

6

Fulfillment

The year 1881 marked a dramatic change in Alice Freeman's life course. Until then, she had pursued a promising if undistinguished career as an intelligent, creative, hardworking woman educator. She had pioneered as an early participant in university coeducation, done yeoman service as a seminary and high school teacher and principal, and contributed meaningfully as an early member of the Wellesley faculty. But in no way was she a national figure.

If Henry Fowle Durant had lived another ten years, it seems unlikely Freeman would have achieved the position in education she held for the rest of the century. Either she would have married or continued as a Wellesley professor, popular and beloved, but lacking the academic distinction brought to Wellesley by a Mary Calkins, founder of one of the first psychological laboratories in the country, or a Sarah Whiting who presided over the second physics laboratory in the United States. She provided part of the succor that made possible the accomplishments of both these women, but, even in her chosen field, she did not begin to rival her University of Michigan colleague Lucy Salmon, whose analytical studies of American constitutional history represented major scholarly advances.

1

Henry Fowle Durant's early death at fifty-nine (his wife Pauline lived another thirty-six years) provided the opportunity for Alice Freeman to become, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the most distinguished woman educator in the United States. Freeman set the pattern of what a woman president should be for a women's college. With her election to the Wellesley presidency, she became the only woman to head an independent, nationally known college. ¹ Vassar and Smith had men as presidents. Mount Holyoke had not yet moved beyond academy or seminary status. Radcliffe's ambiguous role as a Harvard annex was still tenuous and included no power to grant degrees. Bryn Mawr and Barnard did not exist.



Alice Freeman when she became president of Wellesley College. (Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.)

What is more, Alice Freeman's visibility coincided with the golden age of the American university presidency. As Hamilton Mabie, *Gilded Age* editor and critic, commented in 1893: "There is no class in the community more influential today. None commands greater respect on public questions no less than on academic and educational questions; they [college presidents] are credited with large intelligence, with disinterestedness, and with high aims." ² The high prestige of college presidents was abetted by the fact that the hundred-year-old republic was

beginning to have major intellectual pretensions. In the 1880s the United States routinely sent its best scholars abroad to the sources of European culture and science for training. At the same time Americans rightly believed that their mobile social system provided the most open avenue to higher education in the world. Simultaneously, Old World learning was respected, and the United States was proud of its unique democratic opportunities. At no other time in its history had the United States so revered and listened to its educators, put them in positions of trust, and seen them as incubators of public policy. James Burrill Angell alternated educational leadership at the University of Michigan with sensitive diplomatic missions to China and Turkey and important negotiations on Pacific fisheries. Cornell's Andrew Dickson White served as American minister to Russia, minister and ambassador to Germany, and was a major force in the early Hague peace conferences. Charles W. Eliot of Harvard made his chief contribution to public policy in the area of civil service reform.

Alice Freeman was the only woman in a galaxy of academic giants, all of whom were making pronouncements on the proper course of the republic. Alice Freeman did not rival Angell, White, or Eliot as an arbiter of major public questions. She largely confined her public role to matters of educational policy, but in the 1880s and early 1890s higher education had no other woman's voice that could match Freeman's in prestige and breadth of audience. And certainly no other voice that could rival hers for eloquence and charm. Now the college girl who had basked in her fellow students' affections, the teacher who had seduced her pupils into loving loyalty and strong commitment, had a larger role to play. She was neither radical nor aggressively assertive, except that she believed with zeal that women should be educated. Had she been a "shaker" rather than a "mover" she would have been neither chosen for her role nor listened to when she achieved it. And she was certainly not among the first of her sex to champion higher education. Instead she belonged to the consolidating generation that made higher education for women a part of the mainstream.

Freeman was women's strongest voice in a number of academic battles. And academic battles of importance were fought during the years she functioned as women's representative in college- and university-governing councils. The American university was being shaped in a mold that lasted for at least seventy-five years, and Alice Freeman was of great importance in shaping admission standards, implemented eventually by college boards; curricular reform, substituting science and the infant social sciences for the heavy dependence on classics (and an earlier departure, literature); and professional standards, including research degrees, tenure, and sabbaticals for faculty. She fought all those fights, gracefully, for Wellesley and in so doing assisted the acceptance of new standards in academe as a whole.

2

On October 3, 1881, after a long illness, Henry Fowle Durant died of Bright's disease at his home on the Wellesley campus. In what Pauline Durant later called "a sacred hour," he indicated on his death bed that he wished to see Alice Freeman as his successor, or as Mrs. Durant chose to view it, "God had given you [Alice Freeman] to us in our great need." [3](#) Whether he specifically designated that she should become president is not known. Ada Howard, president of the faculty,

was ill that fall and had frequently suffered periods of invalidism in the past. [4](#) In any case Howard was incapable of providing real educational leadership. Pauline Durant had shared her husband's concern with every facet of the college's development, and she undoubtedly hoped to play as active a leadership role as Henry. However, her real concern was with the individual student and her needs, not the larger purpose of the college. [5](#) Had educational leadership fallen into Pauline Durant's hands and Wellesley followed her chosen path it would have become a parochial, self-consciously religious institution, probably focused on training missionaries and clergymen's wives, not the leader in the professionalization of education for women that Alice Freeman shaped.

Over a month elapsed between Durant's death and Alice Freeman's appointment as acting president and vice-president. Not until the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees met on November 14, 1881, was formal action taken. [6](#) Freeman replied to a letter she had received from Eben Horsford that suggests he had been talking with her about accepting the presidency, but the trustees' minutes are sketchy for this period and Alice wrote no letters that survive to family or friends. [7](#) Lucy Andrews had joined the Wellesley faculty that fall. Alice had no need to correspond with her; they could consult and confide in person. Had she actively hoped for the appointment, she may not have chosen to confide in her family. In any case, we do not know if Alice Freeman expected or hoped for the responsibilities she was about to assume. She certainly was aware of Henry Durant's confidence and trust. She must have known that Mrs. Durant felt comfortable working with her. Alice never shirked the responsibility necessary to give her control over outcome. By now she had a substantial investment in the success of Wellesley as an experiment in higher education for women.

This was an uncertain, fearful time for the college. Undoubtedly Durant's prolonged ill health contributed to the deterioration of his financial affairs. Just before he died the New York Belting Company in which he was a heavy investor was in danger of bankruptcy and also tainted by corrupt practices not of his doing. [8](#) The college had consistently lost money (approximately \$50,000 per annum) since it opened its doors, deficits that Durant personally absorbed. Enrollment was growing and faculty increasing in size, but no realistic long-term financing had been provided. Without Durant's business acumen and open purse, could Wellesley carry on?

If Wellesley was to flourish, leadership was needed. Alice Freeman rose to the challenge and provided that leadership, but whether she sought leadership or had it thrust upon her, we can only speculate. Her friends thought the proffered appointment came as a surprise, that she hesitated a bit before accepting, conferring first with Ada Howard, the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, and Pauline Durant. [9](#) But her acceptance seemed enthusiastic. And as we saw earlier, she had written her mother in July that her own prospects had never seemed so bright. Ada Howard, in feeble health, was to go away for a rest, and Howard's absence from campus would assure that Alice was in undisputed control. Although Freeman's teaching load was reduced, she continued as head of the history department.

When the announcement was made in chapel the evening of November 15, the enthusiastic good wishes and congratulations of faculty and students did not conceal that she faced a back-breaking job. Alice Freeman was only twenty-six, but if a trained woman, a product of the university system dominating higher education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was to head

Wellesley, she would have to be young. There were no others. As one of her contemporaries put it, "It was not only that *we* [the students] were young, the college was young, too, and so was our president." [10](#)

3

There were two aspects to the Wellesley presidency as assumed by Alice Freeman in 1881. First, Wellesley had never before had a president in a real sense. Ada Howard had been little more than a house mother. Henry Fowle Durant had presided over the college as chairman of the board and treasurer. The presidency itself had to be defined and delineated, and Freeman did it with dispatch. Secondly, Wellesley's academic mission had to be redefined and broadened to include clearly the new professional and scholarly training of women.

First came the delineation of the office of the presidency. What were the duties and responsibilities that went with that office? How much of the governance of the college did the president assume? And this in the face of Henry Fowle Durant's adoring and strong-minded widow inheriting his mantle as treasurer of the college, the person with absolute and intimate control of the purse strings. It was this aspect of her job, delineating the powers of the office itself, that fully engaged Alice Freeman at the beginning of her tenure and that was never clearly and cleanly resolved, especially in terms of the power and influence of Pauline Durant. This problem recurred later when Freeman relinquished her presidential duties.

