

Phaethra.

SCIENTIA ET RELIGIO.

WILSON COLLEGE, MARCH, 1894.

NO. 4.

THE SIGNING OF THE CHARTER.

MARCH 22, 1869.

That day had been one full of duty and care  
For the man in the gubernatorial chair,  
Who sat carefully reading and signing his name  
To the papers that wait his attention to claim.  
The letters must first be disposed of, and now  
A smile now a frown may be seen on his brow.  
Here are letters on business affecting the nation,  
And others from people of lowliest station.

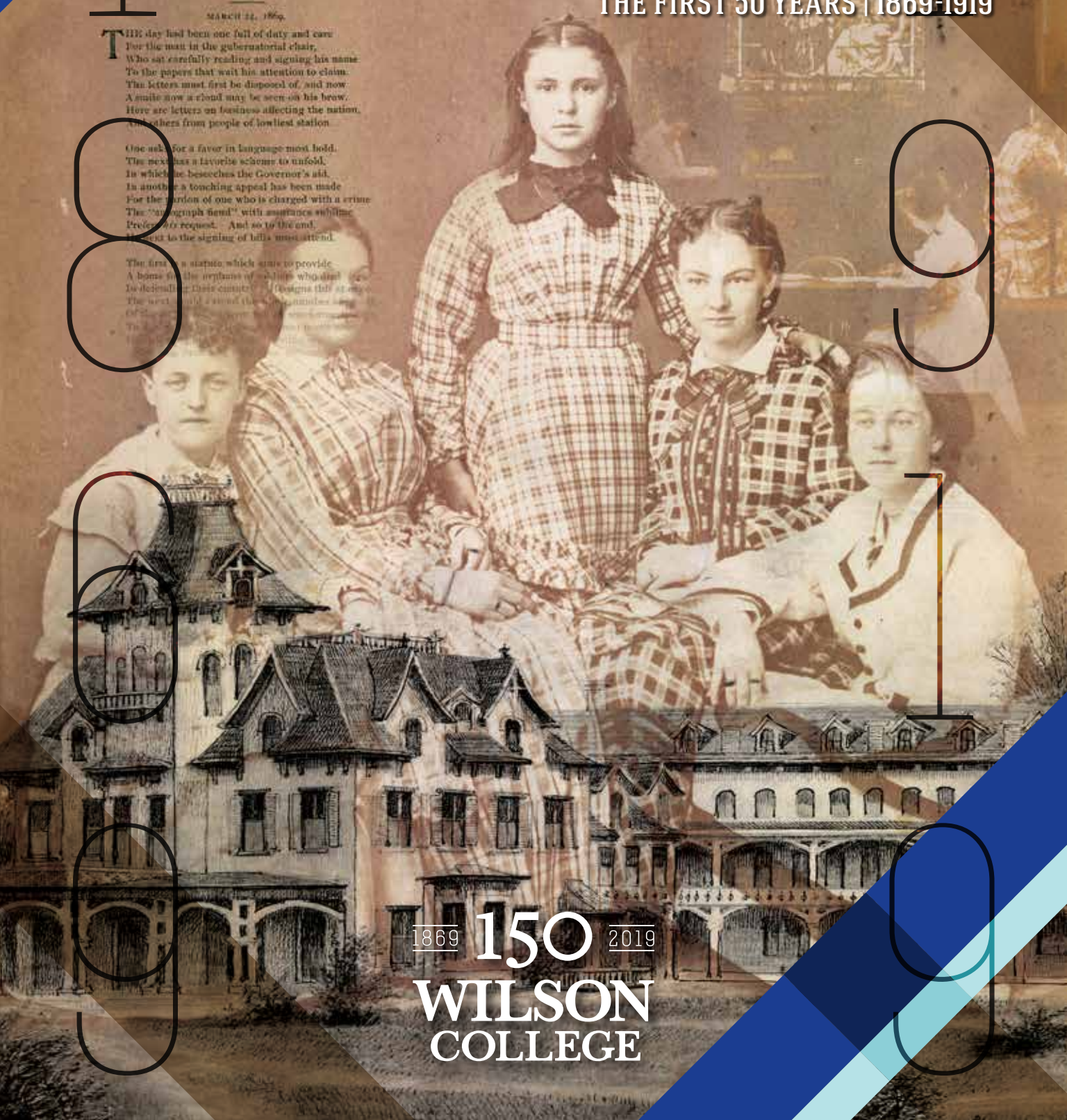
One asks for a favor in language most bold,  
The next has a favorite scheme to unfold,  
In which he beseeches the Governor's aid,  
In another a touching appeal has been made  
For the pardon of one who is charged with a crime  
The "Analogous Item" with assurance submits  
Preferred request. And so to the end,  
The next to the signing of bills must attend.

The first is a statute which aims to provide  
A home for the orphans of sailors who died  
In defending their country. It designs that among  
The next shall stand the same number of  
The next is a statute which aims to provide  
A home for the orphans of sailors who died  
In defending their country. It designs that among  
The next shall stand the same number of

Boldly

DISTINCT

THE FIRST 50 YEARS | 1869-1919



1869 150 2019

WILSON COLLEGE



# WILSON COLLEGE, CHAMBERSBURG, PENN'A.

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR 1876 AND '77

The undersigned having assumed the presidency of Wilson College, particularly calls attention to the fact that the course of study in this College has been, with the approval of the Trustees, entirely revised and placed on a plane with that of the best colleges in the land.

Graduates of the Classical course will be thoroughly instructed in the entire curriculum, while those students who desire to pursue any especial study beyond the line marked out, will be accorded every facility for so doing.

