only securing volunteers from the school, but also fulfilling the quota on bandages issued by the Red Cross, this experience required her to assert herself in a vocal and active position in school life. Students developed leadership skills by becoming liaisons between their schools and national organizations, requiring them to take on a central role in the service projects.

Another way girls’ schools encouraged leadership through community service was by placing students in charge of identifying the charity organizations and causes that the schools would sponsor. In 1908 Madeira created the Social Welfare League that worked with the student government to organize and plan fundraising events. That year students formed committees to lead the investigation into different causes. According to the report in the student newspaper, students had made much progress that year:

The Foundling Hospital and the Children’s Hospital were both carefully investigated by a committee from the school, as some thought one of these would be the best place for our charity, to support a bed for some little child. But as yet nothing definite has been decided. The settlement houses will be investigated and it may be that they need our help more than the hospital.

Administrators at Madeira encouraged students to be active leaders in community service by having students investigate different causes and using student input and votes to decide the initiatives undertaken by the school. While Madeira urged its students to

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278 The Jinger Jar, 1918, 64, STAB Archives.
279 Another example of student organizations working directly with national organizations is Madeira’s 1920 knitting drive, when student leaders coordinated the efforts of forty-five classmates in response to a call from the Red Cross. See Yearbook, Madeira School, 1920, 73, Madeira Archives.
280 The Tatler, December 1908, 1, Madeira Archives.
become active in the selection process, this type of leadership and the work in which the students were engaged did not completely challenge traditional expectations for women. By looking for work that would support young children, this type of community service work reinforced women’s roles as nurturers and caretakers. Although students took on an active leadership role in the selection of the charities, the type of work that was expected of students did not test conventional boundaries of women’s work and domesticity.  

A final way that community service programs at girls’ schools challenged traditional notions of femininity was through the emphasis on financial education that girls needed to coordinate large fundraising initiatives. Schools encouraged students to raise funds by appealing to the surrounding communities. During World War I students at St. Anne’s used patriotic and emotional arguments to raise money through various drives and events, often calling on their classmates to consider all of their family members and friends sacrificing their lives in Europe. Students at Foxcroft put on patriotic plays in Middleburg with the purpose of “stirring up the country people and of making money for the Red Cross.” These efforts often produced large sums of money that students were responsible for collecting and sending to the different charities. For example, in the 1921-1922 school year, Foxcroft students raised $1,185.84 for the Red Cross, the Mountain Mission, and other charity organizations in Middleburg. The students referred to their work as “an organized business,” which indicated that they thought they needed some

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282 Facets, November 1917, 40, STAB Archives.

283 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 7, Foxcroft Archives.

284 Tally-Ho!, 1921-1922, 84-85, Foxcroft Archives. The yearbook indicated that the Mountain Mission sent money and clothes to poor families living in West Virginia.
financial skill in order to carry out their responsibilities for these charities. This idea was further demonstrated in the 1923-1924 academic year when the school established the Foxcroft Foundation that raised money to send a young boy from Loudoun County to college who otherwise could not afford to do so. The yearbook discussed how the students had collected $1,981.31 so far that year for the fund and hoped to raise ten thousand dollars in five years by encouraging classmates to donate at least five dollars each year. The long-term goals of the Foxcroft Foundation indicated that girls took their financial duties and service to others seriously, participating in active leadership roles that would transcend just one school year. By encouraging girls to handle large amounts of money and giving them freedom to decide where the money should be sent, administrators placed a great deal of leadership in the hands of young women and challenged notions that women should not be concerned with money or financial responsibility.

Although administrators encouraged students to develop leadership and financial skills through these projects, the initiatives also reinforced notions of traditional femininity that praised women’s roles as dutiful and moral nurturers and promoted their domestic work. The service projects did not challenge them to leave their lives of relative privilege, and instead promoted their philanthropy through raising and sending money rather than working directly with the poor or sick. This type of work was consistent with the “bourgeois philanthropy” that Allis Wolfe identified when examining Florence

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285 Tally-Ho!, 1921-1922, 84. Similar to the fundraising efforts at Foxcroft, Madeira students collected $1,403.00 for the Hoover Relief Committee in just the 1920 to 1921 school year in addition to hundreds of dollars for other organizations such as the Red Cross and the Literary Digest Child Feeding Funds. Yearbook, Madeira School, 1921, 62, Madeira Archives.

286 Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 99, Foxcroft Archives.

287 Women’s relationship with money and family finances was changing during the early twentieth century. For discussion over the tensions surrounding young women’s spending money, presence in public, and participation in consumer culture. See Hunter, How Young Ladies Became Girls, 261, 274-276.
Kelley’s characterization of women’s work. Since the schools did not encourage direct engagement with these charities, students at girls’ schools participated in work that was more consistent with traditional expectations for their gender and class. By connecting women’s work in philanthropy with domestic duties such as household chores and entertaining, these projects often demonstrated the limitations schools placed on the appropriate or proper role women played in community service.

The opening example of Lent at Foxcroft showed the focus on using community service to promote domestic roles for women. In the week leading up to the forty-day period of giving and fundraising, “the untiring and clever charity workers get busy and…every available space on the study hall blackboards is covered with startling advertisements.” These advertisements included a wide variety of chores that girls offered to their classmates for a small fee that was collected for the different charities. The girls’ duties and chores included familiar ones like laundry, cleaning, cooking, and some that fit their rural setting like dog washing and exercising horses. The school’s promotion of this type of event signaled that administrators felt that this type of activity was appropriate for young women, which in turn reinforced conventional notions about what women’s work should encompass. However, the focus on domestic chores as a way to raise money also indicated that the schools acknowledged that housework had economic value, a contested and unresolved issue at the time. Students at Madeira also

288 Wolfe outlines Kelley’s criticism of this type of philanthropy, arguing, “This kind of philanthropy could never really solve the problems of poverty because nothing was done to change the economic or social arrangements that had created the poverty.” See Wolfe, “Women, Consumerism, and The National Consumers’ League in the Progressive Era, 1900-1923,” 381.
289 Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 101. The horseback riding program at Foxcroft was extensive during this period, and girls often brought their own horse to the school.
290 Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 101. The horseback riding program at Foxcroft was extensive during this period, and girls often brought their own horse to the school.
291 For discussion on the changes in the standards of women’s domestic work in the early twentieth century, see Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, 162-163, 170-172. Christopher Cappozola also discusses
participated in this type of fundraising efforts that promoted women’s domestic skills, indicating that across multiple girls’ schools, administrators often connected traditional women’s roles to their voluntarism.\textsuperscript{292}

In addition to the focus on domestic work in the community service projects, administrators at Foxcroft and Madeira also reinforced traditional feminine morality through these initiatives. One way that Foxcroft students raised money during Lent was through the promotion of “moral control” and the use of a “swear catcher,” which forced students to pay five cents for every time they used a swear word.\textsuperscript{293} While the fact that the school had an apparent issue with swearing may call into question students’ moral purity, when describing the project in the yearbook a student qualified, “Please do not misunderstand. I refer to little school girl swears such as ‘gosh’ and ‘darn.’ Not to the really big one, you know what I mean.”\textsuperscript{294} By ensuring that readers should not mistake the girls at Foxcroft for unladylike or rude, this example showed how these schools were still concerned with how their work impacted others’ perceptions of them. Students at Madeira echoed these concerns and also provided similar reassurance that women’s participation in community service was consistent with feminine morality. After describing all of the different domestic-based activities students did to raise money, the yearbook claimed, “There are certainly no idle hands now for Satan to fill with mischief.”\textsuperscript{295} Madeira connected community service with proper and moral work, which also promoted its students’ purity and resistance to sinful behavior.

\textsuperscript{292} Yearbook, Madeira School, 1921, 68, Madeira Archives.
\textsuperscript{293} Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 101, Foxcroft Archives.
\textsuperscript{294} Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 101.
\textsuperscript{295} Yearbook, Madeira School, 1921, 68, Madeira Archives.
Administrators also encouraged women’s traditional roles by urging students’ involvement in philanthropy through hosting parties and teas. Although the planning and execution of these events required leadership and the operation of a financial budget, this type of entertainment was consistent with traditional expectations of middle and upper class women’s education. Although not a formal part of the curriculum at these schools, administrators had expectations that young women would learn how to host a proper tea or party as part of their school experience.296 So when these students planned events for various charities, many times the projects became an opportunity to combine these efforts with social events that promoted women’s traditional roles as gracious hostesses. In 1921, Madeira students responded to the needs of the National Consumers’ League and hosted a “stunt party,” where students enjoyed ice cream and other treats as well as numerous performances by different entertainers including a Red Cross dog.297 Another example included the 1916 “war ball” at St. Anne’s to raise money and awareness for the war in Europe. Based on student accounts, many girls were more concerned with the party decorations, which included model ships and airplanes, and the costumes for each class than promoting concern for the actual cause.298 The prominence of hosting parties as one of the main forms of community welfare engagement indicated that this was the type of work that was perceived to be the most appropriate for young women. By placing students in charge of identifying charities, fundraising efforts, and event planning, service projects often required young women to take on leadership roles and gain some financial

296 All four of the schools discussed the events hosted for both social and philanthropic reasons by their students in the yearbooks. For some examples, see Yearbook, Madeira School, 1919-1929, Madeira School Archives, The Jinger Jar, 1916-1929, STAB Archives, Frills and Frizzes, 1902-1916, and Quair, 1923-1929, St. Catherine’s Archives, and Tally-Ho!, 1914-1929, Foxcroft Archives.
297 Yearbook, Madeira School, 1921, 65, Madeira Archives. In the 1929 school year, Madeira also hosted a wide variety of parties including a newspaper party, a backwards party, and a cabaret all for fundraising purposes. Yearbook, Madeira School, 1929, 77, Madeira Archives.
298 The Jinger Jar, 1916, 19, STAB Archives.
knowledge. At the same time, the nature of these events and projects reinforced women’s moral purity and their roles as gracious hostesses and consumers. These programs reflected the contradictions in the expectations for young women’s involvement in philanthropic work that encouraged both active leadership and the fulfillment of more traditional roles like hostesses and nurturers in the early twentieth century.