Nonetheless Alice Freeman was able to shape the contours of the Wellesley presidency in very significant ways. Her contributions fall into two categories, substance and style. Wellesley lore abounds in stories about the young professor summoning her senior students and asking them to help her, because only with their help could she assume the presidency. [11](#) And, undoubtedly, she did just that, because it would be true to her style, making others believe her projects were their own treasured goals meriting their sacrifice and dedication. Henry Durant imposed his standards on the college; Alice Freeman made her goals something everyone else soon knew to be what they had always wanted and worked for.



**Alice Freeman, second from left, with a group of students on the steps of College Hall.
(Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.)**

Both Durant and Freeman had what the nineteenth century called magnetic personalities, and both got their own way, but Alice Freeman had the lighter, easier touch. Durant had governed Wellesley College with a heavy evangelical hand. For example, he remained to the end of his life part of a mid-century tradition of a crusading Protestantism that militantly demanded total commitment to a personal savior and an overt conversion experience. And he actively proselytized students to that end. Alice was a believing devoted Christian, but the late-

nineteenth-century winds of tolerance had softened her approach. When it came to religion, she did not believe it right to impose; she could only convince, and that she did gently.

Both Henry Durant and Alice Freeman interacted closely with students, but Henry Durant's style was patriarchal and authoritarian, albeit kindly and caring. Alice Freeman treated students as cohorts marching under the same banner toward the same goals. If Henry Durant's style was far more authoritarian than Freeman's, Ada Howard's had been much more remote. Poor health, her age (she was in her fifties), and her lack of teaching responsibilities tended to distance her from students even though she lived closely among them in College Hall. Ada Howard had no nickname, at least none that found its way into the written record, but to the Wellesley community of the 1880s, Alice Freeman was "the Princess," one of this community of women and yet also apart.

As historians of education have long pointed out, American institutions of higher education stem from two roots, the Germanic tradition which emphasizes the responsibility of the professor to his academic discipline, and the English system where the emphasis is on developing the person, nurturing the responsible citizen, and of course, incidentally training the clergy and later the British civil service. In the English system the don's primary responsibility was the "formation" of his students. [12](#) Under Henry Durant, the English tradition had supplied the Wellesley pattern, albeit training the clergy was interpreted as training Christian teachers, missionaries, and clergymen's wives. Alice Freeman perpetuated this tradition in the style, but not the substance, of her presidency. Her close, almost maternal, relationship to students, the familial residential patterns she found congenial, the intimate interaction between campus life and academic learning all belong to the English pattern. But her determination to professionalize the faculty and her emphasis on science in the curriculum fit the Germanic tradition. [13](#)

The cottage system beloved by both Alice Freeman and Pauline Durant also smacked of the English nurturant ideal. Cottages already had a foothold on campus when Freeman took the helm. However, the first cottage, Waban, had been more a convenient solution to the crowding in College Hall than a reversal of Henry Durant's centralized patriarchy. And Stone Hall already housed "teacher specials" in the fall of 1881. [14](#) But it was Alice Freeman who exalted the cottages (three more were opened during her tenure) to embody the best in college life. Students were promised at least a year of cottage living, expected, of course, to be the best year of all, and Freeman herself moved her residence from College Hall to Norumbega Cottage when it opened in 1886. [15](#) Norumbega opened with a sentimental housewarming that symbolized the cozy familial quality of cottage life. The president received guests in "her new and beautiful rooms." Eben Horsford talked about the possible early Norse settlement nearby after which the cottage was named. John Greenleaf Whittier sent a poem, a ceremonial fire was lit on each of the house's several hearths, and hot maple syrup on ice, apples, and doughnuts were the eminently suitable refreshments. [16](#) Alice Freeman participated faithfully in the Norumbega "family's" life, entertaining her friends in its dining room, attending its many theatricals, and joining student discussions. She truly accepted Norumbega as her home.



Norumbega Cottage, erected during Alice Freeman's Wellesley presidency. (Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.)

But Alice Freeman not only lived with her students, she also followed the English system in taking responsibility for their moral and spiritual welfare. She conducted daily chapel services, assisted on Sundays by clergymen from elsewhere. She encouraged the organized religious life of the campus. Following the University of Michigan pattern, as she often did, she and several of her colleagues who also were Michigan graduates organized the nondenominational Student Christian Association in 1884. [17](#) She supported Wellesley's devotion to missions. By 1883 twenty-four Wellesley students had entered the mission field, and she took pride in the high percentage of students who professed Christianity and were church members. [18](#)

But it was her personal intervention in religious questions that set the tone for her influence on the religious lives of Wellesley students. Religion rather than politics was the focus for student ferment in the 1880s. Vida Scudder, who attended Smith from 1880 to 1884 and later joined the Wellesley faculty, told how in the 1880s religion provided the prime subject for late-night undergraduate discussions. The curfew was defied "to confide to one another those awful Doubts. . . . Separate at 10 o'clock? Why, the result might be a lost soul." [19](#) Alice Freeman played a central role in this process of religious questioning. Much of her one-on-one counseling of students involved religion; for example, she wrote George Palmer when he was courting her:

One of the Freshmen has just left me after an hour of eager talk about God's will. She is a wonderfully bright, attractive mind, sensitive but timid, afraid lest her "sins are too stultifying to leave enough soul-life to be worth saving." How I like to talk of these things with such girls, so honest and simple, so unwilling to run any risk of shirking duty or failing of the truth." [20](#)

As president, Alice Freeman was Wellesley's chief disciplinary officer. Nothing resembling student government existed before 1887, but her discipline was administered with such grace and tact that no one could resent it. One freshman wrote her family that the good-natured college physician was overfree with giving excused absences to delinquent students for all sorts of trumped-up illnesses. Class attendance was compulsory, but the rule was rapidly becoming a farce. Something had to be done. President Freeman announced at chapel that the regular Monday evening programs of entertainment would cease because class absences were so great that "there must be too much strain on the girls." And the freshman insightfully added, "This is just like Miss Freeman, such a delicate and yet forcible way of giving us a lesson." [21](#) Go to class or lose other privileges, but not as punishment. No one is accused of wrongdoing. The curtailment of their fun was only to protect their health which they themselves had demonstrated was in jeopardy.

In general student reactions to Freeman give evidence of the new spirit of cooperation and affectionate camaraderie, but also attest to the strong leadership that she brought to the campus. In 1884, students complained that the interval between breakfast and "silent time" was too short to complete their chores. Like normal high-spirited undergraduates they undoubtedly hoped to get "silent time" abolished or shortened, but their wily president announced that instead extra time would be provided "in future by having the morning bell before breakfast ring fifteen

minutes earlier," and the student reporter adds: "A less vivid imagination than Miss Freeman's would hardly have construed the general exclamation which followed her announcement as one of joy: but we could not help smiling when she added, 'There, I knew you would be glad.' And so we were in time." [22](#)

On another occasion, Freeman's easy grace facilitated the painless adoption of a political position. In 1887 the Wellesley Microscopical Society had a mass meeting in the interest of the birds being killed for "fashion." After the cause, which ran counter to the tastes of the well-dressed audience, had been pled, Alice Freeman closed the exercises and brought them to a practical conclusion.

She made a kind of confession and promise for the Wellesley women which, in brief, was this. They had gotten the pretty ornaments they had seen in the shops without thinking of what millions of women were doing to our beautiful birds. They would do this thoughtless thing no more, but would do all they could to demand of fashion something which more befitted the enlightened women of the nineteenth century. . . . Several birds that came into the chapel on hats went out rolled up out of sight in handkerchiefs. [23](#)

Freeman's skillful handling of students inspired warm affection as well as admiration and respect. Freeman addressed the international meeting of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) when its final session was held on the Wellesley campus in 1884. Students observed her polished performance on the platform and commented, "How proud we were of our president that afternoon when she addressed the ladies and students in chapel!" And later: "The serenade that 'came upon the midnight clear,' after the excitements of the day were over, was only a faint expression of the loyal tribute each heart paid to our beloved 'Princess Ida.'" [24](#) Students obviously saw her as more than young and attractive, but as beautiful. They courted her like lovers, serenading her frequently to show their affection. One student wrote her family about such an occasion, that after a song or two the blinds were opened and "Miss Freeman was disclosed to view, standing on a chair, smiling and looking so pleased and gratified and every way lovely that we cheered and cheered and cheered." [25](#) Then Freeman opened the window, said it was too cold to make a speech, invited them into her rooms, and probably fed them hot chocolate.