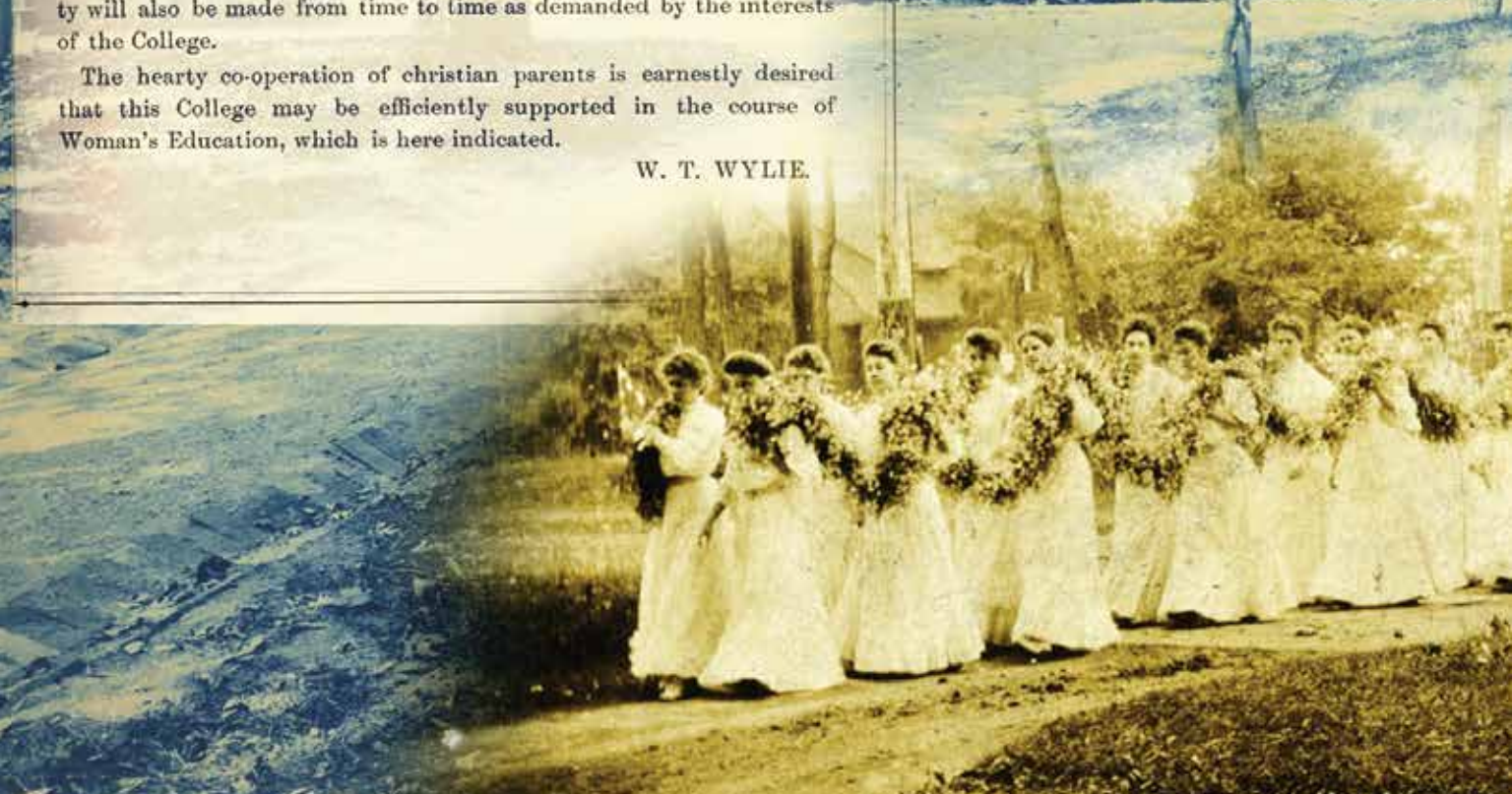
A Post-Graduate course will be organized with unusual facilities for instruction, and it is hoped that Scholarships and Fellowships will be endowed as incentives to study, and rewards of high proficiency.

A department of Chemistry, Gardening, Fruit Culture and Architecture, as applied to thorough and practical *Housekeeping*, will be established as early as possible.

The entire design of this College looks toward the religious and social culture of the pupils, as well as their mental training. Parents while noting the course of study, as now laid down for the Academic, Classic and Scientific courses, will recognize in the Faculty the names of well known and experienced Instructors. Additions to the Faculty will also be made from time to time as demanded by the interests of the College.

The hearty co-operation of christian parents is earnestly desired that this College may be efficiently supported in the course of Woman's Education, which is here indicated.

W. T. WYLIE.







Our brief timeline of Wilson College's first 50 years begins in 1869 with the replacement of the Rosedale Seminary with Wilson, a true college for women. It ends in 1919 with alumnae elected to the Board of Trustees for the first time and female suffrage ratified in Congress.

Over this period, Wilson's triumphs and struggles often parallel the gains and setbacks women faced as they sought to apply their newfound education to solving social ills and participating in the public life of the nation.

Wilson College was created through the efforts of two Presbyterian ministers and a wealthy, religious, farm woman with no formal education. While this trio were unlikely radicals, their collaboration was nonetheless bold. There were fewer than two dozen women's colleges in the whole country and the concept of a college-level education for women was often resisted. The founding and early years of the College have to be understood in this context and in terms of the broad religious and social movements in the United States at the time.

Since independence, Americans had always believed that the strength of the nation depended on an educated citizenry. This, combined with the rise of public education and explosive population growth, led to a demand for well-educated teachers, many of whom were young women. Female seminaries filled this gap, but only offered a limited education. By the end of the 19th century, more and more women were seeking a quality college education.

Wilson was founded with the goal of providing a liberal arts education equal to that offered at the best men's colleges. As one of the first such institutions, the College was part of the vanguard paving a new path for women and the nation.

At the same time, the Protestant Social Gospel movement sought to apply Christian ethics to solving social ills. Church-affiliated colleges like Wilson taught this theory of social justice and encouraged their students and alums to effect change in the real world. Wilson alumnae, empowered to lead "lives of useful purpose," played leadership roles in addressing these societal problems and led the way for other women to enter the public sphere.

Wilson students were prepared for such social activism through their involvement in student organizations, campus publications—which closely monitored and reported on national and international concerns—and lectures on campus by prominent religious and reform leaders. Students attended national and regional conferences on religion and social activism, and their liberal arts education developed finely tuned critical thinking and communications skills through coursework in logic, rhetoric, history and economics. By the early 20th century, many alumnae identified with the ideal of the "New Woman"—a woman who was independent, educated, confident and ready to escape the domestic sphere that defined the limits of Sarah Wilson's world.

Join us as we explore the history of Wilson College in the first of a three-part series in celebration of 150 years of bold, innovative progress.

Amy Ensley  
*Director of the Hankey Center*

Darrach Dolan  
*Managing Editor of Wilson Magazine*

## The Enigmatic Sarah Wilson

Wilson College is named in honor of Sarah Wilson, yet we know little about her or why she donated money to found a college for women.

What we do know comes from an essay written by a neighbor, Rush Gillan, who grew up next to the Wilson farm. Sarah was the youngest of 10 children—three girls and seven boys. As devout Presbyterians, “the strictest of the strict” in Gillan’s words, the family traveled miles on horseback to attend Rocky Spring Presbyterian Church.