A final way schools attempted to develop character and virtue in young women was through the creation of student government organizations. These programs promoted a sense of responsibility and focused on self-government, giving students official leadership positions to help enforce school rules and regulations. While these schools encouraged individual freedom and self-regulation, they also set up strict rules and punishment systems, which often reinforced traditional notions of proper femininity. Although students were able at times to work with the administration to change some of the rules and expectations for young women, often the regulations reflected concerns about the appropriate place and role of girls both in and out of school.

Administrators often established student government organizations to connect their various character education efforts. The organizations’ goals often focused on the development of independent and thoughtful individuals who could work together to benefit the whole community. For example, the 1925 to 1926 St. Anne’s catalogue stated, “In the development of character Student Government prevails, and the girls, with the assistance of the faculty, administer their own affairs and problems.”

According to the catalogue, the students were in charge of the regulation and operation of school affairs with only limited help from teachers and administrators, giving a significant amount of independence and responsibility to students. Administrators at Madeira echoed these

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299 St. Anne’s School, 1925-1926, 13, STAB Archives.
goals and wrote, “The principles of self-government are applied as far as possible, with
the purpose of training the pupils to self-reliance and a high sense of honor.”\textsuperscript{300} The
school promoted the development of independence and self-regulation among students,
as administrators believed that this system of governance would produce a strong
community with better relationships between students and faculty members.\textsuperscript{301}

Administrators and students at St. Catherine’s framed the student government
constitution in similar terms, seeing the benefits of self-reliance and responsibility for
both individuals and the larger community. However, the school also stressed the benefits
of this system of school regulation for students’ future lives. The 1928 student
government constitution stated, “The age in which we live, more than any other, expects
girls to be able to take care of themselves. Society expects and demands from us initiative
and the power to make our own decisions and to live by them. In this day, a girl must in
great measure decide for herself her work, her companions, her environment.”\textsuperscript{302}
The constitution stressed the contemporary challenges and changes that the twentieth century
brought to young women, and this document represented one of the ways administrators
inserted themselves in the discussions about women’s new roles. Other activists,
including M. Carey Thomas, cited similar changes in their justifications for the complete
education of women. Thomas stated in 1905, “The girls of today must be prepared for
different demands and need a different education to be as useful in their day and
generation as we are in our day and generation.”\textsuperscript{303} As national activists called for

\textsuperscript{300} Miss Madeira’s School, 1923-1924, 12, Madeira Archives.
\textsuperscript{301} Miss Madeira’s School, 1923-1924, 12.
\textsuperscript{302} The Constitution of the Student Government, 1928, Ellett-St. Catherine’s Alumnae Association Papers,
1850-1970, Section 14, VHS.
\textsuperscript{303} M. Carey Thomas, “College Education for Our Girls,” The Index 12, no. 19 (May 13, 1905): 1. Nancy
Cott also discusses the different political, economic, and social changes that women faced in the early
adjustments in girls’ education to meet the new challenges of the century, St. Catherine’s tried to use student government to combat anxiety about these changes and to prepare young women for the demands of modern society, in which they would need to know how to take care of themselves. The focus in the constitution on student choice and independence challenged women to break from traditional standards and make conscious decisions about their work and relationships. Furthermore, the government system intended to foster within students an assertiveness that would help them navigate the political and social changes of twentieth century society. In particular, the constitution stated that now in the 1920s an individual woman had different responsibilities, arguing, “With her equals, she makes the environment in which she lives.” With the passage of the 19th Amendment and the official inclusion of women in American politics, administrators at St. Catherine’s saw, more than ever, the need to prepare young women to work with others on an equal footing. The wording of the constitution also suggested to students that they could make a difference in their communities and should strive to do so. In the development of student government, administrators and students placed value on young women’s responsibility for themselves in their work and relationships with others.

In order to help develop the independence, assertiveness, and self-governance that schools wanted to promote, administrators and students created student government organizations to run and mediate school affairs. While each school’s system and organization differed, all of them gave significant power and control to students even though administrators maintained influence in these affairs. Madeira’s student
twentieth century and the ways feminists responded to those changes through their activism. See Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, 22, 118-120.

304 The Constitution of the Student Government, 1928, VHS.
government organization demonstrated the opportunities for leadership and independence through these programs. By including all students in the creation of the student government, the school intended each student to feel a responsibility to help make the community thrive and to maintain the rules and order. A catalogue placed the duty of upholding the school policies on all students by stating, “The rules are few, but they are firmly and impartially enforced. Each pupil is trained to exercise her own judgment, and to base her conduct upon common sense.”

By claiming that the entire student body was critical in the development of a strong community, administrators at Madeira attempted to not only set up a system of self-governance, but also a structure where students could motivate each other to follow the school rules and regulations. While all the girls had the opportunity to be a part of the student government system, students could lose the privilege of participating in school affairs if they demonstrated “willful or flagrant violations of the rules, or actions contrary to the spirit and meaning of the constitution of the Students’ Association.”

Students at Madeira participated in the student government program; however, the school saw this participation as a privilege rather than a right. Therefore, the school placed great responsibility on each student to uphold her place in the community, and the ability for individual participation and influence was contingent upon a girl’s attention to school rules and policies.

Although all girls could play a role in the student government at Madeira, the school also established a comprehensive organization that gave individual students the opportunity to become leaders in these programs. In addition to the leadership positions available in each of the school’s extracurricular organizations, the school established the

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305 Miss Madeira’s School, 1909-1910, 11, Madeira Archives.
Students’ Association for Self-Government with separate branches for the day and boarding students. Within each branch, a Chairman, secretary, and multiple proctors held responsibility for regulating the dormitories, study hall, and the library. Each year the students elected the Chairman and secretary, and the school held elections for proctors every month so that many students had the opportunity to serve in this leadership position. In addition to regulating and enforcing the rules already in place, these students had the opportunity to help shape and create new regulations as the school developed, giving these women influence and experience working within a government organization. This was especially significant at a time when nationally women were restricted from voting and holding government positions. For example, on November 15, 1910, the Chairman held a meeting of the proctors in order to decide a policy about students standing and reading in the hallways after ten o’clock when they were supposed to be asleep. Since this did not fall under a specific rule, the students on the committee discussed the problem and determined that in the future this offense would constitute ten demerits. In this case, the student leaders were able to influence the creation of new rules and expectations for the community. This type of involvement encouraged these young women to be active and assertive in the development of their school’s government system. During a time when women at coeducational schools rarely occupied leadership in student government, Madeira’s program presented young women with an opportunity

307 For a comprehensive list of all student leadership positions available at Madeira, see Constitution and Standard Rules for the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1911, 14-15, Madeira Archives.
308 Constitution and Standard Rules for the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1911, 12, 14-15.
309 Constitution and By-Laws of the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1910, 10-11, Madeira Archives.
310 Page II, November 15, 1910, Proctors’ Book May 1910-Dec.1918, Student Activities File, Madeira Archives. Based on the meeting minutes, it was unclear whether the student leaders called the meeting or if Miss Madeira organized it. Regardless of who called the meeting, the fact that the students were able to build and create new rules on their own suggested that they were taking on active leadership roles in their communities.
to develop and strengthen their own independence and influence.\footnote{For a discussion of women’s roles in student government in coeducational public schools, see Jane H. Hunter, \textit{How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 228-230.} The leadership structure at Madeira placed value on women’s ability to make and enforce decisions that impacted the entire student body.

Although the Student Association gave young women at Madeira the chance to develop independence and leadership, the school also set up a series of rules that reinforced traditional notions of femininity and conventional concerns about young women’s morality. Madeira’s student government system closely regulated the behavior and conduct of students within the school buildings, many of which encouraged women’s domestic duties, silence, and obedience to others. Madeira expected students to take part in the cleaning and upkeep of the school buildings, under threat of demerits if their areas were left in disarray.\footnote{The Students’ Association of Miss Madeira’s School Constitution of the House Pupils and Regulations of the School, 1928, 23-24, Madeira Archives.} The school also offered instruction in bed making, and students could only get out of lessons if they received a C+ or higher on their cleanliness grade.\footnote{The Students’ Association of Miss Madeira’s School Constitution of the House Pupils and Regulations of the School, 1928, 24.} This type of regulation that focused on women’s domestic roles indicated that the school believed that these skills were a critical part of a woman’s complete education. Many of the school policies encouraged women’s order, obedience, and silence. For example, students could not be “impertinent, defiant or disobedient to a proctor,” and could receive demerits for talking in classrooms, the hallways, or their dormitories during the study period.\footnote{Day Pupils Constitution and Standard Rules, 1917, 15, and Constitution and By-Laws of the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1910, 8, Madeira Archives.} Although these policies may appear to be standard, the focus on women’s dutifulness, silence, and obedience seemed to be at odds with the goals of creating
independent and assertive women in student government. These regulations reinforced expectations for appropriate behavior that characterized women by their obedience and deference to others in authority. While other girls in the school community were in those positions of authority, the focus on women’s domesticity and obedience presented a version of femininity that was different from the self-governance and independence that Madeira also sought to teach.

Madeira’s regulations about young women’s behavior in public further demonstrated how these policies reinforced traditional concerns about female morality and presence in city spaces in the early twentieth century. The first rule listed in the sections on conduct in public stated, “Girls must be inconspicuous and in good order at all times.” The students were often required to take chaperones with them whenever they went to public events, especially concerts or plays, and there were strict regulations about what they could wear when attending such events. Madeira also specified the streets where students were allowed to walk, the ones they needed to avoid, and the number of classmates with which girls were allowed to walk. Part of the reasoning for these strict guidelines for students was concern about the safety of young girls in the heart of Washington D.C., but fears about negative perceptions of the students by other residents of the city also fueled these regulations. During the 1908 school year, the student newspaper published an article that addressed student behavior on the streets and demonstrated the ways traditional notions of femininity played a role in policing student behavior.