Students watched what she wore and worried about her health. On Tree Day when she donned the Oxford cap and gown the seniors had chosen for the ceremony, they noticed "how distractingly becoming the costume was to Miss Freeman." [26](#) And when she was ill in 1885, "we all carried a heavy burden on our hearts while the face of our dear president was missed from its accustomed places in chapel and office And when at last Our Lady was released from North Hospital, it seemed as if spring had suddenly come with birds and sunshine," but all in snowy December. [27](#)

Living together as they did, Wellesley faculty took full parental responsibility for the students during their years in college, but the responsibility did not end with graduation. Alice Freeman also led the Wellesley staff in taking active charge of finding suitable employment for graduates.

Wherever she was, placing her "girls" was uppermost in her mind. She wrote Louise Hodgkins, professor of literature, from a train crossing Illinois in a spring blizzard:

Lena Heath would be a good governess for Mrs. Stuke's little relative. Lena H. is so very fond of children that she thinks of an "orphan asylum." If someone is wanted at once, please look over the present candidates for positions on the Registry and see if any names strike you as desirable for this particular place? Verna Sheldon may need a place very much--in the east. There are others to whom such a home would be a heaven! [28](#)

And on another occasion she wrote a recent graduate who asked for advice on what position to take:

I am inclined to advise the Pittsfield High School for your parents sake. You have been away from them for so long, and so far away lately, that, if you do not return to Menominee which I would be very glad to have you do, and if the way should open, I should be in favor of Pittsfield. They need college influence there, also, and you can do very valuable work in introducing enthusiasm and desire of better things. [29](#)

It was Alice Freeman's daily presence on campus, her interaction with the total Wellesley community, that defined the Wellesley ambience. As one of the faculty described it: "Of all this ardent work and play our young president was the center. The grace of thought, the glowing imagination, the bubbling wit which made her classrooms places of joy to throngs of eager girls and charmed her public audiences were poured forth like sparking wine in the glad hours of personal friendship." [30](#)

4

Although she lived in college and participated as a mother and mentor in the life of the students, Alice Freeman also saw the president as governing the college, supplying its direction, presiding actively over its staff. However, at the same time that she exerted her own leadership, she fostered faculty collegiality and responsibility. The faculty began to take shape as an intellectual force. Simultaneously the role of the board of trustees changed overnight. No longer was Wellesley a private fiefdom run according to the views and wishes of its "proprietor."

In delineating the leadership functions of the president, Alice Freeman made skillful use of the board of trustees. Had she encouraged (or permitted) Pauline Durant to inherit her husband's patriarchal mantle, the president's power would have been much circumscribed. But instead Freeman turned to the trustees as the logical successors of Durant's decision-making authority and thereby provided a legitimate avenue through which she could exert her own influence.

The role of the board of trustees changed dramatically. Under the Durant regime the trustees met infrequently and sessions were poorly attended. Since the founder made the decisions, there was

little for them to do. And Ada Howard, as president of the faculty, played no part at all in their deliberations. Under Alice Freeman's leadership, the frequency of meetings increased, attendance improved, and the president was present at all meetings of both the board and its executive committee and influenced the decision-making process directly. From her first year, Freeman made a comprehensive report to the trustees on the state of the college. [31](#) Faculty appointments and salaries became part of the regular business of the trustees. Overall the board assumed the role Durant had played in decisions that involved money. But the board was firmly guided in the decision-making process by the young president who from the beginning attended trustees and executive committee meetings and who formally became an ex officio member of the board and its executive committee in by-laws adopted in February, 1884. [32](#) At the same time the functions of the executive committee were regularized as "general management of the institution," and defined as determining, along with the president, the course of study, the preparation of calendars and other publications, the appointment of emergency faculty, and the nomination to the trustees of faculty for permanent positions. [33](#) The functions of the board of visitors, a body of competent professionals who visited classes and reported on the adequacy of the academic program, had been regularized the previous November. At the same time, Alice Freeman's old mentor, James Burrill Angell, joined its roster. [34](#)

The trustees were the means. However, it was the Germanic influence, with its emphasis on scholarship and research so rapidly gaining ascendancy at the best American universities in the late nineteenth century, that shaped Alice Freeman's curricular and institutional contributions to Wellesley. It was Freeman who brought Wellesley into the mainstream of higher education in the 1880s, fostered secularization, professionalism, high admission standards, and rigorous training and graduate degrees for faculty.

A curricular revolution took place in the American colleges and universities in the last decades of the nineteenth century. One historian has described those years as "an arena of continual dispute, of spirited conflicts over deeply held ideas, of partisan alignments and sharp individual thrusts, which gentlemanly [womanly?] loyalties might soften but could never wholly subdue." [35](#) Freeman did not shy away from these fights. And she was clear about which side should triumph in the end. She slowly shifted the emphasis at Wellesley from training Christian womanhood to preparing young women to work professionally in the natural and physical sciences, the new social sciences, education, and the humanities. She presided over Wellesley's transition to the new academia. And the Wellesley College she eventually transferred to Carolyn Hazard's stewardship, not long before her death, was forged out of her own struggles with and accommodations to the new world of twentieth-century higher education.

The Wellesley faculty Freeman inherited in the fall of 1881 was entirely Henry Fowle Durant's creation. The board of trustees had not even ratified his appointments. He was sole recruiter, hirer, and firer. When Alice Freeman became acting president, ten faculty members carried professorial rank. Much of the teaching was done by twenty-two teachers and assistant teachers (the school of music had its own faculty of ten). [36](#) During Freeman's last academic year as president the number of faculty holding professorial rank had doubled to twenty. Twenty-six instructors played the role formerly played by teachers and were aided by thirteen tutors and assistants. Academic titles had been upgraded, but most of the teaching was still being done by underlings. However, sixteen of the faculty had M.A. degrees, one had earned a Ph.D., and

thirty-five possessed B.A.s. [37](#) Faculty size increased markedly during those six years, as did its quality as measured by formal academic training.

When Alice Freeman became president, the principle of tenure was not recognized and appointments were made annually. For example, in June of 1882 the trustees invited all professors and teachers to stay on at their present salaries for the following year. [38](#) But the next year at Freeman's initiative the trustees instructed the executive committee "to consider whether it was desirable to make more permanent appointment of the Faculty and Instructors of the College, than the plan heretofore followed of reengagement from year to year." [39](#) The following winter a new manual for faculty governance specified that after three years of acceptable service professors, associate professors, instructors, and the physician could all consider their positions permanent. [40](#) By this time, all faculty appointments, salaries, resignations, and dismissals were ratified by the full board although the president and the executive committee were empowered to secure candidates and make recommendations. And in 1884 the president suggested that the listing of the faculty in the *Calendar* be by rank in order of appointment, a clear recognition of the principle of seniority. [41](#) That same fall, the rank of teacher was changed to instructor. [42](#) The previous June, Alice Freeman's title had been changed to reflect the role she actually played—from president of the faculty to president of Wellesley College. [43](#)

In the 1870s faculty leaves had been granted almost entirely for reasons of health and, except for brief periods, were unpaid. By 1884, however, advanced study had replaced illness as the most frequent reason for absence from campus. Sabbatical policy was regularized in 1886 when another gift from the Eben Horsford endowment made it possible for two half salaries to be allowed each year for professors who wished to travel and study abroad. [44](#)

Significant changes in the curriculum also took place during the six years of Alice Freeman's presidency. Science played an increasing role. By June, 1886, twenty seniors had elected to receive the new bachelor of science degree. [45](#) But so much instruction in science required increased laboratory facilities, and by the mid-1880s these were already in short supply. As early as her 1883 report on the state of the college, President Freeman was begging for larger quarters for botany, chemistry, and mineralogy as well as pointing to the need for an observatory and botanical gardens. [46](#) That same year, Freeman's old Michigan friend, Eliza Mosher, was engaged to give a course in practical physiology. Freeman was unsuccessful in enlarging exercise facilities because they would require major capital outlay. [47](#)