None of the boys married or left the family home, nor did Sarah, and only one of her sisters had children. Interestingly, many of that sister’s

descendants have been students at Wilson College.

The Wilsons accumulated as much as 7,000 acres and were quite wealthy. In 1848 they built a beautiful house, described as “finer than any other house in the neighborhood,” and fitted it out with carpets, a stove and expensive furniture. However, for unknown reasons, the family continued to live in the original family home—a two-story log house without carpet next to the new house—and cooked on an open fire instead of a stove. Gillan describes Sarah as having strong convictions, an independent streak and a kind nature. She rarely left the farm other than to attend church and in her 76 years, she visited Chambersburg—only eight miles from her home—less than a dozen times. Although she could read and write, she probably never attended



Yellowstone National Park Created



Territory of Wyoming Passes Woman's Suffrage Bill



Sarah Wilson

1869

1872

1873

## FROM THE ASHES OF A SEMINARY, A WOMEN'S COLLEGE RISES

### FEMALE EDUCATION? NO SIR, I WILL HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!

In 1864, Confederate troops burned much of Chambersburg, Pa., to the ground, including Rosedale Seminary, an educational institution for young women. They also went out of their way to torch Norland, the estate of Col. A.K. McClure, a vocal opponent of slavery—an action that would inadvertently play an important role in the history of Wilson College. After the Civil War, the Rev. Dr. Tryon Edwards of Hagerstown, Md., decided to replace Rosedale with a new “female seminary,” as women’s schools of the day were called. These seminaries concentrated on educating women to be schoolteachers. In summer 1867, Edwards approached a fellow Presbyterian minister, the Rev. James Wightman of Greencastle, for assistance.

“No sir, I will have nothing to do with it!” Wightman replied. “Because I do not believe in the *female* education of women!” Edwards was astonished. Wightman, the younger of the two, explained he did not consider “female education”—the limited education offered at seminaries—appropriate. He

told the older man, “If you agree to organize a first-class college, affording to young women facilities for a thorough education such as now afforded by first-class colleges to men, I will enter

into it, heart and soul.”

Edwards agreed, although the concept was new, even radical, and at odds with his own conservative notions. The two men outlined a plan—most of it the younger Wightman’s—to create a college for young women that emphasized intellectual training with a guiding basis of conscience and honor, and with a nonsectarian but predominantly Christian atmosphere.



Wilson Graduates First Class of 5 Women

### MONEY MATTERS AND A BIDDING WAR

After securing the blessing of the Presbytery of Carlisle in 1868 for their enterprise, the men went to Chambersburg to drum up support for the new college. Their concept appealed to local pride and commercial interest, but when it came to fundraising, they ran into resistance.

“The old-time idea that women have no need of a collegiate education was met with at every turn,” according to a history of the College. Again and again they were told women were better off without education, their place was in the home and they lacked “the physical strength and intellectual ability to master a college course.”

When weeks turned to months without any success, Edwards visited a local Presbyterian woman, Sarah Wilson,



Transcontinental Railroad Completed

school, and for enjoyment, read the Bible. She spent her adult life preparing meals for her parents and seven brothers. Gillan states unequivocally that “she knew absolutely nothing of the world.”

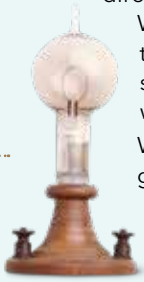
Why did this unworldly woman donate \$30,000 to found a college for women? Was she an early feminist despite her strict upbringing? “There is zero evidence of that,” said Amy Ensley,

director of Wilson’s Hankey Center for the History of Women’s Education. “She was extremely conservative.” Ensley’s best guess is that as a religious woman, she simply gave because it was a Presbyterian minister who asked for the money.

We will never know what inspired Sarah to give the gift of a college for women, but whatever her motivation, her gift had a profound effect on the world.

“The women who were educated here did a million different noteworthy things,” Ensley said. “So we are grateful to her.”

Sadly, although Wilson College opened four months before Sarah’s death in 1871, it appears that she never visited the institution that still bears her name.



Lightbulb Invented

## The Lady Principals

Many 19th-century women’s colleges employed a “lady principal” whose job responsibilities encompassed those of both dean of the faculty and dean of students. At Wilson, while the college president worked with the Board of Trustees to manage finances and policies, the lady principal took charge of the campus’ day-to-day administration and budget. She also was the most involved in the students’ daily lives, acting as counselor and disciplinarian. By 1897, the Trustees voted to change the position of lady principal to dean of the faculty.



First Wilson Gymnasium Built

1876

1877

1878

who agreed to give \$10,000. While this was generous, it was less than he had hoped for and he was disappointed. When the ministers failed to raise more money, they decided to call Chambersburg’s bluff—they announced they were considering other locations for the college and would open the proposal up for bids. Whichever town offered the most money would be home to their innovative college.

This strategy worked! The citizens of Chambersburg, not wishing to be outdone by the offer of \$16,000 from a nearby town, unnamed in the history, magically raised \$23,000. Chambersburg won the bidding war and got its college.

With the town’s support secured, Edwards made a second visit to Sarah Wilson. This time she agreed to contribute an additional \$20,000, with the promise that the College would stand as a memorial to herself and her family.

Her total gift of \$30,000—a sum worth \$555,000 today—provided the pivotal seed money to secure Norland, the McClure estate burned by Confederate troops. It seems fitting that a progressive college was built on grounds associated with a prominent abolitionist.

The Pennsylvania Legislature approved the charter on March 24, 1869. With that, Wilson Female College was born.

## TEETHING TROUBLES—AN ENTIRE JUNIOR CLASS LEAVES

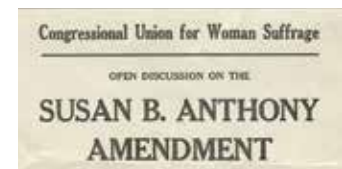
Edwards was appointed president but it was Wightman, appointed vice president and resident professor, who

would actually manage the College in its early years.

Wilson officially opened on Oct. 12, 1870, with eight professors and teachers, along with 26 resident students (later increased to 33) and 42 day students. The College’s largest enrollment of its early days occurred in 1871-72, when 99 students enrolled from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia.