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315 The Students’ Association of Miss Madeira’s School Constitution of the House Pupils and Regulations of the School, 1928, 17-18, Madeira Archives.  
316 The Students’ Association of Miss Madeira’s School Constitution of the House Pupils and Regulations of the School, 1928, 17-18.  
317 The Students’ Association of Miss Madeira’s School Constitution of the House Pupils and Regulations of the School, 1928, 17-18, and Constitution and By-Laws of the Students’ Association for Self-Government, 1910, 7-8, Madeira Archives.
conduct. Acknowledging that since the school was located in the city, students were “open to the criticism of the public, under the eyes of a large neighborhood,” the student then articulated the standards for conduct for appropriate young women. The article stated, “It is the most ardent wish of our principal that we be conspicuous by our absence; and that wherever we go, we leave the people about us with no chance to discuss our behavior, or to know by our remarks from what school we come; for there is no one who submits herself to such unpleasant criticism as can a giggling, noisy school girl.”

Although the goal of student government was to develop independent and responsible young women who could make an impact on her society, these rules suggested that schools were also concerned with how their students were perceived by the broader community. Therefore, administrators and student government leaders encouraged passivity and silence among students in public, and girls were punished if they broke these rules. The regulation of women’s behavior both in school buildings and in public places was not limited to Madeira, and other girls’ schools set up similar systems of rewards and punishments to help enforce their policies. Although girls were key leaders in helping to maintain and promote these systems of governance, traditional notions of women’s passivity, obedience, domestic duties, and relatively inoffensive place in public influenced the regulation of students’ behavior. The contradictory messages sent to women about the expectation of their leadership and passivity reflected the multiple notions about what it meant to be a respectable woman in the twentieth century.

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318 *The Tatler*, Nov. 1908, 1, Madeira Archives.
319 *The Tatler*, Nov. 1908, 1.
Students sometimes responded to these changing expectations for their behavior and conduct by testing the boundaries of school rules. The tensions between student influence and administrative control became apparent when students challenged the established regulations. Although the student government system provided students with an outlet to shape their school communities, school officials often stepped in and asserted their will in situations that were ambiguous or had potential to establish precedent that was not favorable to the administration. Evidence from Madeira’s Court of Equity, which was a student-run body that heard cases involving student conduct, suggested that the Court often turned many cases over to Miss Madeira instead of ruling on them as a group. One example was when Ester Loud requested that her punishment be lifted so that she could leave school to go Christmas shopping. The Court ruled that it was a matter for the administration, because they were unsure of how this instance would impact future cases of granting exemptions. It is unclear whether Miss Madeira granted this exception for Ester Loud, but the fact that the administration was often involved in this process undermined the authority and place of the student leaders.

Girls at St. Catherine’s also discussed the influence that the administration maintained in the affairs of student government. Anne Blair Matthews, a student at St. Catherine’s from 1912 to 1914, recalled, “Miss Jennie encouraged student government with ‘regular elections.’ But the firm hand of dictator was ever ready to take over when discipline broke down. Nor did Miss Jennie fail to tell us quite often her choice of candidates in a coming election.” The fact that the administration had a significant say in the election of student officers was critical because it seemed to limit the power that

321 Court of Equity Minutes 1912-1915, Dec. 14, 1914, 137, Madeira Archives.
322 Court of Equity Minutes 1912-1915, Dec. 14, 1914, 137.
323 Anne Blair Matthews Jennings, Reminiscences, 2, Miss Jennie File, St. Catherine’s Archives.
the students had to determine their own system of governance. Although the intended
goal of the student government at St. Catherine’s was to develop strong and independent
young women, the lasting control that Miss Jennie exerted challenged the notion that
these programs were achieving their stated goals. These examples also showed the
tensions that could develop between the administrators and the students as each group
sought to make an impact on the regulations and expectations that would guide students’
times at school.

While school officials often maintained a significant amount of control over the
student government programs, there is evidence that at times students did undermine or
challenge that authority. Through a variety of means, ranging from individual to
collective action, students were able to reassert their opinion and influence. Some
students used humor and indifference to undermine the system of rewards and
punishments set up at schools. For example, Mary Tyler Freeman recalled that during her
time at St. Catherine’s, “I racked up a record number of reports, unequalled before or
since. These were worked off by walking around the hockey field after school. I walked
uncounted miles, but it seemed to me a pleasant punishment.”324

Seeming to enjoy her penalties for breaking the school rules, Freeman’s recollections showed that some
students might not have taken the rules or their enforcement as seriously as the
administration wished. Indeed, the fact that Freeman continued to break the rules and
collect reports suggested that she did not see the punishments as a successful incentive
for following school policies.325 This sort of response undermined the authority of the
system put in place by administrators and the work of girls who were involved in the

student government. However, it also exemplified the ability of individual students to assert their own influence despite the numerous regulations that managed girls’ lives at school.

At times students at girls’ schools were able to successfully challenge the authority of the administrators by forcing them to overturn or change rules and policies. Girls often accomplished this by using collective action to petition school officials or by holding school-wide elections. An example of this type of student-led action occurred at Foxcroft when students wished to wear their evening uniforms without stockings in the spring. At first Miss Charlotte refused to allow this change in the dress code policy, because she thought it was not proper for young ladies. However, after thorough investigation and discussions with students she decided to allow this change which students described as “pretty daring and questionable for those days.”326 In this case, the students were able to reassert their influence over the standards and expectations that were required of them at school. Although a challenge to the authority of the administration, this remained consistent with the original goal of student government: making young women assertive and independent leaders. However, student governments also set up policies and regulations that reinforced more traditional notions of femininity for students, including a focus on domestic duties, obedience, and modesty in public.

As administrators across Virginia developed institutions for girls’ education in the early twentieth century, they sought to shape and mold the character of the young women who attended them. The values and morals that these schools promoted demonstrated the contradictory and shifting definitions of proper femininity at the time, and students were

often given mixed messages about what it meant to be a young woman during this time. Through programs like religion courses, philanthropic work, and student government, administrators stressed the ability and benefits of strong female leadership. Through these organizations, schools encouraged women to take on positions that valued women’s assertiveness, independence, and active participation. The same programs also questioned these character traits and reinforced more traditional views on appropriate behavior and morals for women, including a promotion of women’s domestic duties and a focus on women’s obedience and passivity. Similar to other areas of school life, administrators articulated contradictory goals that both encouraged and limited women’s leadership, activity, and behavior. Students responded to, reinforced, and challenged these expectations and regulations, further showing the complexities of the changing notions of femininity at girls’ schools in the early twentieth century.
In 1931, *Fortune* magazine published an article about the education of elite women in the United States that examined the programs at Foxcroft, Miss Chapin’s School, Miss Walker’s School, and Farmington School.\(^{327}\) While the article discussed the schools’ academic and athletic programs, it focused on the inherent contradictions in the goals for elite women’s education in the early twentieth century. The article argued, “There is this essential irony about our education of the *jeune fille* who is one day to become the *grande dame*: that in preparing her for a life of sophistication, the almost universal emphasis should lie on simplicity and Biblical virtues.”\(^{328}\) Beyond the differences between the expectations for simplicity and the reality of the extravagant lifestyles of many of these students, the author drew attention to the ways schools prepared women for their futures lives. He concluded, “Still greater irony, perhaps, is the fact that, with so indirect an approach, our girls’ schools do so good a job. The cycle of cloistered girlhood, a débutante-young-married fling and then, suddenly, the calm assumption of responsibility, is an American phenomenon.”\(^{329}\) While the “assumption of responsibility” represented women’s acceptance of their traditional place as elite wives

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\(^{328}\) “Miss Chapin’s, Miss Walker’s, Foxcroft, Farmington,” *Fortune*, 4, no. 2: (August 1931): 38.

\(^{329}\) “Miss Chapin’s, Miss Walker’s, Foxcroft, Farmington,” 38.
and mothers, the author of the article concluded that the twentieth century had transformed the function of motherhood. He wrote:

> The American woman of position is inclined to take the responsibility of that position seriously. Her children’s education she studies, she assumes charitable obligations far beyond the necessity of social acceptance, satirists to the contrary notwithstanding. She takes as a matter of course the fact that she must continue her education, that things are going on in the world about which she must keep herself informed. She has a faith of a sort, if no longer the orthodox faith of the Victorians.\(^3\)

Even though this author acknowledged the continued expectation that women serve as mothers and wives, he argued that the changes in society required them to make more active contributions in these roles than their ancestors. This type of article reflected some of the discussions occurring about the shifting expectations for women and schools’ roles in preparing them for their future in elite society.

Although this article only highlighted one school in Virginia, other institutions in the state also confronted issues surrounding young women’s preparation for their future social roles. In the academic, athletic, and extracurricular programs, young women at girls’ schools in the early twentieth century encountered a set of expectations that encouraged them to display active leadership and maintain their roles as passive and dutiful nurturers. School traditions and social events represented areas of school life that often reinforced traditional notions of femininity, including the belief that women needed to be ready to find suitors and husbands and to raise a family. Although these events often were not an official part of the schools’ guiding visions or curricula, they represented limitations in achieving pieces of the schools’ missions, particularly the desire to develop independent women ready to contribute to society in a variety of ways.

Administrators encouraged students to participate in traditions that glorified women’s

\(^3\)“Miss Chapin’s, Miss Walker’s, Foxcroft, Farmington,” 38.
femininity, and they also gave students ample opportunities to serve as gracious hostesses through a wide variety of social events during the school year. Social events and school traditions were popular topics of student writings and publications, and girls showed a range of emotions when discussing their futures. Some students spoke of social events, flirtations, the prospect of being debutantes, and the search for a husband with great excitement. However, for many girls the specific topic of finding a suitor or husband was a source of anxiety and fear, and some believed there had to be a clear choice between having a career or having a husband and family. Although schools did not directly promote the combination of career and marriage, administrators attempted to leave a wide variety of options open for students by preparing them for multiple life paths as well-educated and independent women. Students categorized the future into separate pathways, rather than envisioning a full, dynamic, and integrated identity. The emotional discussions about students’ futures and the conflicts over their potential roles as career women, wives, and mothers reflected the possibilities and limitations for elite women’s education during the early twentieth century.