Although teachers had been trained at Wellesley from the beginning, it was President Freeman who initiated a course in pedagogy and drew on the new head of the German department, Carla Wenckebach, because of her experience with German educational ideas and systems, to teach it. [48](#) By June of 1887, 122 students were availing themselves of this opportunity. [49](#) Wenckebach was an ardent disciple of the new pedagogy. Soon after her arrival in the United States she wrote to a teacher friend in Hamburg that she was thoroughly disappointed in American schools and colleges. Despite splendid buildings, generous equipment, and good salaries, the teaching methods were antediluvian, memorization "just as if Pestalozzi and Froebel and Herbart had never lived." [50](#) Her tutelage ensured the professionalization of teacher training at Wellesley. Anglo-Saxon, Italian, and Spanish were added to the language curriculum, and Wellesley added that new discipline, political economy, to its offerings in 1883-84. [51](#) The candidates for the B.S.

degree were required to have a year of German, the language of science, and the classics had to give a little in the competition. Latin and Greek were made elective in the sophomore year. [52](#)

Another new discipline, psychology, introduced into the Department of Mental and Moral Philosophy in the 1880s, caused overt concern on the board of trustees and open conflict in the department itself. Eventually the department was divided, a compromise Freeman favored from the beginning, and the president was authorized "to secure independent instruction for Logic and Psychology." [53](#) No one was peremptorily fired, as looked likely for awhile, although Lucy Andrews and another instructor left at the end of the academic year. Lucy and Alice were never again to be close. Lucy did not fit with the new research-trained younger faculty, but exactly why she left is unclear. Alice admitted that after one stormy faculty meeting, "I did feel strongly inclined to say that `this place was too narrow for me.' " [54](#) The unspoken problem was at least partly religious. Were secular attitudes toward human behavior replacing religious faith? Mrs. Durant was firmly on the side of religion; faculty and trustees were divided, and Alice Freeman by this time was firmly convinced that Wellesley must be part of the new academia pursuing intellectual and secular ideas wherever they might lead.

Although President Freeman was meticulous in bringing matters of curriculum and faculty appointments and status changes to the attention of the executive committee, they generally followed her recommendations. Occasionally their governance was intrusive. They refused Frances Lord's request for appointment of a recent graduate as an assistant in her department, demanding someone with more experience. [55](#) They suggested the classical curriculum include more lectures on art and literature. [56](#) Eben Horsford exercised strong paternal care over the sciences. As chairman of the board of visitors he reported to the executive committee in the spring of 1886 that he felt Maria Eaton, the professor of chemistry, was not providing the quality of instruction necessary. Eaton resigned, and her resignation was accepted after she was interviewed by the committee and given a chance to present her case. [57](#)

Although no direct evidence exists, I suspect the seemingly intrusive behavior of the executive committee was really Freeman's way to exert control over the faculty, that it was Freeman who was disturbed over Professor Lord's choice of an assistant or felt the need for more attention to art and literature in the classical curriculum. It is clear that it was Freeman who wanted changes in chemistry and asked Horsford, whose qualifications were impeccable, to investigate. As he reported to the executive committee, he found Eaton's course in qualitative analysis far below standard. And as Eaton explained in her own defense, each year brought large increases in number of students and new branches of instruction. [58](#) She had been brought to Wellesley in 1876 by Henry Durant and the field of chemistry was obviously moving too rapidly for her comfort. One member of the executive committee voted against accepting her resignation. The vote was cast by Pauline Durant, a clear chastisement of those who wanted to change her dear husband's college.

Another skirmish between the old and new orders involved Vida Scudder. Scudder, one of the first generation trained at the women's colleges (Smith class of `84), joined the Wellesley faculty after graduate work at Oxford. Her superior was Louise Hodgkins, who had been brought to Wellesley by Henry Durant when the department of English literature was organized. Scudder was brilliant, radical, and creative, and her Wellesley career was more than once singled by fiery

controversy, but the question in 1887 was about Scudder's tenure. Clearly Freeman was on Scudder's side. She saw Hodgkins as "commonplace" and Wellesley as needing Vida Scudder's spark. [59](#) And Freeman, as usual, won. Friction between older faculty and the new professionals recruited by Freeman continued for many years. Ellen Hayes, appointed to the chair of mathematics by Henry Durant in 1878, was eventually seen as such a problem that a separate department of applied mathematics was created for her in 1897. [60](#)

Although the change was made with tact and kindness, Alice Freeman converted the Wellesley faculty from a group of relatively untrained, bright, well-meaning educators into a professional faculty that prized research and scholarship. She herself was not part of that new order. Her graduate work in history at the University of Michigan was scarcely begun, much less completed. However, Michigan awarded her a Ph.D. at its first June commencement after her election as president. [61](#) Actually, as late as 1900, one-third of all American Ph.D.'s were awarded for unsupervised work done off-campus or for no work at all. In 1884 only 10 percent of Harvard's professors had received a Ph.D. [62](#) Freeman's degree was not considered honorary at the time, and she proudly used the letters after her name for the rest of her life.

Other changes, somewhat less abrasive, involved curricular organization and faculty status. At Alice Freeman's request, the bachelor of science degree was awarded at her first commencement as president, formal recognition of Wellesley's strong science curriculum especially in physics. [63](#) The library was catalogued on the brand new Dewey decimal system. Freeman was familiar with library cataloging from Michigan, and had Wellesley's done in the best new process. [64](#) The music school, whose teachers had been paid on a fee-for-service basis, was forced to accept salaries for its faculty, and its organization was tied more closely to the college as a whole. [65](#) The departmental system was strengthened. Standing committees of the faculty were developed to deal with entrance examinations, preparatory schools, curriculum, academic schedules, and the library. [66](#) The academic council grew out of the regular meetings of department heads called by Freeman.

The faculty met on Tuesdays in the evenings, and its meetings frequently were lively affairs.

9 p.m. Faculty meeting, two hours long, well attended. Our proposed classification of the undergraduates unanimously voted, and a good discussion on the students' work, taken up heartily. [67](#)

Although Alice Freeman well understood the killing work load under which the Wellesley faculty labored, she was unable to do much about it. Faculty size almost doubled during her tenure but so did the size of the student body. The constant toll of serious illness, at a time when tuberculosis was the scourge of young people everywhere, meant faculty were always having to assume someone else's responsibilities as well as their own.

Faculty salaries also seem to have remained about the same during Freeman's administration. Henry Durant had been generous to senior faculty from the beginning, and in the early 1880s they continued to receive salaries ranging from \$1,200 to \$1,500 per annum and, of course, a "home." [68](#) In 1885 regular raises were provided until professional salaries reached \$1,500. [69](#) Instructors were paid \$500 to \$800, with an occasional recent Wellesley graduate receiving a

mere \$400 plus "home." [70](#) Women's professorial salaries were certainly adequate, but far below those received by the only full-time male professor on campus. When Junius W. Hill came to head the music school in 1884 his salary was \$3,000, but of course he received no "home." [71](#) Single women could have done no better anywhere, and the average family income in Massachusetts in 1880 was only \$1,000.

Alice Freeman's own salary was generous. In June of 1885, a motion was made to the trustees, perhaps at her instigation, that it be increased to \$4,000 per annum. [72](#) The motion was referred to the executive committee who scaled down the request to take fuller account of the college's distressed financial position. In 1885-86 she was raised from \$1,700 to \$3,000, and received an increase of \$500 for each of the next two years, bringing her stipend to the \$4,000 first requested. [73](#)

Changes inevitably meant tensions. Few personal documents have survived from the early years of Alice Freeman's presidency. For the later years we have her correspondence with George Palmer. When she was away from campus she wrote freely of college problems to her secretary, Anna McCoy, but she could afford few other confidants. For example, she now exercised a leadership role over her old Michigan network and could hardly confide in them about college policy.

Eben Horsford was her closest advisor. She consulted him constantly about college business, everything from custodial crises like an outbreak of scarlet fever or a suspicious water supply to substantive questions like Melvil Dewey's recommendations for the arrangement and cataloging of the library. [74](#) Their personal relationship was extraordinarily warm and intimate. He gave her the kind of gifts she might have received from a family member, gloves for Christmas, a furry rug to warm her feet, and a soft lamp to make "a cozy, happy place of this working room." [75](#) Eben Horsford was, after Henry Durant, Wellesley's most generous early benefactor. His generosity to the college, its staff, and its students was endless. He provided funds for faculty sabbaticals, library acquisitions, and the construction of Norumbega Cottage. [76](#) President Freeman was not averse to exploiting his concern for the college. When the need arose to replace the original gas illumination in College Hall with electric light, Horsford was consulted about the problem. [77](#) What Freeman wrote him on his birthday in 1886 was true: "Wellesley is full of you and the signs of your loving life are everywhere." [78](#)



Eben Horsford, Harvard chemist, and President Freeman's closest advisor. (Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.)