However, the first decade did not go smoothly. The College grappled with financial difficulties, persistent faculty turnover and fluctuations in enrollment. When the College announced it was raising academic requirements to meet the more rigorous standards of similar colleges, the entire junior class departed. For three years in a row—1877-79—there was no graduating class.

Referring to 1879 as “the darkest fiscal year,” the Trustees feared the College would have to be shuttered. Yet, by sticking to its principles of strong academics, and through sheer grit and determination, Wilson righted itself. In fact by the following year, the College ran a modest surplus and would begin its second decade on firmer footing.



Suffrage Amendment First Introduced to Congress



## Birth of the Alumnae Association

On a June evening in 1879, Wilson's lady principal, Abby Goodsell, invited a few local alumnae to her Chambersburg home for tea, with the ulterior motive of urging them to form an alumnae association. Her suggestion was well received, and a group of 10 alumnae crafted a constitution with a straightforward purpose: "to support the interests of the College and to maintain a spirit of fellowship among its graduates."

Under the leadership of its first president, Mary Lane Wells, Class of 1874, the association undertook a fundraising project to refurbish the College's reception room. After that was accomplished, however, the association suffered from "a great lack of interest." It wasn't until 1891, under the leadership of Eleanor Chambers VanLear, Class of 1889,



Alumnae Banquet Invitation from 1900

that the association organized a luncheon meeting and invited college president, the Rev. John Edgar, and the Board of Trustees to attend. Edgar then encouraged the association to hold annual business meetings.

The association decided to raise money to endow a chair of literature for the College. In June 1897, the first alumnae banquet was held, with 76 alumnae attending. The association grew stronger under the presidency of Dr. Ella Everitt, Class of 1888, who set members the task of raising money for an income-bearing endowment for Wilson.

In 1909, the Trustees voted to install two alumnae trustees.



President Garfield is Assassinated

1881

1883

## A TOPSY-TURVY DECADE

### A DYNAMIC WOMAN AT THE HELM

Wilson began the decade with increased enrollment and optimism about its future. "Everything is hopeful," the Board of Trustees reported in April 1880, after meeting expenses and achieving a \$200 surplus. By the next year, college President Rev. Thomas H. Robinson recorded in the president's report, "The financial condition of the College is better than years past."

Robinson was "president pro tem," meaning he was a figurehead and had agreed to have his name appear on the catalog but was "not expected to discharge the duties or meet the responsibilities of the office."

He credited the College's financial and academic success to the actions of Wilson's Lady Principal Abby Goodsell.

Goodsell, a Vassar graduate, became "lady principal" in 1877. When she arrived, Wilson was in such financial difficulties that it had dispensed with the services of the registrar, matron and housekeeper. Undaunted and dynamic, Goodsell not only took on the responsibilities of all three, but remarkably also raised the College's level of scholarship and seized the financial reins for campus operations.

### Abby Goodsell

From finances to academics to groundskeeping, she ran every aspect of the College almost single-handedly. As a

member of the Class of 1881 remarked to a friend, "Miss Goodsell has taken charge of the trimming of the trees, and all of the girls help her."

The Trustees, all men, wouldn't have been expected to hand financial and academic control over to a woman. However, in recognition of her importance and outstanding abilities, she was listed as "Consultant to the Board of Trustees" and was "requested to express her views on matters pertaining to the interests of the College." The Trustees voted to adopt her plans for the internal management of the institution and appointed a committee to confer with her with regard to details.

### WILSON PREPARES TO CLOSE FOR THE FIRST (BUT NOT THE LAST) TIME IN ITS HISTORY

Unfortunately, the good times were short-lived. Both Robinson and Goodsell left Wilson in 1881—Robinson returning to his Presbyterian congregation and Goodsell to Vassar to become its lady principal. Although they had left Wilson in a strong financial and academic position, without a large endowment to make it financially secure, the College was vulnerable. When the nation plunged into a serious economic downturn, known as the Depression of 1882-85, enrollment at Wilson



Trustees Offer College to the Carlisle Indian School



## Wilson Traditions

Odd vs. Evens, the daisy chain, song wars, even banner stealing—all these traditions can be traced back to Wilson's first 50 years. Today's popular banner-stealing night began as "dummy rush" from the late 1880s. Each class made a dummy, hid it somewhere on campus, and left clues for the other classes. The

21st-century version involves hiding Odds and Evens banners with clues posted in Lenfest Commons. The back-and-forth stealing often goes into the wee hours.

In the 1890s, the campus did not have Odds or Evens, but there were Defenders and Invincibles.

The two rival clubs battled in an annual Thanksgiving game of basketball (the sport was created in 1891). By the start of the 20th century, this competition had been recast as today's rivalry between odd and even-numbered graduating



The Defenders in 1900

years, each with its own colors. The first color ceremony was recorded in 1905, when seniors marched from South Hall to present colors to the freshman class waiting by Laird Hall—a tradition that remains part of the modern Sarah Wilson Week.

Beginning in 1902, students celebrated May Day with maypole dances and costumed pageants, which eventually transformed into today's annual Spring Fling carnival. The commencement morning ceremony of floating a daisy chain on the Conococheague Creek for good luck began in 1909. Song wars and step-sing—musical and chanting competitions between Odds and Evens—had their start in 1905. The first White Dinner was held in 1914.



First May Day in 1902



Coca-Cola is Invented

1885



Statue of Liberty Arrives in N.Y.

plummeted and the College had to mortgage its buildings just to pay staff and expenses.

By 1883, the Trustees were facing a crisis—enrollment had dropped more than 50 percent, to less than 30 students, and Wilson was struggling to pay its mortgage and running expenses. Citing failing health, the Rev. John C. Caldwell, the new president, tendered his res-

ignation. At its July meeting, the Trustees voted to accept Caldwell's resignation and—in a decision that foreshadowed a similar turning point 100 years in the future—they notified the faculty that the school would close.

The Trustees contacted Capt. Richard Pratt of the Carlisle Indian School to see if he was interested in leasing the grounds at Wilson. Luckily, Pratt declined the offer.

## CHAMBERSBURG TO THE RESCUE

The citizens of Chambersburg were not ready to see the end of Wilson College and sprang into action. In the space of a month, residents raised \$3,000 and presented the sum to the board in August. Encouraged by this gift, the Trustees agreed to settle the school's debts by repurposing \$20,000 donated by Thomas Scott, president of the Pennsylvania

1886

Railroad, who had originally given the money as an endowment to fund a professorship. The board then reversed its July decision; set Sept. 19, 1883, as the date classes would start; and promptly installed the Rev. John Edgar as the new college president.