Celebrations and traditions at girls’ schools often promoted a definition of femininity that focused on women’s purity, duty, and subordination to men. They also idealized the proper lady as a woman who had appropriate manners and a desire to fill the role of hostess and caregiver. Scholars have commented on the emphasis of social education at girls’ schools during this time, often finding similarities between traditional finishing schools and college preparatory institutions. For example, Jane Hunter and

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331 Jane Hunter concludes that girls’ schools in the late nineteenth century focused on social education to prepare women for genteel domestic life. See Jane Hunter, How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 188. Also see, Ilana DeBare,
Ilana DeBare argued that the focus on social education diminished academic programs.\textsuperscript{332} DeBare concludes, “Many schools gave girls a message that it was more important to be polite than smart, more important to dress properly for dinner than to understand the laws of physics. They discouraged girls from imagining lives beyond the traditional feminine world of family, social engagements, and volunteer work.”\textsuperscript{333} An examination of girls’ schools in Virginia complicates these conclusions that schools could not provide students with both strong academic preparation and the social skills needed for elite society. While school traditions and social events often focused on more traditional feminine roles, these events often functioned outside of formal curricula. Students themselves often voiced more concerns about their social preparation than the administrators. The social programs put in place at girls’ schools showed the complexities surrounding the definition of a proper lady and the differences between student and administrator views on the goals of women’s education during the early twentieth century.

Some students at girls’ schools reflected on the role of tradition in their own education, and many commented on the ways their roles as women shaped their school experience and their preparation for the future. For example, Bessie Bosher Purcell, who was a member of the class of 1900 at St. Catherine’s, recalled the expectations for women’s education during her time at school. She wrote, “In those days there was very little formality about girls’ education. I never heard of a girl going to college, but we were given a strict grounding in the culture of the day. That consisted of proper conversation, being polite and agreeable to all ages, dancing, note writing, high-class


\textsuperscript{333} DeBare, \textit{Where Girls Come First}, 75.
Purcell reflected on how Miss Jennie began to challenge traditional expectations by working to bring the Bryn Mawr examinations to Richmond and by encouraging college attendance, while also maintaining the strong foundation in social education. She further commented on these two aspects of the St. Catherine’s program by stating, “Miss Jennie’s mind was way ahead of her times. Of course she conformed strictly to the customs as they were in Virginia in the 1890’s. She would not have thought of doing otherwise, because she, herself, was a part of Old Richmond.” From her recollections, Purcell suggested that Miss Jennie and others at the school in its early years placed emphasis on tradition and custom. However, she also hinted at some challenges to traditional expectations for women’s education in Richmond by encouraging girls to pursue strong academic paths. Miss Jennie’s own background in Richmond influenced the development of her school that in part rested upon the traditions of the time in this southern city.

Students at Foxcroft also emphasized tradition in their writings, and some girls in particular focused on the expectations for and manners of proper young women in the early twentieth century. In April 1929, a girl wrote an editorial in the student newspaper, The Snooper, which criticized her fellow students for failing to uphold what she called “the Foxcroft Standard.” She wrote:

Tradition is a wonderful thing, an heritage passed on from generation to generation, from year to year—a flaring torch placed in the hands of each succeeding year to light the way for younger girls to follow. Good manners, thoughtfulness, sweetness, difference and consideration to others should have been born in all of you. If not you can acquire them.

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334 Bessie Bosher Purcell, “Reflections,” St. Catherine’s Now, November 1974, 1, Miss Jennie File, St. Catherine’s Archives, Richmond.
335 Purcell, “Reflections,” 1, St. Catherine’s Archives.
336 The Snooper, April 10, 1929, 2, Foxcroft Archives.
337 The Snooper, April 10, 1929, 2.
In the editorial, this student praised the role that tradition and conventional traits for women, such as sweetness and consideration of others, played at the school and argued for the continued place of these values in women’s education. She went further and urged her fellow classmates to “not let down the girls who have gone before you and made Foxcroft what it is today, a place you want to go, a place your are proud to have come from.” The student associated pride in her school with the promotion of good manners and other values for the ideal lady, suggesting that these were traits for which young women should continue to strive. These examples from St. Catherine’s and Foxcroft suggested that students, as well as administrators, saw value in the promotion of traditions and values for women that reinforced their social responsibilities and consideration of others.

In addition to these examples of a general promotion of tradition and good manners for young women, girls’ schools took part in a variety of traditions, events, and celebrations that often reinforced conventional notions about the definition of an ideal lady. Examples included the May Day events at St. Anne’s and the June Queen ceremony at St. Catherine’s. Some scholars of women’s education have examined these types of traditions and have concluded that the rituals “celebrated and promoted the Victorian ideal of woman as delicate, graceful, pure, and virtuous.” In addition to these traits, historian Christie Farnham has identified a distinct southern character in the history of May Day rituals, which helped to construct and reinforce the image of the southern

338 The Snooper, April 10, 1929, 2.
339 DeBare, Where Girls Come First, 92.
belle. She argued, “The crowning of the May queen was a Durkheimian collective enactment of society’s definition of femininity, whereby men offered women protection in return for deference.” May Day events in the South became a way to promote ideals of femininity that reinforced notions of women’s passivity and moral purity. These events often took place around the same time as commencement, which added to their significance in defining proper femininity for young women. Historian Jane Hunter characterized the graduation ceremony as marking “a significant rite of passage in which girls became ‘young ladies’ eligible for matrimony.” The commencement ceremonies and May Day events often focused on women’s beauty and their duty to become proper ladies who could carry on the traditions of society by devoting themselves to romance, family, and domesticity.

Evidence from student recollections and event programs supports scholars’ claims that participants at St. Anne’s and St. Catherine’s associated these events with purity and compassion for others. At St. Anne’s girls participated in the May Day event each year, which included the crowning ceremony at graduation as well as a dramatic performance by the senior class. A graduation program from 1929 outlined the details of the crowning ceremony, during which time the school community presented to the queen, who was a senior elected by the faculty and students each year, and her court various gifts and performances that idealized the queen’s honor. Senior students also wrote a play that

341 Farnham, The Education of the Southern Belle, 168. She continues, “By placing them on a pedestal and paying homage to their beauty, purity, and virtue, men infused the realities of a patriarchal society with a romantic patina that made young women’s position more palatable to them. The pageantry provided a glorious symbolic representation of the chivalric ideal forming the bedrock on which the image of the Southern belle was constructed.”
342 Hunter, How Young Ladies Became Girls, 341.
343 May Day Program, May 25, 1929, Programs 7/20-6/29 File, STAB Archives, Charlottesville.
was a part of the May Day events, which often gave them an opportunity to reflect on the values they deemed necessary for young women during the time. Students performed a play called “The Quest” in 1916, and the performance both reinforced the notions of women’s purity and good deeds, while also challenging the traditional focus on women’s physical beauty during these events. In the play, a girl set out on a quest to find beauty after graduation. Throughout the different acts, she encountered first the “outward graces” such as vivacity, form, and poise, which were each played by a student actress, then a variety of scholarly pursuits such as art, music, math, and literature. The girls discussed the value and benefits of each trait, but the main character continued to feel unfulfilled by her quest. The play concluded with the rejection of these two categories of beauty—both physical beauty and scholarship—in favor of the values of faith, good deeds, purity, wisdom, and truth. The play thus reinforced women’s duty to others and to their faith. While the students challenged the reliance on women’s physical beauty, the criticism of women’s scholastic pursuits in favor of a life of service to others showed the limitations that these young women saw for their future education. Although administrators often saw all of these components as intertwined parts of their missions, this student-run play suggested that students saw these three categories as separate pursuits for women.

St. Catherine’s implemented a modified version of the May Day events in the June Queen ceremony that happened during the commencement exercises in the spring.

344 The Jinger Jar, 1916, 33-38, STAB Archives.
346 The Jinger Jar, 1916, 38. The play concludes, “The outward Graces led her far astray, and vanished, leaving her with dismay. Intelligence next beckoned on the Quest. Attainment all there vanished like the rest. True virtues take the maiden by the hand, and safely lead her to the promised land.”
According to the 1907 graduation program, the ceremony shared many similar characteristics to other May Day events with the crowning of a queen and various performances surrounding the event. The program provided a description of the selection of the queen: “The June Queen, who is endowed by each class with a quality of noble womanhood, was crowned, according to custom, and her throne heaped with offerings of flowers. The ideal woman is represented in the June Queen.” Similar to the ceremony at St. Anne’s, students and administrators saw the June Queen as a representation of the ideal lady and placed emphasis on the importance of tradition and custom in the annual event. Each year the selected June Queen gave a speech during the commencement ceremony on a topic of her choice. The June Queen speech from 1921 showed similarities to the play “The Quest” at St. Anne’s, as Pocahontas Wight Edmunds decided to focus her speech on beauty for young women. However, the speech also differed from the play, as Edmunds argued that multiple kinds of beauty could coexist together, while the students at St. Anne’s argued that individuals should choose and strive for beauty in service over other forms. Edmunds’ speech also demonstrated how St. Catherine’s challenged some of the traditional expectations for femininity during this time. Edmunds reflected in her speech, “In our school life we have found three great beauties, the beauty of friendship, the beauty of cooperation, and the beauty of seeking for knowledge.” In her descriptions of the beauty of friendship and cooperation, Edmunds promoted the values of service and duty to others, which was consistent with conventional definitions of proper femininity during the time. However, her last definition of the beauty of intellectual pursuits represented one of the ways that these types of traditions presented

347 “Miss Ellett’s School Commencement,” 1907, Press Clippings File, St. Catherine’s Archives.
348 Scrapbook of Pocahontas Wight Edmunds, St. Catherine’s Archives.
349 Scrapbook of Pocahontas Wight Edmunds, St. Catherine’s Archives.
challenges to traditional expectations for women. The May Day and June Queen ceremonies during commencement were events that schools and students used to promote definitions of femininity that at times both reinforced and challenged the focus on women’s duty, purity, and beauty.