5

One of the most subtle and difficult changes during Freeman's tenure took place in the college's relation to its roots in evangelical Protestantism. As Ernest Boyer has pointed out, "issues of

values and religion have been central to the tradition of higher education in America." [79](#) Alice Freeman was part of that tradition as was Wellesley. However, Christian service as a major aim of higher education was losing status as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Pauline Durant continued to uphold that goal. Alice Freeman in the spirit of the times moved away from it.

Alice Freeman's Wellesley presidency cannot be discussed without facing that nineteenth-century bugaboo, how does one arrive at and test religious faith. Alice did everything as good church people thought it ought to be done, presiding over weekly chapel (the iconoclast Carla Wenckebach confessed she came to a service so alien to her German soul only because "it was such fun to hear Alice Freeman chat with the Lord!" [80](#)), to religious counseling of disturbed students. But she drew the line at severe proscriptions.

Henry Durant had founded his college "for the glory of God and the service of Jesus Christ." [81](#) Daily chapel services, Bible study classes taught by the whole faculty, two periods of silent meditation, and a religious test (membership in an evangelical church) for all faculty and officers, imbued Wellesley with a religious orientation that was rigid and all-embracing. One could argue that Alice Freeman did not change this very much. However, Vida Scudder, socialist and ritualistic Anglican, but with impeccable scholarly qualifications, was not lost to the Wellesley faculty because of her non-evangelical views. Daily chapel services and silent periods continued, Bible study was retained, and every meeting of every committee including the board of trustees opened with prayer. President Freeman's annual reports to the trustees always included a paragraph like this: "As a body the students have been thoughtful and responsive, the religious feeling deep. Out of 444 students at the time of the inquiry, 219 were church members and 400 believed themselves to be Christians." [82](#)

But there was a subtle difference from the Durant regime. Even Lyman Abbott, a prominent Boston clergyman who preached occasionally at Sunday chapel, was aware of a new liberalism. He wrote that religious doubts "were no longer discouraged. . . . The eager quest for truth had taken the place of an acceptance of authority more apparent than real." [83](#) Alice Freeman defined "Christian" somewhat differently from Henry Durant. She listed the churches to which the students were attached and they included Episcopalians, Lutherans, Friends, and Roman Catholics, all Christians in her eyes, but not necessarily Durant's evangelicals. In fact, as time went on, she found more and more professing Christians among the students. In recommending the 1886 senior class for degrees, she stated that "all but two were professing Christians, and not a weak or doubtful member." [84](#) To achieve such unanimity, a broader interpretation was inevitable, but one still wonders about the two non-believers. Perhaps it was a student who was confirmed the next year, and "who never had a Bible until two years ago when she came to College. How many times she had been to me to talk of her astonishment in finding the 'truth of the other side' as she says. She had been brought up on [Thomas] Paine and his class, and feels now that she is in a new world. There are so many compensations for the long toil of these years." [85](#)

Before Alice Freeman's presidency not only was Bible study mandated throughout the four years of the college course, but all teachers were required to give instruction in it. Eliza Kendrick reported that on her first Sunday as a freshman, in the fall of 1881, she got her Bible lesson from "Miss Hollowell of the Department of Botany and her talk was on the opening chapter of

Genesis." [86](#) One cannot imagine this obligation was high on Hollowell's list of priorities. The faculty resented the Bible study classes and found them burdensome, and the students by 1881 found them less than serious and sometimes amusing. Kendrick speculated that at the end of her senior year they would reach Revelation. But Pauline Durant could hardly be expected to accept tampering with the founder's clear intentions. Nor did Alice Freeman ask her to.

It took time, but by 1886 Henry Durant's evangelical Bible study was on its way toward conversion into an academically respectable department of biblical studies. A two-hour course in Greek New Testament, taught by Angie Chapin, professor of Greek or a course in Hebrew (as a language) was substituted for Bible study for juniors and seniors. Bible study had become a department, and its courses were taught by professionals. [87](#) Chapel was left untouched as it acted as a unifying force for the college and a way for Alice to chat not only "with the Lord" but with the students. No revolution had occurred, but one might categorize the result as a modest secularization of Wellesley's religious roots.

Pauline Durant, although appeased, was not always happy with this new academic semi-secularism, nor did she understand Alice Freeman's intention to make Wellesley part of the larger, rapidly changing academic world. But Alice Freeman found ways to include Pauline Durant in the process. She took her to an important Canadian educational conference where they were entertained by the Canadian minister of education at a state dinner. Canadian leaders eager to modernize Canadian higher education consulted Freeman about coeducation, colleges for women, admission standards, and adequate preparatory schools. Durant was present as trusted advisor and friend and shared Alice's glory. [88](#) Alice Freeman always kept Pauline Durant as her friend. Durant would vote against Freeman in trustees meetings, but would continue to depend on Alice as a loving daughter. Alice gave Durant both time and affection, and was considerate of her always.

Increasing acceptance of varied religious viewpoints was not the only kind of tolerance Freeman encouraged at Wellesley. Sophonisba Breckenridge, daughter of the Kentucky aristocracy, entered Wellesley in 1884. Her parents escorted her to the college and "as we approached the entrance a handsome, handsomely dressed couple of the Negro race with an attractive daughter [Ella Smith who later taught at Howard University] approached the door." The friend who was with the Breckenridges asked if they would allow Nisba to go to school with a Negro. Her father replied that she'd got on all right with the boys and would get on all right with the colored. Nonetheless Nisba could not swallow her food when the Fiske singers entertained at the college and some were placed at the table. Freeman tried to help her overcome her prejudice and Sophonisba Breckenridge was able with Freeman's help to squash the opposition to Smith's being given equal privileges at the Junior Promenade. [89](#)

One of the problems facing American colleges and universities in the late nineteenth century was the raising and standardization of entrance requirements. Wellesley, like other academic institutions, first solved the problem by itself. Again Freeman had watched the University of Michigan experiment with accrediting Michigan public high schools that met its standards and admitting their graduates by diploma. Wellesley had acquired easy access to a preparatory school, Dana Hall, in 1880 when it phased out its own preparatory department, but Freeman greatly expanded the system of what she called "fitting schools." Wellesley inspired preparatory

schools that opened in Philadelphia and Auburndale, Massachusetts, in 1883. By November of 1884 seventeen "fitting schools" had been organized. [90](#) Although Wellesley took no financial responsibility for any of these schools, Freeman actively supervised their curricula and staffing, and most of their faculty were recent Wellesley graduates. The physical toll taken by setting up this network of feeder schools was enormous, especially because of the traveling required. For example, she visited Philadelphia to supervise the opening of its fitting school, writing the circular herself, arranging newspaper publicity, and helping to choose the faculty. [91](#)

A less cumbersome system of dealing with entrance requirements supplemented the fitting schools by 1885. A Conference of College Officers had been organized and had met with principals of various preparatory schools on admission standards. Standardized requirements were agreed on, a paid secretary hired and a fee for service assessed to the participating colleges. At Freeman's urging, Wellesley was a part of this group from the beginning. [92](#)

Alice Freeman had aspirations for a graduate school at Wellesley. In this, she was unsuccessful. The Ph.D. degree was still a rarity among male scholars when women seriously began seeking a college education. Only 25 women had received Ph.D.s by 1890 although the next decade saw over 200 more join their ranks. [93](#) Durant made provision for graduate study as early as 1876 when the *Calendar* announced that "graduates of this and other colleges" would be received for further study, and two M.A.s in Greek were awarded in 1882, the first commencement at which Alice Freeman presided. [94](#) Some students pursued graduate study but were never candidates for an advanced degree and others continued their study while not in residence. By 1887 there were 24 master's candidates. [95](#) However, Alice Freeman lost her enthusiasm for investing the very limited resources of the faculty in graduate training. [96](#) Freeman was right. As Margaret Rossiter has pointed out, the women's colleges did not have the financial resources to expand into graduate work. Certainly Wellesley did not. And there was also substantial sentiment among women scholars that graduate studies was not the place for a sex-segregated educational experience. [97](#) Wellesley remained a college for undergraduate women.