For the next 11 years until his untimely death, Edgar guided the College to increasing success. When he took office, 78 students were enrolled for fall classes and by 1887, that number had grown to 164. He worked to strengthen Wilson's liberal arts curriculum and encouraged students to carry as much work as they could, but at the same time promoted the College's music and arts school because it was a profitable source of income.

Edgar oversaw the expansion of Main Hall along with other building projects, including remodeling a new dormitory (Fletcher Hall) and installing a working observatory that became known as "the chocolate drop." He realized his dream to have Main Hall completed by Wilson's 25th anniversary in 1894.

1888



Susan B. Anthony Founds International Council of Women

### The First International Student

In 1894, Fuji Tsukamoto of Japan became the first international student to graduate from Wilson. Tsukamoto frequently contributed to, and was mentioned in, the College's student newspaper, the *Pharetra*.

Seeking to educate Wilson about Japanese culture, she translated the Japanese fable, *The Good Mikado*, into English and composed her own short stories and essays about Japan and the English language.

During her junior year, Tsukamoto dressed in "full Japanese court costume for the gratification



Fuji Tsukamoto

of American curiosity." She later gave a lecture on Japan for the entire faculty and student body.

In 1894, Tsukamoto was president of the Missionary Society at Wilson when membership rose to 52. In September that same year, Tsukamoto became the first Asian woman to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania after graduating from Wilson. She then returned to Japan to teach at Kobe University. She never forgot about Wilson, frequently writing letters to former professors and fellow alumnae.



Hershey Chocolate Company Begins Operations



Daughters of the American Revolution Founded

1890

1892

1894

## EXPANSION AND GROWTH

### INDEPENDENCE, STABILITY AND AN UNTIMELY DEATH

By the final decade of the 1800s, the Wilson community was proud of being "singularly exempt from the interest and help of rich men," according to Anna Robinson Ziegler, Class of 1889. In other words, unlike many similar colleges, Wilson did not depend on rich patrons or an endowment with strings attached. Instead, the College was funded by tuition fees and, through careful management of these finances, was a wholly independent institution.

Under the continuing leadership of President John Edgar, enrollment steadily increased and the College remained on firm financial footing. But in 1894, at the age of 53, Edgar suddenly fell ill and died three days before graduation. His death was felt deeply by the campus. Ziegler commented that he was "so good and kind a friend, so untiring and faithful a teacher, so great and fine a man; so well-fitted for our struggling and ambitious college. The loss seemed irreparable."



**Rev. John Edgar** The community soldiered on, led by Lady Principal Elizabeth Edgar, the late president's wife, until Samuel Martin was installed as president in April 1895. "I entered Wilson College on All Fools Day in 1895," Martin noted in his reminiscences in

*Wilson College, 1870-1910.* "My advent was celebrated by an unintentional and expensive bonfire which destroyed the roof of the west end of the college building (Main Hall)."



First U.S. Stamp to Depict a Woman Issued (Queen Isabella)

### A BUILDING SPREE AND A LOVERS' RETREAT

Undeterred by the fire that marked his arrival, Martin continued the building boom that had begun with his predecessor. In his first year, the west wing of Main Hall was rebuilt, followed by the construction of Harmony Cottage, Science Hall (called by many students "The White House" and demolished in the 1970s), the president's house (which became an infirmary and is now Alumni House), the dining hall, Edgar Hall, South Hall and Sharpe House.

These improvements were well-received across campus, with one exception: When the expansion of Main Hall began, the students lamented because for it to be built, their "only lovers' retreat" had to be "destroyed."

### A MUSICAL ETHICAL DILEMMA

Reflecting not only the changing world but also the Presbyterian values instilled by its founders, Wilson encouraged science, charity, arts and understanding. It promoted itself as a serious and academically rigorous college where women



## The “New Woman”

Sarah Wilson represented the “ideal woman” of the Victorian era. With no formal education, she was pious and content to make home and family care the center of her life. But her gift to create a true women’s college was directly responsible for educating women who would go on to challenge this Victorian ideal. Wilson alumnae worked to improve the lives of other women—women like Ella Everitt, Class of 1888, who became a gynecologist, surgeon and professor; Mary Belle McElwain, Class of 1895, who became a professor, then dean at Smith College; and Hannah Patterson, Class of 1901, who became a leader in the woman’s suffrage movement.

These younger women were examples of what became known as the “New Woman”—well-educated, independent and vibrant. They represented a shift in the way women saw themselves and were regarded as a threat to the conservative and patriarchal establishment. Although



Mary Belle  
McElwain

they met with great resistance and even enmity, they used their education and self-belief to pursue careers and to live lives of useful purpose in the wider world. Wilson students had such role models among the young alumnae of the College—professional women who were well-represented in Wilson’s Alumnae Association and frequently visited the campus. The female professors—mostly single women who lived on campus where close proximity established strong bonds and mentoring—also had significant influence over the students.

The women who attended Wilson in Everitt’s generation were often serious, ambitious students who had fought hard for the opportunity to attend college. Everitt, McElwain and Patterson remained devoted to Wilson College their entire lives, serving on the Alumnae Association and the Board of Trustees, and raising money for the endowment. The ideal of the “New Woman” helped move the pendulum of public opinion in favor of greater equality for women.

1895

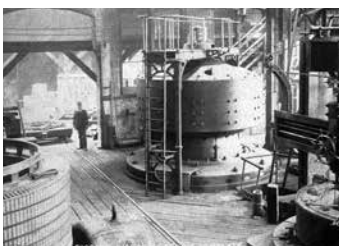


Wilson’s Orchestra in 1901

were educated to participate in business, science and all aspects of society.

But there was an ethical problem with this: The very finances that had allowed the College to be independent and academically rigorous came, in large part, from tuition received by the music and art departments. And the students who enrolled for the music “degrees” came

from a radically different demographic than the other undergraduates—they were women from traditional families who believed a woman’s place was in the home and the only education she needed was in decorative arts.



First Hydroelectric Generator  
Produces Power at Niagara Falls

1898

Martin grappled with what he termed “the perplexing problem” of the College’s music degrees. In a nutshell, the College was granting “music” bachelor’s degrees without significant academic requirements—the very opposite of what Wilson stood for.

He attempted to make the requirements for music students more rigorous, but noted, “The music department was the only source of surplus revenue (for Wilson) ... in short we could not have met our expenses for a single month without the music department.”