Besides the special traditions surrounding commencement, students at girls’ schools attended and planned many types of social events. From teas and bazaars to different themed dances and parties, these students often had busy social calendars throughout the year. Evidence from yearbooks, which usually provided detailed descriptions from most parties that students hosted or attended, suggested that the girls looked forward to and enjoyed the various social events each school year. Although administrators rarely mentioned social events in the descriptions of the mission and goals of their schools in official catalogues, the fact that the schools hosted so many events each year suggested that this type of social education was an accepted part of school life.

Based on evidence from yearbooks and student records, students saw invitations to events and functions as important opportunities for their individual social standing and the prestige of their schools. For example, Kathryn Goode petitioned the Madeira student government council to get permission to go to a reception at the White House, despite the fact she was not allowed out of school since she had demerits for poor behavior.350 The student panel, with the approval of the administration, ruled that she should be able to attend the event because it would be of “lasting interest” to both the student and the school.351 Madeira students and officials saw the reception at the White House as an opportunity for the intellectual and social advancement for Goode since she would be

350 Proctor’s Book, 1910-1918, 15, Madeira Archives, McLean.
able to interact with politicians and others at the event. Therefore, they did not uphold their traditional punishment system in favor of allowing her to attend this function, which was both political and social in nature and could be seen as beneficial to the school’s reputation. Foxcroft students also recounted the significance of invitations to others’ social events, especially during the First World War when the school had to cut back on hosting functions. One student wrote during the 1917 to 1918 school year, “Also many people living near the school have been good enough to ask us to their houses for luncheon, which is one of the greatest pleasures we can have.”

Since the option of hosting events was not available to students, they saw these events as significant for the continuation of a social life at the schools. The focus on the types of invitations the schools received suggested that administrators and students saw these events as opportunities to display or improve social status.

Students at Foxcroft also looked upon these events hosted by others with excitement, and they often discussed their experiences by invoking traditional standards of femininity. For example, students described a luncheon hosted by Mrs. Hitt in December 1917 with great anticipation and enthusiasm. One student wrote in the yearbook, “For once the excitement of the moment overruled our eternal prejudice and we consented without a struggle to wear our sweet and girlish uniforms.”

The prospect of attending a social function led the girls of Foxcroft to abandon previous challenges to the school uniform, suggesting the excitement and importance they placed on these events. In the description of Mrs. Hitt’s luncheon, students used ideas about proper femininity to show how the girls challenged these boundaries, particularly when it

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352 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 7, Foxcroft Archives.
353 Tally-Ho!. 1917-1918, 33.
concerned food and dancing. The student recalled, “Having eaten all—and more than is consistent with the reputation of perfect ladies, we next turned our attention to dancing and to the music furnished by the Foxcroft orchestra. We indulged in this pastime to our heart’s content.”

Despite seeing these events as signs of social status, the student acknowledged that the girls’ behavior was not consistent with traditional ladylike behavior. This example demonstrated the ways in which students viewed the excitement and status of invitations to others’ social functions, and it also indicated that girls displayed some behaviors that challenged conventional expectations for young women during this time.

In addition to the excitement and status of invitations to various social events, administrators and students also hosted many functions each year. Girls’ schools often placed students in charge of planning and executing the different events, suggesting that administrators may have seen the development of the skills needed to become good hostesses as an important part of a complete education for young women in the early twentieth century. At Foxcroft, students described the extensive preparations involved for the final dance held every May. In 1920, a student recalled the anticipation surrounding the event:

For weeks before the night of May 14th Foxcroft conversation veered to one subject only and this was discussed at all convenient or inconvenient times and at great length, to the utter exhaustion of our faculty who, it must be said, bore it bravely though with secret amusement. Mail time became a riot. Acceptances were handled carefully while regrets were tossed angrily away.

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354 *Tally-Ho!,* 1917-1918, 33. Although the event was off campus at Mrs. Hitt’s home, it appears that she invited or hired the school’s orchestra as the entertainment for the event. The sources were unclear about whether these were music students or an orchestra that the school frequently used or hired for such events.

355 *Tally-Ho!,* 1920-1921, 56, Foxcroft Archives.
According to this student’s descriptions, the preparation for the annual dance consumed the time, energy, and conversations of the student body, even at times interfering with classes. The observation that faculty members showed “secret amusement” towards the constant discussions of the dance may have suggested that although teachers did show some disfavor for the students’ frivolous behavior, they were not completely upset about or surprised by the distractions from the regular course work. In addition to the enthusiasm and anticipation surrounding the social events, the student also described the extensive time and energy that went into preparations. She wrote, “The victims of fatigue-duty helped scrub and polish the floor and as the day approached redoubled their efforts with feverish energy.” By calling these students victims, this suggested that girls felt compelled to work especially hard, despite fatigue and other duties, in order to help prepare the school for a major social event. The emphasis on the preparations and the “feverish” work of the students indicated that they took these responsibilities seriously. The fact that administrators allowed students to spend this time and energy on these social events also suggested that they saw value in this type of activity for young women. Students’ consistent excitement and enthusiasm surrounding these events in their writings differed from other areas of school life. While some students complained about homework, tests, and the athletic requirements, the yearbooks and newspapers did not include criticisms of the students’ social schedules each year.

In addition to describing the excitement and work surrounding the preparations for various dances and social events, students wrote about the different roles members of the school community played in the organization and execution of these events. For example, in her description of the annual Bazaar at St. Catherine’s, Jeannette Freeman

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356 Tally-Ho!, 1920-1921, 56.
wrote about the different tasks given to each grade level. For the 1916 event, the sixth class girls were in charge of the lemonade, the second class sold embroidered towels, pillowcases, and handkerchiefs, and the third and fourth classes were in charge of providing cakes and candies to the guests.\footnote{Frills and Frizzes, 1916, 86, St. Catherine’s Archives.} The participation of girls of many ages showed the incorporation of this kind of education throughout the entire course of study at St. Catherine’s. Similar events happened at other schools in the area, showing the participation of entire communities and the popularity of these events at girls’ schools.\footnote{See descriptions of the Bazaar at St. Anne’s and the George Washington Ball at St. Catherine’s for examples of this type of school involvement in the social calendar. Facets, Jan. 1913, 100, STAB Archives; and The Quair, 1926, 83-84, St. Catherine’s Archives.} Finally, the activities and work involved in the Bazaar were consistent with traditional notions of feminine domestic responsibility. By encouraging students to engage with the community by selling cakes, lemonade, and sewing products, this type of activity demonstrated a way that schools promoted the image of ideal hostess to young women.

Students described their experiences at social events in gendered terms, and they often outlined proper standards of femininity and expectations for women’s behavior at these events. At times, students discussed the ways that their fellow classmates strayed from the perceived social standards through their frivolous actions at school dances. For example, a student from St. Catherine’s wrote about the annual George Washington Ball in 1925 and drew much attention to the behavior of the students, half of whom were dressed as men and the other as women from the colonial period. In particular, she focused on the types of dance at the event, writing, “There the orchestra had begun to play the conventional slow and sedate waltz which they thought was expected of them. The stately couples stood for this for a few dances, but no longer. They enlightened the
orchestra as to their favorite foxtrots, and soon the long, fully skirts and short, tight pants were whirling around the room, as if it were a skating rink.”\(^{359}\) In this example, the student recalled how the girls participated in the slow waltzes first in order to meet the expected customs of these events, but they quickly changed the music in favor of more lively types of dances that were popular among the younger students. These challenges to the traditional standards continued when the student recounted the end of the evening. She wrote, “Again we danced, and danced until a rumor sent every hungry gentleman, and many unladylike hungry ladies flying to the spot. And there they found the crowning glory to a perfect evening, block ice cream and large, fat, chocolate cakes.”\(^{360}\) By calling the desire to take part in the refreshments of the evening unladylike, this student implied that having an appetite and acting on it was not compatible with expected standards of behavior for young women. However, since the girls challenged these standards by consuming the ice cream and cakes, this example demonstrated the contested definitions of feminine behavior in the early twentieth century.

Students from St. Anne’s also wrote in yearbooks and literary magazines about the ways in which students used social events to challenge expected norms of proper behavior. The annual Junior’s Party was one example of this type of function where girls tested what was seen as appropriate decorum for young ladies. In 1913, a student opened an article about the party in the school’s literary magazine by stating:

> It’s a good thing those Juniors don’t give a party every Saturday night—if they did I’m afraid we would all have our privileges taken away from us. Why? Why because we had such a good time at the last one they gave that we couldn’t tear ourselves away and we all went to bed so late that nobody was on time for breakfast the next morning.\(^{361}\)

\(^{359}\) *Quair*, 1925, 40, St. Catherine’s Archives.

\(^{360}\) *Quair*, 1925, 41.

\(^{361}\) *Facets*, Nov. 1913, 56, STAB Archives.
Students went on to describe the wide range of costumes at the party including the faculty’s “outrageous behavior” as old maids, the “quite proper” attire of the freshmen dressed as babies, and the “very shocking” outfits of the sophomores in the latest fashions.\textsuperscript{362} By hypothesizing that students would get into trouble if the junior class gave more parties, this student suggested that having a good time at a party was not compatible with standards for the young women at St. Anne’s. From the late bed times to the descriptions of the various costumes at the parties, students tested the boundaries of expected behavior through these types of events. This student also suggested that the young women found great pleasure at these functions, as she concluded, “As usual, when the Junior class entertains, the inner woman was splendidly provided for.”\textsuperscript{363} By highlighting the pleasure of the “inner woman,” this wording also suggested that individuals could explore their own personal identities as women through these events. Students at girls’ schools often described their experiences at social events in terms that defined notions of proper femininity. Many of them found that their classmates challenged the accepted standards of behavior through dancing, costumes, curfews, and the consumption of food, but others found personal satisfaction in these events as well.