Unfortunately one of Wellesley's primary needs in the 1880s was financial planning and fund-raising. These were needs Alice Freeman was unable to fill. She could successfully inspire ice cream socials to support a lecture series or ladies' bazaars for student aid funds. But Wellesley needed a substantial endowment, and that was not forthcoming. Although she was later to develop such skills, at this period of her life Freeman was not an effective money raiser. Perhaps her many duties did not allow her the time. Perhaps she did not know how.

Durant money was less and less available. Over the years the Durant fortune had been eroded by business losses and expendable capital gifts to Wellesley. Tuition and fees had never covered costs. Enrollment could not be increased except by converting dormitory space in College Hall to classrooms and laboratories, but then where would the students live? Wellesley village was not large enough to absorb many students into private homes. The new cottages helped, but not enough. The trustees were forced to borrow consistently against designated funds to meet expenses so that the small capital endowment for scholarships and special purposes most of the time existed only on paper. [98](#) Pauline Durant as treasurer was no better able than Alice Freeman to provide sound financial management. [99](#) She resisted tuition increases fearing her husband's plan for a college for "calico girls" was being violated. However, one contribution the president

made now was to assist Wellesley financially decades later. Freeman, while president, founded Wellesley Alumnae Clubs around the country, and while the alumnae were not yet rich enough to be an immediate help, someday they would be. Meanwhile, the problem got worse. And no solutions presented themselves. Lack of financial leadership was Alice Freeman's greatest failure as president of Wellesley.



Alice Freeman in June, 1884. One of the annual portraits she had made as gifts for each graduating class. (Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.)

6

At the same time that Alice Freeman was moving Wellesley into the Germanic-influenced avant-garde of American academia, she was gradually taking her place as the most visible woman educator in the United States, possibly the world. She was active in various types of educational associations. She was one of the founders of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA; later the American Association of University Women) organized in Boston in 1882. Collegiate Alumnae played a major role in defining a community of educated women. Not only did it provide college graduates with association with their peers, but it also created an organ for establishing scholarships for women, especially to finance graduate studies. Alice Freeman was active in ACA all her life. [100](#) She also was active in the Commission of New England Colleges. She was one of the directors of the Classical School at Athens, and we have already noted her participation in the Conference on Admissions Requirements. She spoke frequently before various educational bodies. Her appearance in the fall of 1886 before the Canadian educators in Montreal was designed to coincide with a heated controversy over admitting women to McGill University. [101](#) In June of that same year, she spoke before the Milford Teacher's Association and gave the commencement address at Tilden Seminary where two former Wellesley students were teachers. [102](#)

She was a friend to the famous, which also helped to create for her a public audience and nationwide attention. John Greenleaf Whittier, then the United States' unofficial poet laureate, had a visit from her on his deathbed. "I had a rare hour with Mr. Whittier this week. This morning he talked of death, holding my hand, and saying, 'I have written always thinking only of the friends I love.' " When she left him, he took her hands and kissed her repeatedly. She feared she would not see him again. [103](#)

Her activities on campus often attracted media attention to both her and Wellesley. The Queen of Hawaii, on a state visit to the United States, came to call, partly because she had known Lucy Andrews since childhood. As the students saw it, "the Queen of Wellesley spoke beautiful words of welcome to the Queen of the Sandwich Islands," as Liliuokani planted a tree on campus. [104](#) However, their weary president was less enthusiastic in private.

I am informed today that the Queen of the Hawaiian Islands wishes to visit the College. So, Wednesday or Thursday, the Royal Party must be received, but I am too sleepy at this moment to care that I know only half a dozen sentences of her language, and she little more of mine, and that I never was presented at her court. [105](#)

Pundita Ramabai, the charismatic Indian educator and reformer, also paid Wellesley a visit and, since her visit tapped some of Alice Freeman's larger purposes, she inspired more enthusiasm on Alice's part. Ramabai raised \$200 from the students for her work. "They are full of enthusiasm and respond in the hearty way I like to cultivate in women who have money. If these girls only learn to think of others, instead of spending so much upon themselves." [106](#)

More important for the future of women's higher education was the visit of M. Carey Thomas, then dean and professor of English (and later president) at about-to-be-opened Bryn Mawr College. Thomas was one of the new breed of academicians with a European Ph.D. and the high scholarly standards that Freeman herself could not match but attempted to recruit for her faculty. Nonetheless Thomas was impressed as she sat in Wellesley's chapel listening to a woman president reading prayers to an audience of 600 women and seventy professors, all women, "not a man's influence seen or felt." She felt Wellesley "ushers in a new day." [107](#) However, Thomas's reservations about any vocational emphasis at Bryn Mawr were confirmed by Wellesley's teacher's department, which she quite rightly attributed to Durant although Freeman had not hesitated to strengthen the pedagogical training. [108](#) Nonetheless Bryn Mawr and Thomas were to build on Wellesley's experience.

The public side of Alice Freeman's life during her term as Wellesley's president was full of rich rewards and public applause that helped to counteract the grueling hard work and dearth of free time or privacy that marked her days. After she moved to Norumbega Cottage, she was able to breakfast in her rooms rather than with her housemates, but 8:30 chapel was a service she routinely conducted, including the homily. Her mail plus the usual appointments with students and others kept her busy through the morning, and she lunched in College Hall with faculty and students. Meetings, more letters, callers, interviews, and many trips to Boston, where the college's boards often met and where influential trustees could be wooed and consulted, occupied hours and days. She continued to teach and offer public lectures on campus as well as in the larger community. She dined with her Norumbega housemates and frequently joined their pre-study hall fun. In 1887 she wrote a revealing letter while proctoring an examination in one of her courses. She had conducted three services on Sunday (two of them because the men who were supposed to have presided did not show up). She spent much of Monday arranging for a meeting of the faculty council, no doubt carefully plotting how its discussions would go; Tuesday was faculty meeting, another exercise in diplomacy and tact. Wednesday she met with the executive committee of the trustees, no doubt to advance an agenda to which she was committed, and Thursday she was to preside over a "Day of Prayer." [109](#) Wellesley's evangelical origins were irrepressible.

She lightened her load a little by obtaining clerical assistance. She acquired a stenographer sometime in 1881. By 1884 she was requesting an additional secretary and an assistant secretary was appointed in 1885. Before she left the presidency she was seriously considering the addition

of a dean who would be in charge of the college's correspondence and possibly be in training as a future president. [110](#) The mail followed her wherever she went. The receptions at which she presided as Wellesley College president were endless. On June 10, 1886, "from three to five p.m. Professor Horsford and President Freeman received in the library," the *Wellesley Courant* reported. On the 19th she presided at a reception for the graduating seniors. Baccalaureate followed on the 20th with another reception, and the next Monday still another receiving line for the sculptor Anne Whitney. [111](#) She made biennial trips to Saginaw to visit her family but these represented duty rather than vacation. Her one substantial holiday was her first journey to Europe in the summer of 1884 and that was justified by ill health and professional duties.

7

On July 12, 1884, Alice Freeman sailed on the *City of Rome* with her father and her cousin Electa Dye for Keswick, England. Electa Dye was the closest personal companion of Alice's presidential years when her administrative responsibilities required that the old Michigan network be used less freely. She and Electa, daughter of Alice's mother's sister Sarah, met several times a year at Electa's mother's home in Osborn Hollow, where Alice always retreated for real rest when her health was threatened or her responsibilities overwhelmed her energy, or they met in New York City where Electa worked in an educational program for young working women. Theirs was a happy companionship. Both had strong professional interests and commitments. Both enjoyed the out-of-doors and gardening during their brief respite from other cares. When they arrived at Sarah Dye's home, roses were pruned, flower beds weeded, and the neighboring hills climbed to admire pleasant vistas. Alice loved the Susquehanna Valley and its small mountains with an intensity she never could muster for the elegantly contrived Wellesley campus, perhaps because care was her constant companion at Wellesley. At Osborn Hollow, she was free.

