

# Women at Williams: The College's Road to Coeducation

*A timeline prepared for the exhibit on view in the Schow Connector Gallery, Spring 2020*

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## **1793**

Williams College opens with eighteen (male) undergraduates.

## **1798 November**

The Adelpic Union, Williams' literary/debating society, argues 'Whether Females Ought to be Educated Equally with Males.' The dispute is settled in the negative. This same topic will be debated four times over the next three years.

## **1837**

Oberlin College accepts women students making it the first coed college in America.

## **1848 July**

The Seneca Falls Convention, the first woman's rights convention in the world, is held in upstate New York.

## **1859 March**

The Adelpic Union again debates 'Ought Women to be admitted as Students in our Colleges?'

## **1869**

Swarthmore College goes coed.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton founds the National Woman Suffrage Association.

## **1871**

Prof. John Bascom moves to appoint 'a committee to examine the subject and report at the next yearly meeting, as to the propriety of admitting women to pursue the college course of study with the other sex.' Prof. Bascom, Hon D.D. Field, Hon. Francis H. Dewey, Hon. D. H Hill and Rev. Henry Hopkins are appointed to the committee. (*Vidette* Sept. 16, 1871)

## **1871 September**

'As far as regards the ... assertion, that women have a right to as good an education as men, we reply, of course they have; just as good. But they do not, therefore, need the same . . . The upholders of

co-education . . . wish to mix the studies of both [men and women] into one grand conglomerate, comparatively good for both and absolutely good for neither.' (Student editorial, *Vidette* Sept. 30, 1871)

### **1871 October**

'The Senior class at Williams College did, in reality, vote not to allow ladies to attend the Saturday morning recitations in the catechism under Dr. Hopkins... the Senior class has a right to say, as it thus did indirectly, that it does not wish ladies to be admitted to this college as students; for this question was regarded by many as a sort of test question.' (Student editorial, *Vidette* Oct. 28, 1871)

### **1871 November**

'With all the various institutions and modes of teaching which have sprung up in our midst, to meet the wants of a progressive age, are there not better and fitter seminaries in which women may be educated, to meet what is to be required of them, than in a purely scholastic institution like our Alma Mater?' (Alumnus letter, *Williams Review* Nov. 27, 1871)

### **1872 June-July**

In June the majority and minority reports regarding Williams going coed are presented at the Society of Alumni meeting. The student newspaper, the *Vidette*, publishes the reports soon afterwards. The majority report, while upholding the right of women to higher education, decline to have women attend Williams for several reasons: Williams was established as a school for men, the College is not a university with the expanded course offerings women might desire, and public opinion regarding educating the sexes together is divided. (*Vidette* July 6, 1872)

### **1896**

Throughout the 19th century, women appear on campus, suitably chaperoned, for houseparties. Pictured here is a Kappa Alpha party.

### **1915 November**

Women's suffrage is voted down in Williamstown.

### **1920 August**

On August 18, the 19th amendment is ratified, guaranteeing all American women the right to vote.

### **1931**

Williams College grants its first degree to a woman, Beatrice (Wasserscheid) Acly. A secretary in the Dean's Office, Ms. Wasserscheid successfully petitioned the Board of Trustees to allow her to complete her Master's degree in American Literature.

### **1935**

Emily Cleland is the first woman to teach at Williams, completing her husband's Geology 6 course in spring 1935 upon his death.

### **1946**

After the War, 778 veterans returned to campus, 69 of them with wives. A number of these women found their way to the classroom where, as the 1946 yearbook noted, 'their eagerness to learn . . . has aroused the admiration of the faculty to a man.'

### **1955**

'When the subject of coeducation was brought up at a Gargoyle-Scarab dinner last year, President Baxter smiled, 'Not in my time.'" (*Williams Alumni Review* May 1956)

### **1957-1964**

Katharine (Mills) Berry '57, Judith (Husband) Kidd '64, Elizabeth Stoddard (Phillips) '61 and Linda (Freeman) Armour '62 each complete Williams coursework. In January 1975, the College decides to grant them their degrees retrospectively.

'I transferred [from Vassar to Williams] after my sophomore year when we were married ... I took two years at Williams knowing that I was not going to be able to graduate at the time. Dean Brooks made that very clear, that Williams conferred degrees upon men, but women who were wives of students, wives of professors, or people who lived in Williamstown, had been allowed to take courses for credit ever since World War II when the returning veterans came. So I could take all the courses I wanted for credit, but I did not expect to graduate.'

Katharine Berry '57 interview 2007

### **1958**

Doris deKeyserlingk comes to Williams to reorganize the Russian Department. She is the first tenured female faculty member at the College.

### **1962 June**

The trustees decide to implement the Angevine Committee's recommendation that the College provide housing, dining and social facilities for all undergraduates. This decision effectively leads to the abolition of fraternities at Williams.

### **1965 September**

Fred Rudolph, Prof. of History, authors a report on the possibility of establishing a coordinate college, using the model of Harvard and Radcliffe, and situating it at Mount Hope.

### **1967 April**

The Trustees appoint a joint faculty-trustee Committee on Coordinate Education and Related Questions. For the next two years, the Committee wrestles with coeducation options. One option centers on establishing a coordinate college (sometimes referred to as 'Mary'). Other possibilities under consideration include exchange arrangements, or urban centers used by several cooperating colleges with resident faculty.

### **1969 January**

Committee X, a subcommittee of the Committee on Coordinate Education, produces its interim report on the effect of the addition of women students on the curriculum. Although 'studies of course-preferences in a variety of coeducational and coordinate institutions indicate that men and women tend to make different choices' the Committee finds that 'a plural curriculum, designed as an extension of our present strengths, would offer women more than the chance of being included in a curriculum established for men... what many women want most as an undergraduate experience is not inclusion in a college established for men or inclusion in a college established to meet a generalized concept of women's needs but inclusion on an equal footing as individuals who derive benefit from an academic community because they participate in it and contribute to it... Furthermore such a curriculum would offer women an educational experience which affirmed their presence as indispensable to the growth of a modern college and its community.'

### **1969 January**

The faculty vote, without dissent, to recommend that the College 'include undergraduate women in its educational program in significant numbers at as early a time as is feasible.'

### **1969 January**

Thirty exchange students from Vassar arrive at Williams to study for the spring semester. They live in Goodrich House, Goodrich Annex, and Doughty House.

### **1969 February**

The Student Committee on Co-ordinate Education and Related Matters is established. Eight (male) students proceed to visit a variety of coordinate and newly-coed institutions to inform their April report supporting coeducation at Williams. The Committee reports that its 'decision is a deliberate choice made in light of Williams' unique identity and with the aim of improving this institution.'

### **1969 spring**

The Vassar exchange students report that their 'experience has been a very good one for all of us' while noting that they have noticed that men and women students behave differently in the classroom.

**1969 April**

African-American students take over Hopkins Hall issuing fifteen non-negotiable demands regarding the admission of African-American students, hiring of Black administrators and faculty, and strengthening the Afro-American Studies program.

**1969 May**

The College reviews the effect of women students on course enrollments.

**1969 May**

The faculty vote by voice vote, without dissent, 'recommend[ing] that Williams College include undergraduate women in its educational program in significant numbers . . .'

**1969 June**

Responding to the final report of the Committee on Coordinate Education, the Trustees vote unanimously to admit women on a regular undergraduate basis beginning fall 1971. Admitting women will effectively grow the undergraduate population from 1250 to 2000, which will allow the College 'to add to the range of studies that they offer and to include new fields of knowledge in [the] curriculum.' The Committee is also 'convinced that women will add substantially to the co-curricular life of the College' and, 'if Williams wishes to continue to attract first-rate students and faculty, the trend for the decades ahead point to a community in which women are present as students, faculty, and administrative officers in significant numbers.' (*Williams Alumni Review* summer 1969)

**1969**

Yale, Princeton, Kenyon and Trinity go coed.

**1969 September**

Sixty-two exchange students from the original Ten College Exchange Program arrive at Williams.

**1969 October**

The Vietnam moratorium envelops the Williams community.

**1969 winter**

Williams Record editor reports on a student poll regarding coeducation: 81% are in favor, 14.5% oppose.

Jay Haug '73 is pictured with the infamous Coeds Go Home - Keep Williams Pure - Keep Girls Out sign. He later notes that he did not place the sign in the window and 'as everyone who knows me will attest, I am constitutionally incapable of such sentiments.'

### **1969 December**

Five women receive acceptances to Williams, making them the first women who will receive undergraduate degrees from the College.

### **1970 February**

The College hires its first female dean, Nancy McIntire. 'Although I wasn't called, and didn't want to be called, 'Dean of Women' I was very conscious that that was one of the reasons I was here and one of my real interests was to make sure that the experience was a positive experience for women students.'  
Nancy McIntire interview, 1991

'... The director of Buildings and Grounds had suggested that I might like to see the women's locker room before they finally finished. And what that meant was that they had finished everything about it except for the colors. However, they had also chosen all of the stalls and sinks and the flooring and whatever, and they were all quite pink and I thought that was very remarkable. I'm not sure that anyone had gotten the connection, but Ralph and I decided we would paint the walls beige to tone down a bit of the pinkness of the locker room. But that was one of my first duties at Williams.'  
Nancy McIntire interview, 1991

'A lot of them lived in the small, single-sex houses: Goodrich, Doughty, Lambert, etc. All of those women were also affiliated with one of the other existing houses, for example: the women who lived in Doughty House were also members of Agard House or Wood House or another house of the old ex-fraternity facility. When the freshman came the following year, we continued to use those houses and additional upperclass residential houses like Gladden for the upperclass students, and the freshman women lived in parts of Sage and Williams Halls.'  
Nancy McIntire interview, 1991

### **1970 April**

College Council recommends coeducational living arrangements.

### **1970 May**

Students vote to strike protesting Pres. Nixon's escalation of the Vietnam war and sending troops into Cambodia without consulting Congress. Faculty cancel classes.

'I discovered that there was a feeling, a sense of community at Williams that was unlike anything I had experienced at other schools. I decided that I really wanted to transfer to Williams ... In that first year, particularly that first fall, I was very conscious of being a minority, being looked at, being of interest in a curiosity sort of way. But that never really made me feel uncomfortable. In those days we had dining facilities all over campus and that was the place where I found you could make some friendships, you

could have conversation in a very kind of casual, relaxed way that was always supportive. I never had a bad experience at Williams.'

Wendy Hopkins '72 interview, 2004

'[The College] had a faculty that was very accepting of having women in the classroom ... my professors were always welcoming our points of view. It didn't have to do necessarily with the female point of view so much as the individual point of view . . .'

Wendy Hopkins '72 interview, 2004

### **1970**

Colgate, Johns Hopkins and the University of Virginia go coed.

### **1971 June**

The first group of women students graduate: Jane Gardner, Judy Allerhand, Christy Shepard, Gair Hemphill, Joan Hertzberg (Class Valedictorian), Karen Mikus, and Ellen Josephson.

### **1971 September**

Williams offers its first course on women, titled 'The American Woman,' taught by professor of history Fred Rudolph.