Dances, parties, and other social events also became forums for young women to interact with men, which students usually described with great anticipation. These events were rare opportunities, as some of the schools had strict visitation policies that usually included chaperoned visits in the schools’ parlors.\textsuperscript{364} Dances provided an occasion for more intimate interactions between the students. Jeanette Freeman recounted a feeling of

\textsuperscript{362} Facets, Nov. 1913, 56.
\textsuperscript{363} Facets, Nov. 1913, 56-57.
\textsuperscript{364} St. Anne’s School, 1913-1914, 11, STAB Archives.
excitement among students at St. Catherine’s when they got to mingle with young men
during the annual Bazaar. She wrote, “The room was filled with laughing, chattering
school girls, and with friends and relatives…These girls continually held court among a
group of laughing boys. I could feel animation in the very air.”365 Students at Foxcroft
also described great eagerness among girls for the arrival of young men before the
various dances each year. In her description of the 1923 Old Girls’ dance, one student
recounted, “Young men, holding in their hands scanty bouquets snatched from the
garden, were seen rushing around, while the New Girls, dressed in their best, waited
anxiously for their Beau-Brummels to arrive.”366 This description suggested that girls
placed a great deal of importance on these events with young men. Other accounts of
dances at Foxcroft suggested that students saw the dance as a “long-dreamed-of night”
that gave them the opportunity to develop relationships and flirtations with numerous
young men.367 The unofficial part of the curriculum of hosting social events gave young
women the opportunity to develop social skills that were perceived to be critical in
becoming acceptable hostesses. The events also allowed girls to test the boundaries of
appropriate feminine behavior and to interact with members of the opposite sex. These
interactions with boys held significance for these students as they looked forward to their
futures and their prospects of finding suitors and potential husbands.

In addition to student accounts of dances and parties, interactions with boys and
the possibilities for future suitors and potential husbands were often topics of student
writings at girls’ schools. Physical appearance and flirtations became significant parts of
girls’ social standings and reputations, and girls often reflected on what they perceived

365 Frills and Frizzes, 1916, 86, St. Catherine’s Archives.
366 Tally-Ho!, 1923-1924, 59, Foxcroft Archives.
367 Tally-Ho!, 1915-1916, 30, Foxcroft Archives.
young men to desire from modern girls. Mary Tyler Freeman recalled the numerous discussions about boys at St. Catherine’s, writing, “By the time we reached the eighth grade, boys had taken over the imaginations of the earlier bloomers in our class. The rest of us watched from the sidelines, holding on to our receding childhood.”\textsuperscript{368} As the girls progressed through the end of eighth grade and entered high school, boys became even more pivotal for the young girls’ social standing, and there was a lot of pressure to impress members of the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{369} The preoccupation with finding boyfriends and potential suitors could interfere with other aspects of school life, including academics. Freeman wrote, “‘Popular’ was the key word, and to be admired and pursued by members of the opposite sex was the overriding goal of the more spectacular members of our feminine world. Although some of them were very bright, they weren’t the best students because they committed their energies to feeding their emotions rather than their minds.”\textsuperscript{370} According to Freeman, being feminine at these schools partially required women to focus on their own popularity among young men. She observed her classmates’ decisions to focus more on those pursuits than academic ones, suggesting that at least some girls believed that social progress was more important and practical for young women than preparing for class or future education.

Freeman’s observations about girls’ concerns over what young men desired were consistent with other students’ recollections about their experiences at girls’ schools. Students wrote and hypothesized about what young men found attractive and the ways women could become more desirable as they matured. Charlotte Ingle, a student at St.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{368} Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek McClenahan, \textit{Southern Civility: Recollections of My Early Life} (Richmond, VA: Donnan Publishing, 2003), 38, St. Catherine’s Archives.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{369} Freeman wrote in reference to flirtations and relationships, “I knew that this was an essential stepping stone to social success.” See McClenahan, \textit{Southern Civility}, 55.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{370} McClenahan, \textit{Southern Civility}, 40.}
Anne’s, penned an editorial about this very subject titled, “His Dream Girl,” in the May 1914 edition of the school’s literary magazine. She wrote, “Tall, dark, and slender, ripening into womanhood, she was beautiful—with a beauty that seemed to draw him toward her.” The student focused on the physical appearance as the first factor in creating the image of an ideal woman. However, she did not limit the definition of a man’s ideal girl to just physical beauty, stating, “Her beauty—His ‘Dream Girl’—was not only face, for she was unselfish, generous, spending her life in making others happy.” Although this student believed that there was merit in these other qualities besides beauty, this ideal type of woman was one whose responsibility was still to serve others. These traits were consistent with traditional expectations for women to be humble and dutiful nurturers and caregivers. By including these traits in discussions of men’s desires and expectations, students at girls’ schools in the early twentieth century promoted a version of proper femininity that encouraged women to focus on physical beauty and service to others.

Discussions about young men, relationships, and potential suitors sparked excitement among students, but they also made some students anxious and nervous about their prospects for the future. This was especially true when students discussed the process of being a debutante and the “coming out” season. Scholars have addressed the stress and anxiety that young women faced when making their debuts, particularly as it became a way to secure status in the midst of the changes in society in the late nineteenth century. In particular, Jane Hunter argued that the brevity of the debutante process caused considerable of anxiety, and she described a marriage market “which quickly

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371 *Facets*, May 1914, 178, STAB Archives.
372 *Facets*, May 1914, 178.
detected the scent of stale goods. The shelf life of a debutante was short indeed.\textsuperscript{374} Hunter concludes that many girls in the late nineteenth century felt pressure to quickly find a husband, which added to their anxiety surrounding their transitions from school to broader society.

This sense of anxiety about finding suitable young men and becoming a debutante was present at girls’ schools in Virginia in the early twentieth century, and students often voiced a combination of both excitement and dread concerning their coming of age and presentation to society. For example, in an editorial in the 1910 yearbook titled, “Fifteen versus Sixteen,” St. Catherine’s student Edmonia Lancaster reflected on the benefits of being fifteen. She wrote, “Her freedom is the first characteristic of the girl of fifteen. Unchained alike by the laws of childhood and maturity, she follows the course of her own willful fancy.”\textsuperscript{375} Defining the age of fifteen by freedom and independence for young women, Lancaster presented a much different picture for girls of sixteen. Not only did girls of sixteen have to face “a great degree of public criticism,” but she also concluded that girls of fifteen have “not yet reached the point when her possibilities and acquirements are rated at a fixed standard. Unlike her senior of a year, she has not been summed up and pronounced as good or bad. She may conquer where she will.”\textsuperscript{376} Lancaster pointed to the prospect of criticism from others as a negative factor in the lives of sixteen year olds, which suggested that she may have been nervous about her own future encounters in society. The choice of the word “conquer” to describe the opportunities available to fifteen year olds was significant, because it implied that younger women experienced unique freedom to choose their own paths. This word

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\textsuperscript{374} Hunter, \textit{How Young Ladies Became Girls}, 357.
\textsuperscript{375} \textit{Frills and Frizzes}, 1910, 32, St. Catherine’s Archives.
\textsuperscript{376} \textit{Frills and Frizzes}, 1910, 32-33.
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choice also suggested that girls sixteen or older were limited by society’s views of their potential.

Some students reflected more directly about their excitement and anxiety about becoming a debutante. One student wrote in the St. Catherine’s yearbook in 1902 about her struggle to find a sweetheart. She described being asked by a woman if she had a sweetheart, and the woman suggested to her that finding a suitor was critical in becoming a successful debutante. She concluded, “What shall be my fate? is the question I ask myself. The lady’s suggestion was only a foundation stone. I must hunt for many, not one sweetheart. I am helpless since my plans have grown and become involved. I can do nothing to make myself a success. Time alone will prove what I shall be ‘when I turn out.’” The feeling of helplessness and defeat that this student described was one of the reactions students had to the pressures of coming out in society. The student’s decision to try and find many suitors also implied that this task was one of the more important aspects of her life at school, and one to which she should dedicate ample time and energy. The preoccupation with debutantes and suitors among some students at girls’ schools suggested that these students saw the quest for marriage as a significant part of their futures. The fear and anxiety that they described, along with the excitement of finding potential suitors, demonstrated the often-complex feelings that girls felt towards their future domestic roles.

Students at girls’ schools also thought about decisions surrounding marriage, and many discussed conflicting goals about either pursuing a college degree and career or settling down and searching for a husband to start a family. Evidence from student input

377 Frills and Frizzes, 1902, 20, St. Catherine’s Archives.
378 Frills and Frizzes, 1902, 21.
and writings in yearbooks, newspapers, and literary magazines suggested that students struggled with these decisions while at school, and many thought they had to make decisions in regards to these issues while they were still adolescents. The strict binary that many students saw between having a career and being married was particularly interesting considering many of these schools’ established mission statements that left open numerous possibilities for women’s futures. Although educators sought to mold and develop women who could make an impact on society in a variety of ways, students tended to see marriage and careers as two separate alternatives in their identities as women. Many students desired for themselves roles that were consistent with more traditional definitions of femininity that made marriage and family the primary goal of a young woman’s life.