For one reason or another Alice needed her father on this journey or perhaps he needed her. Her health had been poor that spring and she did not want to undertake so strenuous a venture without medical supervision. Or perhaps his periodic restlessness demanded a new outlet. In any case her father's companionship posed problems. Her mother, frequently in ill health, thought he belonged at home with her. James Freeman was torn between two strong-minded women. Alice may have exaggerated her physical problems to carry him with her. After all, she had Electa to rely on, and the possibility that her mother also travel with them seems not to have been seriously considered. Undoubtedly Alice paid her father's passage, but also he would be earning nothing, and Elizabeth Freeman would be left to fend for herself. [112](#)

Three academic years in the presidency had left Alice Freeman scarred and worn. Tuberculosis again threatened, and she herself was convinced that she needed a true holiday "if I am to save a bad breakdown and go on with my work." [113](#) Her fatigue was real. A student who knew her when she came to Wellesley as a teacher in 1879 and who had not seen her until after her first year as president reported that she did not recognize Freeman at first glance. Although a greater Wellesley had evolved, "our lady showed marks of the effort. . . . The evolution of the new Wellesley had drawn lines over the round, mobile face, lines of character, of strength, great,

great lines to be welcomed, for they stood for development and growth." [114](#) But these lines also stood for weariness, overwork, and ill health. So much communicating one-on-one with students, struggling with administrative and curricular problems, appeasing an increasingly diverse faculty, worrying about fiscal dilemmas she could not solve, to say nothing of the endless receiving lines at receptions, had all taken their toll. She needed, as the Victorians would say, a change of air, and she got it. On June 5, 1884, the executive committee gave its approval for President Freeman to go abroad for several weeks of rest. [115](#)

Never before had she been quite so self-indulgent. She wrote her secretary Anna McCoy and her Wellesley colleagues as the voyage drew to a close:

The truth is I have the experience of having done absolutely nothing since we left New York a week ago this morning, and now the Irish cliffs are looming off at the left, and in a few hours we shall touch Queenstown. I have not had an uncomfortable hour, have slept ten hours a night, and eaten four meals a day and worn water lilies around my neck, and walked from three to five miles on deck everyday, and played ball, etc., and am quite another woman than the one who left Wellesley ten days ago. [116](#)

The travelers stopped at Oxford and Cambridge to examine the great British universities where several of Freeman's faculty were soon to study. They walked in the Lake District, journeyed on to Scotland where James Freeman explored his mother's origins, and returned to London September 1st after stops at Durham and York. James Freeman then returned home. Alice had been appointed as a delegate by the United States commissioner of education to represent American colleges at the International Conference on Education held in London that September at which "I was called on to speak three times." [117](#) This was her first appearance outside the United States on the international educational scene. After the conference she spent a week at Newnham College with Anne Jemima Clough, pioneer in British higher education for women, after which she and Electa walked for a few days in the Shakespeare country. Alice had completed her first substantial holiday as well as had her first exposure to travel abroad.

8

On April 13, 1887, Alice Freeman was awarded an honorary doctor of humane literature degree by Columbia University, the first honorary degree given by a great eastern university to a woman. This recognition exemplified the preeminence Alice Freeman had reached in American educational circles. She was by far the best-known, the most respected, and the most influential woman educator in the United States. She had presided over and helped to implement the movement of women's higher education from experiment to mainstream.

Typically, she worried about what she would wear for the occasion. Should the street costume, mantel, and bonnet that she would need for the public exercises in the Metropolitan Opera House in the morning be black or a color? [118](#) She decided on a simple black silk, but she had her

dresses for the ceremony and the evening reception made in New York. Alice Freeman was never dowdy.

The ceremonies were colorful and impressive. The *New York Times* reported that the orchestra chairs were filled "with well-known men [but there was a woman, unmentioned by the *Times* among them], most of whom had assembled to receive honorary degrees at the hands of the college." [119](#) Among the other recipients were Andrew Dickson White, whom she had heard lecture as a Michigan student, and Moses Coit Tyler, who had then been on Michigan's faculty. Her brother, Fred, watched pridefully, the only family member able to be present.

Alice Freeman was pleased but not overwhelmed by accolades that came her way. She wrote:

I am having some very pleasant letters about the degree. That is the pleasant thing--if others like it. I wonder if I ought to care more about it. I am afraid I am too indifferent. I am going to try to be more interested,--to feel that it is an honor, but somehow I can't remember it. I hate to see people who are not sensitive to the courtesy and kindnesses of others, public or private. I must not be one of them.

[120](#)

Alice Freeman's success and recognition as an educator were assured, but already she knew that quite possibly her days at Wellesley were numbered.

Chapter Six Notes

[1](#) Frances Willard had claimed the title earlier but the pattern in which she operated was different. Hers was a coordinate college, not an independent institution. Much of its work was clearly preparatory and in that sense, she was only following the well-worn path of the earlier prefectresses of women's seminaries (Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986], 54-56).

[2](#) As quoted in Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, 131-32.

[3](#) Pauline Durant to Alice Freeman, May 23, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts. Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, October 20, 1881. Photocopies in the Wellesley College Archives of original Eben Horsford Papers in the possession of Andrew Fiske. Hereafter cited as photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[4](#) Glasscock, *Wellesley College*, 22.

[5](#) Horowitz points this out. *Alma Mater*, 85.

[6](#) See the Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Report of the Executive Committee, June 1, 1882, 94. Wellesley College Archives; Hackett, *Wellesley*, 69.

[7](#) Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, October 20, 1881. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[8](#) Kingsley, *Durant*, 337.

[9](#) An Ann Arbor friend, probably Lucy Andrews or Angie Chapin, to Elizabeth Freeman, November 15, 1881, as quoted in Palmer, *Life*, 115-16.

[10](#) Mueller, *Wenckebach*, 221.

[11](#) The original version of this story is probably the one in Palmer, *Life*, 101-2.

[12](#) A recent statement of this is to be found in Ernest L. Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 125.

[13](#) I do not find Roberta Frankfort's analysis of Alice Freeman Palmer in (*Collegiate Women*, chaps. 1, 3, 4) very helpful nor do I agree with many of its conclusions. It is true that Alice Freeman often articulated the Wellesley community as a family but the academic ideal of training the whole person was not peculiar to women's colleges. Men's schools still cherished the English pattern in the 1880s, and Freeman's choice of language was largely a matter of semantics. She was as devoted to professorial professionalism, the increased emphasis on science, the new social sciences, and the American translation of the Germanic ideal as any of her male colleagues.

[14](#) Glasscock, *Wellesley*, 22.

[15](#) See Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 88-90, for a discussion of the influence of the "cottage system" on college life.

[16](#) Clipping, April 22, 1886, in C. McCamant Scrapbook, Class of 1887 Papers, Wellesley College Archives.

[17](#) Converse, *Wellesley College*, 134; Palmer, *Life*, 146. Liberal Protestants found the Y's uncongenial, in part because they would not accept Unitarians.

[18](#) President's Report, 1883, 5, 11, Wellesley College Archives; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 19, 1883, 117; June 22, 1886, 200, Wellesley College Archives; *Wellesley Annals*, 1886-87, 6.

[19](#) Scudder, *On Journey*, 71.

[20](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, January 9, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[21](#) Clara D. Carron to family, October 28, 1883, Class of 1887 Papers, Wellesley College Archives.

[22](#) *Wellesley Annals*, 1884-85, 3.

[23](#) *Wellesley Courant*, April 26, 1886 as clipped in C. McCamant's Scrapbook, Class of 1887 Papers, Wellesley College Archives.

[24](#) *Wellesley Annals*, 1883-84, 4. Sometimes the students used Tennyson's princess as a reference, sometimes Princess Ida.

[25](#) Clare D. Carron to her family, October 28, 1883. Class of 1887 Papers, Wellesley College Archives.

[26](#) *Wellesley Annals*, 1883-84, 5-6.

[27](#) *Wellesley Annals*, 1885-86, 2.

[28](#) Alice Freeman to Louise Hodgkins, April 6, 1887.

[29](#) Alice Freeman to Anna Fuller, July 21, 1885.

[30](#) Louise McCoy North as quoted in Hackett, *Wellesley*, 89.

[31](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 27, 1882, 102. Wellesley College Archives.

[32](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, February 29, 1884, 125. Wellesley College Archives.

[33](#) *Ibid.*, 125.

[34](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, November 12, 1883, 123. Wellesley College Archives.

[35](#) Vesey, *Emergence*. Although he almost completely ignores women, probably the best account of the changes in higher education in the late nineteenth century is still to be found in Vesey's book, especially pt. 1, "Rival Conceptions of Higher Learning," 21-251.

[36](#) Wellesley College Catalog, 1881-82. Wellesley College Archives.