Martin admitted his attempt to “harmonize” the conflicting educational views between the music faculty and the college faculty was “never really accomplished.” This dilemma—to be academically rigorous or prepare women for work in the home—would not go away and would take on more significance as the suffragist movement gained momentum in the coming century.

But, apart from this dependence on music and art students, the College was doing well and the new century would begin with enrollment at an all-time high of 300 students.

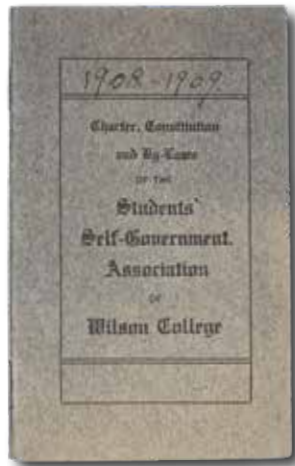


Spanish-American War  
Begins and Ends

## Student Government and the Honor Principle

The Wilson College Student Government Association (now known as WCGA) was established in October 1904, largely due to the influence of Dean Anna Martin Pugsley, who published an article in the *Phaethra* in December 1903 explaining the system and praising its success

in other women's colleges. President Matthew Reaser approved of the idea and asked the faculty to draw up a constitution. Wilson's first student government association was formed during the 1905-06 academic year.

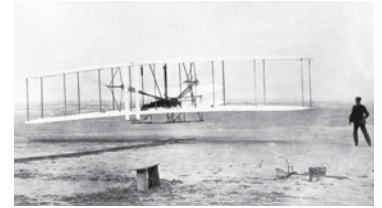


Student Government Association Booklet from 1908

The Honor Principle was adopted at the same time the student government formed. It is the contract Wilson students sign at convocation in which they agree to “act with integrity in all aspects of life” and “trust each other to be mature and responsible individuals.”

The Honor Principle also champions “both individual freedom and the rights and welfare of

others.” Enforcement of the principle was put in the hands of students working through elected WCGA officers.



Wright Brothers' First Flight



President McKinley is Assassinated

1901

1903

## ACADEMICS, NOT HOME ECONOMICS!

### A WOMAN'S PLACE DECIDED BY MEN

As a new century dawned, the country debated—often rancously and rancorously—the role of women in society. The nation was divided between those who advocated for gender equality and a much greater role for women in every sphere of society, and those who believed a woman's role was in the home.

At Wilson, the battle lines were drawn over the content of the curriculum and with it, the direction of the College. The administrators, all men, leaned toward emphasizing “domestic relations” courses. The alumnae, a new generation of educated women, led the charge to preserve the curriculum's academic rigor.

In 1899, college President Samuel Martin reported to the Board of Trustees, “The tone of college life is higher, more dignified and womanly.” His emphasis on refinement and culture was popular with some parents and donors, resulting in the construction of the new Thomson Music Hall and greatly increased enrollments in the music and art programs. It appeared the traditionalists had the upper hand at Wilson.

However, the first Wilson graduates—a significant number of whom had completed doctorates and graduate degrees

in medicine—were beginning to make their mark in the world. These alumnae were not prepared to accept their alma mater becoming a finishing school for young ladies. Dr. Ella Everitt, Class of 1888, a surgeon and president of the Alumnae Association, described the importance of higher education for women at an alumnae meeting in Philadelphia: “All that we ask, as women leading independent lives, is the chance to make the most of ourselves for our time and for humanity; that we may lead useful, helpful lives to the limit of our powers.”

At the same gathering, underscoring the power of the traditionalists, the Rev. Charles Wood of the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia urged the College to “train up women, who might be able not only to talk in ‘dactylic hexameter or blank verse,’ but to live sweet, quiet, helpful womanly lives in their homes and church.”

Like the alumnae, Wilson students were keenly aware of the value of a real college education. In 1900, Laura Campbell said in her graduation speech, “Our grandmothers donned their gingham aprons to bake and to brew; when the college maiden of today puts hers on, she goes to the laboratory to experiment with acids and salts; she plants microbe colonies, examines germs enough to kill half the people in the world. She can, with equal facility, vanquish her opponent



Science Lab at Wilson circa the 1890s



## The First Alumnae Trustees

### Dr. Ella Everitt, Class of 1888

After graduating from Wilson, Ella Everitt received her medical degree from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania (WMCP) in 1891. She became the assistant physician and gynecologist to the State Hospital for the Insane in St. Peters, Minn. In 1897, she was named chief resident physician of the Woman's Hospital in Philadelphia and chair of the gynecology department at the WMCP. She served as president of the Alumnae Association and a life Trustee of the College. In 1915, upon the resignation of Wilson President Anna J. McKeag, Everitt was asked to become college president. She declined because of her love for medicine. She was tragically killed in an automobile accident in 1922 while on her way to perform surgery.



Dr. Ella Everitt

### Belle McLellan Pomeroy, Class of 1880

After graduating from Wilson, Belle McLellan married Nevin Pomeroy, editor and publisher of the *Franklin Repository*, a local newspaper. They settled in Chambersburg, where they raised their two children. She remained active in the affairs of the College. A memorial in the *Alumnae Quarterly* upon her death in 1927 stated, "As a philanthropist, she was ever on the lookout to relieve suffering and help the less fortunate. She happily combined the elements of intellectual and spiritual culture which make college women so great a force for good in society."



Belle McLellan Pomeroy

1906



Einstein Discovers  
 $E=mc^2$

intellectually in debate or physically on the basketball field."

In direct contrast to Campbell's pride and enthusiasm for the modern era, Wilson's new president, the Rev. Matthew Reaser, railed against educating women for life outside the home. In an interview with the *Philadelphia Record* he said, "We are losing that notion of

family life which was a power 50 years ago, and for the great body of girls who enter college, we believe it is unwise. In most women's colleges, too much Latin and too little home study are taught, and as a result after four years in such institutions, girls are unfit to preserve old domestic relations."

### THE ALUMNAE FIGHT FOR THEIR COLLEGE

In 1901, the Alumnae Association, concerned that the College was turning away from rigorous academics at a time when the Seven Sisters, selective women's colleges considered the equivalent of the Ivy League men's colleges, were embracing higher standards, requested that the Trustees allow alumnae representation on the board. The Trustees completely ignored the request.