Women across the United States grappled with questions surrounding marriage, families, and careers during the early twentieth century, and many competing ideas about the most appropriate roles for women developed. Scholars like Elaine Showalter and Nancy Cott explored the various feminist messages of the 1910s and 1920s as well as the ideas formed in opposition to women’s advances in the public sphere. Both scholars pointed to the prevalence of articles on the issue of the choice between marriage and careers for women during this time. Cott argues, “Even in progressive circles, the belief that women could and should combine family life with outside employment was very distinctly a minority viewpoint.” She then traces the development of the “career-
marriage model” and the “working-class woman under financial stress” model that Americans used to justify married women’s involvement in the workforce. While these models had different motivations, they both ultimately undermined feminist arguments of equality and the removal of the sexual division of labor and gave priority to family life. Showalter examines the work of seventeen feminists, who were interviewed by the *Nation* in 1926 and 1927 about their views on women’s roles in the new century. Based on their writings, Showalter concludes, “To be modern meant to want heterosexual love as well as work; neither was sufficient by itself. However, the modern woman was not unaware of the difficulty in combining these goals.” Indeed, both scholars point to the various challenges women had in achieving satisfaction and recognition for their work both in and outside of the home. While Showalter identifies the lack of precedent and the absence of social and political supports as key barriers to feminists’ realization of their goals to have both marriage and careers, Cott outlines the ways psychologists and social scientists appropriated feminist messages about love and work in order to dismantle some of their key arguments against gender hierarchy. As students at girls’ schools confronted issues about their own futures, they were a part of larger discussions by other activists across the United States. These men and women presented a variety of arguments and counterarguments about the roles of marriage, family, and careers in

382 Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 191-207. The two strands of thought were the “career-marriage model,” which justified wealthy women’s involvement in the workforce, and the “working-class woman under financial stress model”. Although there were significant differences in both of these justifications, neither one challenged the institution of marriage or the assumption of the male breadwinner.


384 Showalter, *These Modern Women*, 14 and Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 174. Cott traces the development of companionate marriage and home economics to show how social scientists and other opponents of Feminism used feminist arguments to reassert men’s roles as providers and women’s roles as caregivers.
modern women’s lives that contributed to the complexities in defining ideal femininity at the time.

Students often thought about the different paths open to them after school, and yearbooks documented students’ hypotheses about their own futures each year, particularly in sections about the senior class. In these articles, students drew a strict line between those who they thought would pursue academics and careers and those who would make their debuts and find husbands. These predictions suggested that many of them thought these two life paths could not easily coexist. For example, in the prophecies for the class of 1919 at Madeira, students predicted that some of their classmates would pursue work outside of the home. Students thought that Mabel Adams would invent a new device for lowering coal into a furnace and Trudy Spencer would work hard cultivating her own farm. Some even predicted Anne Halliday would become a famous athlete, competing in horseback riding, hockey, and sailing. Although these characterizations did not necessarily represent the actual futures of these young women, the fact that students wrote these prophecies suggested that they believed that these careers could be a real possibility for their classmates. However, these descriptions of students with successful careers never included a discussion of marriage or family. Other students’ predictions included being married and becoming lavish hostesses for America’s elite, including Florence Harrison, who many thought would become a hostess at Quantico and an officer’s wife. The fact that none of the students’ predictions included a scenario where a woman had a career and a family may have suggested that

385 The Madeira Searchlight, 1919, 12-13, Madeira Archives.
386 The Madeira Searchlight, 1919, 12.
387 The Madeira Searchlight, 1919, 12.
these women did not think that having both of these futures was realistic or desirable. Students at Foxcroft made a more direct assertion on this subject in the prophecy of Matilda Houghton in 1921. The yearbook stated that by 1926, “Miss Matilda Houghton is choosing a sporting life instead of wedded bliss. She hunts in all countries and is famous for jumping jumps that no other female would hazard.” Not only does this article suggest that Houghton chose her career over the possibility of marriage, the type of work that she was involved in was characterized as being unfeminine according to the standards of the time. These exercises in the yearbooks, though not based in the reality of what each girl pursued after school, showed that students saw their potential life paths as strictly divided between career and family.

These divisions over the appropriate roles of marriage in young women’s lives can also be seen in recollections about discussions that happened at the schools. For example, The Snooper, Foxcroft’s student newspaper, reported in February 1929 on a debate about marriage that took place in one of the school’s dormitories. The article stated, “We overheard a very heated discussion by some of the Orchard House concerning this odd institution.” The conversation was heated due to the fact that two of the students involved disagreed over the benefits of marriage. On one side of the argument, students described Barbara, who “talked on the joy of having one’s little ones near—oh that sweet maternal instinct!” Peggy, another student in the dormitory, saw her future much differently than Barbara. The article stated, “Peggy thinks she will soon

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388 This sentiment is consistent with the theme of disillusionment and maturity that Showalter identified in the writings of feminists in the Nation. Some women felt like it was unrealistic to be able to pursue both of these paths together. See Showalter, These Modern Women, 10.
389 Tally-Ho!, 1920-1921, 72, Foxcroft Archives.
390 The Snooper, Feb. 13, 1929, 2, Foxcroft Archives.
tire of hubby and is anxious to spend the rest of her life taking walking trips through Europe. She was somewhat worried, however, when Barbara told her she would be old, friendless and deserted at forty! Peggy’s observations acknowledged the idea that some women thought that marriage might not have been as fulfilling as others did. However, Peggy’s worry about being alone showed how students who were not as keen on marriage still conformed to societal norms and fears about the lives of older, single women. This incident at Orchard House showed some of the ways young students approached the perceived benefits and anxieties surrounding marriage.

Students at St. Anne’s School also reflected on their own futures, often drawing clear distinctions between jobs and marriage. For example, in an editorial called “My Ambition,” one student struggled to articulate her true desire for her life. She began her piece, “I think my real ambition is to get married, but if I don’t suit the men’s taste, I’ll be an old maid. I would like to go abroad and teach English to the Spaniards or Germans.” Although this student had a desire for marriage, she was also uncertain about her ability to find a husband. A career abroad was clearly her second choice, and she rearticulated this by concluding, “Of course my real ambition is to marry and live in the East with a nice husband to love me.” This student left open the option of a career, but the fact that marriage was her “real” ambition suggested that she saw this as the most appropriate place for young women in the new century. Unlike other student accounts, this student

392 The Snooper, Feb. 13 1929, 2.
393 Scholars have also pointed to the changes and continuity about ideas of marriage in this time period. Nancy Cott points to the rise of companionate marriages as a tactic to undermine some feminists’ objections to the institution. This model combined heterosexual love with women’s opportunities for employment; however, the gendered division of work remained in place with women’s primary responsibility as the caregiver and men’s as the breadwinner. This model “disarmed Feminism’s challenges in the guise of enacting them.” See Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, 174.
394 Facets, Jan. 1913, 96, STAB Archives.
395 Facets, Jan. 1913, 96.
acknowledged that her opinions might change when she grows older, since she thought, “I’ll get more sense.” This statement demonstrated how many young students were preoccupied with ideas about marriages and families, and they often did not think that careers were consistent with the most ideal versions of femininity.

During the early twentieth century, students at girls’ schools participated in a wide variety of social activities and traditions, many of which promoted expectations of feminine behavior that did not challenge traditional norms in society. Through participating in ceremonies tied to commencement and attending and hosting different social functions, schools encouraged women to develop a set of skills that strengthened their domestic abilities as gracious hostesses. Although these events were not included in formal mission statements or the curriculum, administrators provided ample time for the preparation of these events and encouraged the girls to be actively involved in the planning and the execution of them, suggesting that they thought this type of social education was beneficial for young women. Students viewed the social events and dances with enthusiasm, and many described them in gendered terms, often showing the ways some of their classmates challenged traditional notions of proper femininity by indulging in dancing, food, and flirtations with young men. Interactions with members of the opposite sex became a major topic of discussion at girls’ schools, and many students were preoccupied with thoughts about finding suitors, becoming a debutante, and getting married. Students often saw their futures as a choice between a life pursuing higher education and a career and finding a husband and starting a family, but rarely did they foresee that they could do both. Administrators also did not specifically promote the combination of marriage and career; however, they did seek to develop the girls’ whole

396 *Facets*, Jan. 1913, 96.
character so that graduates could contribute to society in a variety of ways. While educators sought to create well-rounded women, students continued to see their futures as separate and distinct pathways that could not be intertwined. These conflicting accounts and desires about interactions with boys, pursuing a career, and finding a husband demonstrated the complexities of the shifting notions of femininity in the early twentieth century.
Conclusion

After Virginia Randolph Ellett’s death in 1939, many of her former students, colleagues, and friends attempted to memorialize what she had accomplished throughout her lifetime. St. Catherine’s charged Natalie Blanton, a graduate of class of 1913, with writing the first official school history. Compiled in 1955, Blanton argued that Miss Jennie’s work was “the struggle of a strong, vigorous, able, dedicated woman to do a job for her day and generation that needed to be done.”397 In 1962, Blanton published another book about Miss Jennie where she continued to praise her mentor by expressing Ellett’s “energy, imagination, curiosity, determination, high standard of excellence, and ambition to pursue an intellectual aim in a Southern city that in her day, and some think even now, still prefers conformity and comfort.”398 While both of these publications were intended to commemorate Miss Jennie’s accomplishments, and therefore presented her work in positive terms, in many ways the work of the founders of girls’ schools in Virginia did represent a challenge to traditional education for women in the early twentieth century. Despite attempts by the women in the administration at St. Catherine’s, St. Anne’s, Madeira, and Foxcroft to provide girls with rigorous programs and leadership in academics, athletics, and various other extracurricular activities, notions of traditional femininity remained at girls’ schools, limiting the complete realization of the schools’ missions.

The early 1900s marked a time of great change for many American women, as they had greater access to education and careers outside of the home. Women’s involvement in public affairs and the rise of women’s rights activism during this time

397 Natalie Blanton, Miss Jennie and Her Letters: An Effort at Documentation, compiled 1955, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
398 Natalie Blanton, Ninety-nine Notes to “Love Remains,” compiled 1962, VHS.
demonstrated challenges to traditional notions of femininity and conceptions of women’s roles both in and outside the home. At a time when the public education system was undergoing significant changes, private girls’ schools also had to create their own missions, curricula, and programs in order to recruit students and differentiate themselves from other schools in the new century. Notions about gender and femininity influenced not only the development of the ultimate goals for women’s education, but also the creation of specific curricula and programs at these schools in Virginia. Through academic, athletic, character development, and social education programs, administrators attempted to influence the growth of their students based on the standards of femininity that they saw as proper and appropriate for the twentieth century. Across many areas of school life, administrators often sent unclear and contradictory messages about what they expected as standard behavior for young women as well as the ultimate goals they had for their students. While many administrators encouraged their students to pursue rigorous accomplishments in academics and athletics and to develop strong and assertive leadership, aspects of traditional femininity, including a commitment to domesticity, moral purity, and service to others, remained in the goals for and execution of these various programs. The lack of a consistent or clear set of expectations for these young women and the contradictions inherent in many of the programs at girls’ schools reflected the complexities in the definitions of femininity in the early twentieth century.

From their opening years, administrators at Madeira, St. Anne’s, and St. Catherine’s sought to develop rigorous and demanding academic curricula that could prepare women for the challenges of higher education. Although Foxcroft’s academic program got off to a slower start, administrators at all of these girls’ schools placed
significant value on the ability of their students to compete and thrive in strenuous academic settings. Each school established a college-preparatory track that focused on preparation for the college entrance examinations, and many of the administrators highlighted their schools’ connections to and relationships with the elite women’s colleges of the day. This commitment to college preparation for young women showed that administrators often promoted the idea that women had the intellectual capabilities to pursue this type of education and many thought that higher education was an appropriate goal for many women’s schooling. However, while these administrators encouraged many girls to pursue this course, girls’ schools also made it relatively easy to opt out of the more rigorous course of study to pursue more traditional subjects for young women including English, music, arts, and limited domestic training. Although the presence of preparatory and non-preparatory tracks at these schools indicated that students had some level of choice in their own schooling, it also represented the divisions in opinion over the proper goals of women’s education in the early twentieth century.

In addition to an emphasis on intellectual and academic development, administrators at girls’ school established extensive athletic programs, which were influenced by discussions about proper standards of femininity. Each school established athletic requirements for all students, and administrators often looked to athletics as a way to strengthen not only students’ bodies, but also sharpen their minds and develop their characters. Administrators, therefore, encouraged girls’ participation in athletics in hopes that it would assist in their academic performance. Based on catalogue descriptions and accounts of different sporting events, administrators also hoped that students would find enjoyment and excitement in athletics. Schools encouraged girls’ participation in a
variety of competitions through the development of numerous school teams that would compete against each other as well as other girls’ schools in the Mid-Atlantic region. Through these programs, administrators urged their students to embrace the value of competition and assertiveness on the court and field. However, administrators also placed limits on the levels of competitiveness and aggression that students were allowed to show, and they emphasized sportsmanship and humility as the most critical and favorable traits of female athletes. Schools also reinforced traditional concerns about female health through these programs, showing the inconsistent expectations about women’s athletic abilities and standards for proper feminine behavior in sports.

Character education became a critical area of development at girls’ schools during the early twentieth century, and administrators actively sought to mold students to standards of behavior that they considered to be feminine and ladylike. Through programs like religion, community service, and student government, administrators presented students with contradictory and inconsistent messages about what it meant to be a proper woman. These programs often encouraged women to develop critical leadership skills, such as assertiveness, self-responsibility, and independence, which showed these young girls’ a model of womanhood that valued women’s strength and active engagement in their communities. However, students were also presented with programs that mirrored traditional expectations for young women, including a focus on domesticity and deference to others.

These limitations to women’s leadership and assertiveness in school affairs were also present in the schools’ social events each year. While Foxcroft, Madeira, St. Anne’s and St. Catherine’s did not include planning and attending parties, teas, and dances in the
official curriculum, students and administrators spent considerable time and energy on them. This suggested that administrators saw the benefit of this kind of activity for women, particularly the development of social skills that would be helpful as these women prepared to enter elite society after graduation. The unofficial or informal programming surrounding social functions at girls’ schools valued women’s ability to serve as excellent hostesses and encouraged their interactions with members of the opposite sex in anticipation of their future entrance into the marriage market. These functions often reinforced definitions of femininity that praised women’s physical beauty and domestic abilities and encouraged students to think about their futures, including the prospects of finding a husband and beginning a family.

While administrators failed to communicate a clear and consistent set of expectations for feminine behavior in academics, athletics, character development, and social education, students also thought about and articulated a wide range of opinions about their own femininity and the purpose of their schooling. In student publications, girls commented on each area of school life with excitement, praise, criticism, and anxiety. Some students spoke about the academic and athletic requirements with excitement, pride, and an ambitious tone, indicating they saw these programs as a positive or beneficial part of their own education. However, other students looked upon the same programs with dread and anxiety, suggesting that some saw the focus on testing, sporting events, and competition as inconsistent with what they wanted from their schooling experience. In the various programs implemented for the development of character and social skills, students also responded to administrators’ goals in a variety of ways. Some students embraced aspects of these programs and participated actively in the
religious life, community service programs, and student government organizations. However, others resisted schools’ efforts to regulate their behaviors and activities, and the tensions that developed over standards and rules reflected the different expectations members of the school community had about the proper definitions of femininity and morality in the early twentieth century. Students also showed a wide range of emotions and opinions about the social events at their schools, and they often reflected about their own futures. Although administrators wanted to prepare well-rounded students for a variety of life paths, girls were more likely to draw strict divisions between pursuing a career and further education and the search for a husband to start a family. The limitations that students placed on their own futures in their adolescent writings could have suggested that many thought that it was undesirable or unrealistic for women in the early twentieth century to pursue both a career and a family.

The contradictions in the goals for women’s education and the programs put in place at Foxcroft, Madeira, St. Anne’s, and St. Catherine’s led to many different visions for ideal femininity in these communities. Graduates from these schools pursued multiple paths after graduation, which showed the wide variety of behavior, expectations, and lifestyles that these women sought for themselves. Yearbooks and publications from the schools’ alumnae associations often included lists of notes and updates from various graduates. While not all students kept their schools updated with their lives and many were not included in the publications, these sources gave an idea of the range of activities that girls’ schools graduates undertook.399 Some students realized the goal of many of

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399 See Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, 1920-1921, 1923-1924, 1924-1925, and Gone Away, 1944, Foxcroft Archives; Jinger Jar, 1929, and Facets, November 1917, STAB Archives; Miss Madeira’s School, 1929-1930, Madeira Archives; and class lists files, prior to 1920, and scrapbook of Pocahontas Wight Edmunds, St. Catherine’s Archives for lists of alumnae updates.
the administrators by continuing their education at the college level, with some of them attending the elite women’s colleges like Bryn Mawr, Smith, Barnard, and Vassar. For example, St. Catherine’s student Mary Wingfield Scott attended both Bryn Mawr and Barnard, where she graduated in 1921. She continued her education with a Master’s degree in 1925 and a Doctorate in 1936, both from the University of Chicago.400 Others continued their education in music, art, social work, and teaching, again reinforcing the administrators’ goals of prolonged and deep education for young women. Some girls’ schools graduates reported that they had taken on work outside of the home, including numerous teaching positions and clerical jobs. Many students took teaching and coaching positions at their alma maters. For example, Alice Jones, a 1916 graduate of Foxcroft, took a position as the athletics and dancing instructor at the school starting in 1918 until she moved to a farm with her husband in the early 1940s.401 Numerous St. Anne’s students took jobs in New York and Washington D.C., including Dorothy Pilkington, Miriam Winslow Fettis, and Mildred Weaver, who worked at the Rockefeller Foundation.402 Other reports from alumnae indicated that some of them were actively involved in political activism in their communities. For example, Adele Clark, a 1900 graduate from St. Catherine’s, worked as a stenographer at the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, and then became actively involved in the suffrage campaign in Virginia, serving on the Boards of numerous organizations.403 These examples indicated that some students pursued paths that were consistent with administrators’ goals of continued education and contributions to their surrounding communities.

400 Alumnae Questionnaire, Class list file prior to 1920, St. Catherine’s Archives.
401 Tally-Ho!, 1917-1918, and Gone Away, 1944, Foxcroft Archives.
402 Jinger Jar, 1929, and Facets, November 1917, STAB Archives.
403 Alumnae Questionnaire, Class list file prior to 1920, St. Catherine’s Archives.
However, in their reports to the alumnae association, many more girls’ schools graduates focused on their civic and social engagements and their marriages and families. Some students even reported that they left college early to be married instead. Many of the alumnae reports tracked the extensive numbers of graduates participating in debutante balls in major cities across the United States and London. Students also informed their former classmates of engagements, marriages, and births, and many of them chose to focus on their family members rather than giving any updates on their own activities or accomplishments. The focus on their husbands and children may indicate that these women characterized these aspects of their lives and their roles as wives and mothers as the most significant to share with others. The wide variety of responses to alumnae questionnaires and notes demonstrated the different paths that alumnae took after their school years in the early twentieth century, suggesting that alumnae responded to the administrators’ visions for their education in many ways. Some women saw their education and future careers as their main accomplishments since school, while others focused on their domestic pursuits, showing the complexities surrounding the definitions of ideal femininity in the early twentieth century.

When Miss Jennie, Miss Madeira, Miss Charlotte, and the vestry members of Christ Church developed their schools in Virginia, ideas about gender and proper femininity influenced the creation and articulation of the goals for women’s education. In many areas of school life, the expectations for and the experiences of the young women who attended these schools were shaped by the ways administrators defined and perceived ideas about femininity. These administrators often presented inconsistent and

404 An example is Flora Bertha McClellan Baylor, a graduate of St. Catherine’s who completed three years at Vassar before dropping out to be married. See Alumnae questionnaire, class list file, prior to 1920, St. Catherine’s Archives.
contradictory messages to students that both challenged traditional expectations by encouraging strength, assertiveness, and leadership among girls and reinforced women’s commitment to duty, domesticity, and service to others. Students also confronted these issues surrounding femininity and women’s expectations, and their various responses and critiques of administrators’ visions reflected the complexities surrounding the appropriate place of education and its ultimate purpose in the lives of young women in the early twentieth century.
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