[37](#) President's Report, 1887-88, 3. Wellesley College Archives. At this time Vassar had many teachers but only eight full professors, [Louise Fargo Brown, *Apostle of Democracy: The Life of Lucy Maynard Salmon* (New York: Harper Bros., 1943), 106].

[38](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, June 1, 1882. Wellesley College Archives. Cited hereafter as Minutes of the Executive Committee.

[39](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, February 12, 1883, 125. Wellesley College Archives.

[40](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, February 29, 1884, 127. Wellesley College Archives.

[41](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, October 31, 1884. Wellesley College Archives.

- [42](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, November 21, 1884, 151. Wellesley College Archives.
- [43](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 5, 1884. Wellesley College Archives.
- [44](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, February 4, 1886, 188, 192. Wellesley College Archives.
- [45](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 26, 1886. Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, October 27, 1884, February 11, 1886. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.
- [46](#) President's Report, 1883, 8. Wellesley College Archives. The other women's colleges were less receptive than Wellesley to the increased emphasis on science and the addition of psychology and the social sciences to the curriculum, and continued to stress the old classical course. (See Rosenberg, "Academic Prism," 324-25). Freeman had experienced James Burrill Angell's promotion of science at Michigan, and of course Durant had opened the path.
- [47](#) President's Report, 1883, 7, 8. Wellesley College Archives.
- [48](#) Hackett, *Wellesley*, 113.
- [49](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 28, 1887, 145. Wellesley College Archives.
- [50](#) Mueller, *Wenckebach*, 204-5.
- [51](#) *Calendar of Wellesley College*, 1883-84.
- [52](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 3, 1886, 196. Wellesley College Archives.
- [53](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, December 30, 1886. Wellesley College Archives.
- [54](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, December 30, 1886, January 26, 1887, February 23, 1887, April 27, 1887, May 14, 1887, June 1, 1887; Alice Freeman to George Palmer, April 24, 1887, May 1, 1887, May 8, 1887, May 15, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [55](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, February 15, 1884. Wellesley College Archives.
- [56](#) Ibid.
- [57](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, March 10, 1886, Wellesley College Archives; Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, March 12, 1886. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.
- [58](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, March 10, 1886, Wellesley College Archives.
- [59](#) George Palmer to Alice Freeman, March 13, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [60](#) Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 22.

[61](#) *Annual Calendar*, 1881-82, of the University of Michigan.

[62](#) Patricia M. Hummer, *The Decade of Elusive Promise: Proper Women in the United States, 1920-1930* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1979), 33-39; Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, 277. Helen Magill, who received the first American Ph.D. earned by a woman (Boston University 1877), studied at Boston University for only two years, taking classes with upperclassmen because there were no graduate courses and spending her second year writing her thesis on Greek drama (Glenn C. Altschuler, *Better Than Second Best*, 38-40). This was a cursory regimen at best and her training was probably no better than Alice had received under Charles Kendall Adams in his seminar.

[63](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 1, 1882, 95- 96; Rossiter, *Women Scientists*, 18.

[64](#) President's Report, 1883, 8. Wellesley College Archives.

[65](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 5, 1884, 132. Wellesley College Archives.

[66](#) Palmer, *Life*, 129-30; Glasscock, *Wellesley*, 25- 26.

[67](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, October 4, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[68](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 21, 1881, 80-81. Wellesley College Archives.

[69](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, November 5, 1885, 177. Wellesley College Archives.

[70](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 5, 1884, 130-31; November 5, 1885, 177; February 4, 1886, 184; June 28, 1887, 145-46.

[71](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 5, 1884, 132. Moses Coit Tyler also received \$3,000 at Cornell (Michael Kammen, *Selvedges and Biases: The Fabric of History in American Culture* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987], 232).

[72](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 25, 1885. Wellesley College Archives.

[73](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, November 5, 1885. Wellesley College Archives.

[74](#) Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, October 28, November 19, 1884. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[75](#) Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, February 23, October 28, 1884. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[76](#) Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, April 8, July 15, 1886; Pauline Durant to Eben Horsford, March 29, 1886; Marion Pelton to Eben Horsford, February 8, 1886; James B. Angell to Eben Horsford, February 9, 1886. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[77](#) Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, April 17, 21, June 12, 1885. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[78](#) Alice Freeman to Eben Horsford, July 26, 1886. Photocopies, Eben Horsford Papers.

[79](#) Boyer, *College* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), xiii.

[80](#) Mueller, *Wenckebach*, 243.

[81](#) As quoted in Hackett, *Wellesley*, 31.

[82](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 19, 1883, 117. Wellesley College Archives.

[83](#) Abbott, *Silhouettes*, 70.

[84](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 22, 1886, 200. Wellesley College Archives.

[85](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, January 16, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[86](#) As quoted in Glasscock, *Wellesley*, 131.

[87](#) Palmer, *Life*, 145-46; Glasscock, *Wellesley*, 32.

[88](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, October 8, 1886. Wellesley Typescripts.

[89](#) Sophonisba Breckenridge, Manuscript Autobiography, University of Chicago Archives [ca. 1930s].

[90](#) Palmer, *Life*, 125-26; President's Report 1883, 9, Wellesley College Archives; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, November 21, 1884, 150, Wellesley College Archives. Alice Freeman to George H. Palmer, October 19, 1886. Wellesley Typescripts. Alice Freeman to Anna McCoy, July 12, 1882.

[91](#) See, for example, President's Report, 1883. Wellesley College Archives.

[92](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, December 2, 1885, December 30, 1886; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 3, 1886, 194. Wellesley College Archives.

[93](#) Rossiter, *Women Scientists*, 35; Solomon, *Educated Women*, 134-36.

[94](#) *Calendar of Wellesley College*, 1876; Glasscock, *Wellesley*, 136-37.

[95](#) President's Report, 1887-88, 12. Wellesley College Archives.

[96](#) *Ibid.*

[97](#) Rossiter, *Women Scientists*, 30. M. Carey Thomas was not to agree. She believed all women's colleges should have graduate schools (Barbara M. Cross, ed., *The Educated Woman in America: Selected Writings of Catharine Beecher, Margaret Fuller, and M. Carey Thomas* [New York: Teacher's College Press, 1965], 167).

[98](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 1, 1882, June 22, 1886, 214, Wellesley College Archives, provides an example.

[99](#) See Palmer, *Life*, 127; George Palmer to Alice Freeman, June 12, 1887, 101; Alice Freeman to George Palmer, May 8, 1887, Wellesley Typescripts.

[100](#) Marion Talbot and Lois Kimball Mathews Rosenberry, *The History of the American Association of University Women* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931), is still the most complete study of the organization.

[101](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, October 6, 1886, October 8, 1886. Wellesley Typescripts.

[102](#) *Wellesley Courant*, June 3, 1886, as clipped in C. McCamant's Scrapbook, Class of 1887 Papers, Wellesley College Archives.

[103](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, December 3, 1886. Wellesley Typescripts.

[104](#) *Wellesley Annals*, 1886-87, 8-9.

[105](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, May 5, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[106](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, February 12, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[107](#) M. Carey Thomas to Mary Garrett, May 3, 1884. M. Carey Thomas Papers, Bryn Mawr Archives.

[108](#) M. Carey Thomas's notes on Wellesley College. Reel no. 166. M. Carey Thomas Papers, Bryn Mawr Archives.

[109](#) Palmer, *Life*, 152; Alice Freeman to George Palmer, January 25, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[110](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, October 15, 1884; Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 14, 1885; George Palmer to Alice Freeman as quoted in Palmer, *Life*, 170.

[111](#) *Wellesley Courant*, June 10, 1886, June 24, 1886, as clipped in C. McCamant's Scrapbook, Class of 1887 Papers. Wellesley College Archives.

[112](#) Alice Freeman to Elizabeth Freeman, July 8, 1884; James W. Freeman to Elizabeth Freeman, July 9, 1884.

[113](#) Alice Freeman to Elizabeth Freeman, July 8, 1884.

[114](#) Adaline Emerson Thompson's remarks at the Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Service, University of Chicago, 1903. These appear in slightly different form in Palmer, *Life*, 165.

[115](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, June 5, 1884. Wellesley College Archives.

[116](#) Alice Freeman to Anna McCoy, July 19, 1882.

[117](#) *Diary*, 1884.

[118](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, March 28, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.

[119](#) *New York Times*, April 14, 1887.

[120](#) Alice Freeman to George Palmer, April 24, 1887. Wellesley Typescripts.