The alumnae again requested representation in 1904. This time, the Trustees formally refused, contending that alumnae trustees would not "be as intelligently advised

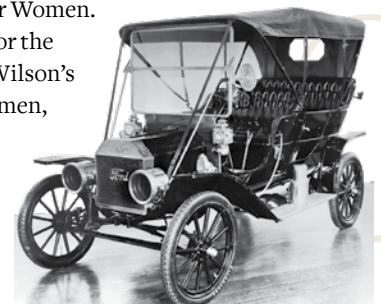
1908

with respect to the wants of the College as the latter's own board." It turned out the Trustees' bylaws specifically excluded women from serving on the board. Alumnae campaigned to amend the bylaws and in 1908, Everitt and Belle McClennan Pomeroy, Class of 1880, were nominated to the board. The board dragged its heels until 1909, when the two women were finally seated as alumnae trustees.

The conflict between the steady stream of conservative ministers running the College and the prominent, successful Wilson graduates now reached a breaking point. As he had in 1908, Reaser again in 1910 recommended adding domestic science to the curriculum. A subcommittee, which included Everitt and Pomeroy, rejected his recommendation, ensuring that Wilson would remain grounded in academic study.

In 1910, the Alumnae Association successfully recommended changing the College's name from Wilson Female College to Wilson College for Women.

This was a huge victory for the alumnae and cemented Wilson's future as a college for women, not a finishing school for young ladies. Reaser resigned the following year and Wilson prepared to name its first female president.



First Model T is Produced

## Wilson at War

Ethelbert Warfield became president of Wilson on the eve of the nation's entrance into World War I. Economizing began immediately on campus—staff holidays were reduced and expenses for commencements, ceremonies and travel minimized. As hired staff left to serve in the military or other war-related industries, students volunteered to serve in the dining room and help with the general maintenance of rooms. Students also took classes in first aid and telegraphy, and the campus community raised money for Belgian soldiers and Armenian relief efforts.

The Alumnae Association created a campus war garden to supply fresh produce to the community.

Two faculty members took extended leave to support the war effort. Virginia McComb, profes-

sor of German, became the secretary of the Committee of Public Safety of Pennsylvania, and Maud Syvret, professor of French, served as secretary of the Foyer des Alliées in the YWCA, which sent aid and support to female factory workers in France.

Hannah Patterson, Class of 1901, served as resident director of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense in Washington, D.C. Other alumnae worked for the U.S. Marine canteen service in England, for the YWCA in Belgium and for the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Alumnae served in many vital positions, including general manager of allied war relief, chief nurse in an overseas military hospital, organizer of a state Red Cross Motor Corps and YMCA secretaries with the American Expeditionary Forces. Many more participated in war work in their hometowns.



Jeannette Rankin is First Woman Elected to Congress



World War I Begins

1914

## A TALE OF TWO PRESIDENTS

### THE PROGRESSIVE AND THE CONSERVATIVE AGREE

Two very different presidents led Wilson in the decade leading up to the College's "Golden Jubilee" anniversary. One, Wilson's first female president, was progressive and believed the College's purpose was to help women reach their true potential through education. The other, a Presbyterian minister, was conservative and believed the College was "to train women whose ideals of life and eternity are those of the old Christian commonwealth."

Despite these ideological differences, both were passionate advocates for strengthening Wilson's liberal arts curriculum and seeking to establish an endowment for the College. In her *History of the Administration of Ethelbert Dudley Warfield*, Virginia Dodd Cooper, Class of 1925, wryly remarked of Anna J. McKeag and Warfield, "Her ambitions became his; her dreams became his realizations."



Anna McKeag

### ANNA J. MCKEAG RAISES STANDARDS BUT LOSES STUDENTS

Under pressure from the Alumnae Association and the two alumnae recently welcomed onto the Board of Trustees, the bylaws of the College were changed in 1911 to allow a woman—not only an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church—to become president of the College. The Board chose Anna J. McKeag, a former professor and dean at

Wilson who had a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, as the new president.

She had been a professor at Wellesley College for 10 years and her plan was to shape the smaller Wilson into a college with equally high standards. While faculty holding doctorates had long been the norm at male liberal arts colleges, the female faculty at women's colleges typically had only bachelor's degrees. McKeag encouraged female faculty to take sabbatical leave to pursue graduate degrees, often granting them full salary and additional funding. She enforced entrance requirements and strengthened the curriculum despite a consequent drop in enrollment.

In an action that ended any misapprehension that the College was preparing women for the home, the Bachelor of Music was withdrawn. Consequently, many of the "special" students left, further reducing enrollment. In 1910, there were 220 students in the classical course and 142 in music, art and the special courses. In 1915, there were 176 classical students and 31 in the other programs.

Even though enrollment was lower, Wilson was finally organized as a "standard college of high grade" under McKeag and was positioned to grow, as better prepared students were able to meet the demands of a more rigorous curriculum.

In 1915, McKeag left Wilson to return to Wellesley after less than four years as president. The College would not have another female president for 60 years.



## In Pursuit of Woman's Suffrage

The quest for woman's suffrage, or the right to vote, began in the 1840s and endured many setbacks. But at the beginning of the 20th century, the battle for suffrage gained new momentum and Wilson's Hannah J. Patterson, Class of 1901, became a prominent national leader in the movement. After serving as chair of the Woman Suffrage Party of Pennsylvania, she was elected secretary of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1916. At that time, NAWSA had more than 2 million members.

Students at Wilson closely followed the news of Patterson and the suffrage movement. As president of the Alumnae Association from 1911 to 1913 and also as an alumna trustee, Patterson was frequently on campus. At her urging, students created a local chapter of the national College Equal Suffrage League and welcomed



Patterson Throws out the First Pitch on "Suffrage Day"

prominent suffragist speakers on campus.

In 1878, U.S. Sen. Aaron A. Sargent, a California Republican and friend of the early suffragist Susan B. Anthony, had introduced in Congress a woman's suffrage amendment to the United States Constitution in 1878. On Aug. 18, 1920, more than 40 years later, this amendment was

ratified as the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. No changes were made to Sargent's wording.

As Wilson celebrated its Golden Jubilee, women all over the country celebrated their right to vote.



Senate Passes 19th Amendment

1916

## ETHELBERT DUDLEY WARFIELD: PATRIARCHAL BUT PRAGMATIC

In 1916, Ethelbert Dudley Warfield came to Wilson after serving as president of Lafayette College and as a Wilson Trustee. He re-established the pattern of the paternalistic, conservative male president and would serve for 20 years. "Wilson naturally stresses those things of the spirit which we used to think due to gentle breeding," Warfield wrote. "What we want is more culture, more refinement, more Christian purpose."

Cooper wrote about Warfield, "Social change often brought him shock and dismay, encroaching upon his ideals for young women."

In spite of his conservative social views, Warfield strove to establish Wilson in the upper academic ranks. In 1915, he



Ethelbert Dudley Warfield

noted that only a small percentage of student applicants met the state's new, stricter entrance requirements. In particular, many potential students lacked Latin and

this adversely affected enrollment. So in 1917, he proposed that the Bachelor of Science degree substitute other foreign languages or additional chemistry and physics for Latin.

This move away from a classical course of study was not in accord with Warfield's own ideals, since he was in education—as in religion—a fundamentalist. But many larger schools were yielding to the pressure for more practical programs and for a more vocational education. Warfield grudgingly made changes at Wilson similar to those at colleges such as Columbia University.

"A college president confronted by a sacrifice of intellectual standards for a gradually diminishing student body and vanishing faculty is hard put to choose," Warfield explained.

## MONEY STILL FOLLOWS MEN

In her short term as president, McKeag vigorously pursued the establishment of an endowment for Wilson—without much success. During her term, neither the Presbyterian Church, the Synod of Pennsylvania nor the Presbytery of Carlisle gave the College any financial assistance.

But Warfield, once he took up her crusade for funds, had better luck with the Synod. He organized the College's first major endowment fundraiser in anticipation of the Golden Jubilee. Thanks to the efforts of committed Wilson alumnae nationwide and \$25,000 in church matching funds, almost \$300,000 was raised by Wilson's 50th anniversary. For the first time in its history, the College had an endowment.



The Council of Four Allied Powers Met at the Paris Peace Conference to Set Terms for the Defeated Central Powers

1918

1919

# NINE NOTABLE ALUMNAE | 1869-

Physicians, suffragists, scientists, missionaries and a Broadway songwriter are among Wilson's earliest notable alumnae:

**Laura Dice, Class of 1874**, was one of the first women physicians in York County, Pa. After graduating from Wilson, she became a teacher but then decided to study medicine at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, receiving her medical degree in 1890. She served as secretary of the otherwise all-male York County Medical Society and often presented scholarly papers at society meetings. Dice was also active in woman's suffrage and served as treasurer of the York County Committee for Woman Suffrage.

**Annie B. West, Class of 1881**, was a missionary who was awarded the "Order of the Sixth Crown" by the Empress of Japan for her work with the Red Cross. This was an honor seldom bestowed on women.

**Rida Johnson Young, Class of 1890**, was a celebrated and prolific American playwright, songwriter and librettist. She wrote more than 500 songs and more than 30 Broadway plays and musicals, and was inducted into the national Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970. One of her most popular songs, *Mother Machree*—a sentimental Irish ballad written in 1910—sold more than 2 million song sheets and early gramophone recordings. Young later donated a month's royalties from the song to Wilson's endowment fund.



Rida Johnson Young



Frances Wick

**Frances Wick, Class of 1897**, earned a doctorate in physics from Cornell University in 1908. She taught at Vassar College and conducted groundbreaking research in luminescence at Cornell, Harvard University, the General Electric Co., Cavendish Laboratory of Cambridge University in England and the Institute for Radium Research in Vienna, Austria. During World War I, she worked for the U.S. Army Signal Corps on airplane technology and gun sights. She also served as an alumna trustee for Wilson College.

**Hannah Patterson, Class of 1901**, became a national leader in the woman's suffrage movement. After moving to Pittsburgh in 1904, she began to work for woman's suffrage and, along with three other young women, formed the Equal Suffrage Association of Allegheny County. By 1907, the group hosted the state convention in Pittsburgh and in 1912, Patterson became chair of the Woman Suffrage Party of Pennsylvania. She and other members of the suffrage association began lobbying members of the state legislature to pass a suffrage amendment. In 1915, they visited all 67 counties, riding in a truck carrying the "Justice Bell"—an exact replica of the Liberty Bell, but with the clapper silenced until "such time as women have the vote." By 1916, Patterson had been elected secretary of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) under President Carrie Chapman Catt. After the 19th Amendment granting woman's suffrage was ratified in August 1920, Patterson served in several national government positions. She also served as a Wilson alumna trustee on two separate occasions and was president of the Alumnae Association from 1911 to 1913.



Hannah Patterson





Mary Sinclair  
Crawford

**Mary Sinclair Crawford, Class of 1903**, earned a doctorate in French from the University of Pennsylvania. She taught at Bryn Mawr College before becoming dean of women at Carleton College in Minnesota. She then became dean of women at the University of Southern California and was known as the “Flying Dean” because of her interest in aeronautics. She was president of the Women’s International Association of Aeronautics, founded in 1919 to stimulate international friendships through aviation. She was also president of the National Women’s Party, which fought for women’s enfranchisement throughout the world. During World War I, she organized a training school for nurses in Washington, D.C., and a service camp for soldiers.



Emily Bacon

**Emily Bacon, Class of 1912**, earned her medical degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1916 and was a practicing pediatrician for more than 50 years. She was professor of pediatrics at the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania for 28 years, and also served as chief of pediatrics at Mary Drexel Children’s Hospital in Philadelphia (later incorporated into Lankenau Hospital). She founded the hospital’s Child Guidance Clinic, which was renamed the Emily P. Bacon Youth Guidance Service in her honor. She was Wilson’s Class of 1912 president for 65 years.

**Eve Garrette, Class of 1918**, was a journalist who wrote about politics, government and international affairs. She wrote for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the *Philadelphia Ledger* and various women’s magazines. In 1930 she went on assignment to Russia to write a series of articles for the *Saturday Evening Post*. She was expelled from Russia in 1931 for insulting Joseph Stalin in one of the articles. After returning to the United States, Garrette wrote a bestselling book, *Seeing Red*, published by Putnam. During World War II, she was a member of the Writers War Board and was very active with the Save the Children organization.



Dr. Laura  
McComb Mueller



Eve Garrette

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Special thanks to the Hankey Center for the History of Women’s Education for all the research and documentation it took to write this brief history of the College. For more in-depth histories and Wilson archives, please visit the Hankey Center’s website at [www.wilson.edu/hankeycenter](http://www.wilson.edu/hankeycenter). To view a more complete timeline of Wilson’s history, visit [www.wilson.edu/wilson-college-timeline](http://www.wilson.edu/wilson-college-timeline).

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1869 150 2019  
WILSON  
COLLEGE

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania