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Challenge

In 1892 the Palmers, both Alice and George, were offered the chance to pursue a joint academic career at the University of Chicago. For Alice this opportunity offered a happy solution that went beyond her most optimistic dreams to the unresolved dilemma. Here was the perfect alternative to arduous lecture tours and lengthy separations. It was as well the professional challenge of the century. William Rainey Harper and the University of Chicago were providing American academia with a stirring new model.

1

Two great private universities, destined to challenge the old Ivy League establishment, took shape at the turn of the decade. In the Far West, Stanford University, endowed by California railroad magnate Leland Stanford, opened its doors in 1891, and its newly assembled faculty, presided over by President David Starr Jordan, began instruction on a complete and opulent campus. But it was the University of Chicago, despite its makeshift physical plant and constant scrambling for funds in the first years, that posed the deepest challenge to old established ways. Although the new fortune of John D. Rockefeller was to make possible Chicago's realization, Chicago's genesis, unlike Stanford's, was not the product of a benevolent millionaire's imagination. William Rainey Harper, professional educator, Yale professor and Yale Ph.D., had his own dream and his own sense of mission. [1](#) Pudgy, ebullient, persuasive, Harper left a distinguished and well-paid chair at Yale to put together a new university that emphasized graduate studies and attracted a faculty so distinguished that it could welcome its first students with a reputation for academic excellence already in place.

Harper was a spectacular recruiter, competing in a world where academic talent was both socially valued and financially rewarded. He was unable to lure any stars from Johns Hopkins or Harvard, but he did attract William I. Knapp of Yale, almost half the staff of poorly funded Clark University, and top talent from the state universities, including John Dewey from Michigan. Eight of his original professors were former college presidents. His goal was to create a faculty composed of men and women with established reputations, not young promising unknowns, and he was prepared to offer spectacular salaries and great freedom to build auxiliary staff to those scholars he saw as essential to his enterprise.

The existing academic community viewed Harper and Chicago with ambivalence. Sometimes they saw the University of Chicago as "Harper's Three Ring Circus," an adjunct to the city's famous Midway amusement district. John D. Rockefeller was at the height of his unpopularity in the 1890s, and many of the eastern intelligentsia were skeptical of linking education with "tainted" money. [2](#) Chicago was dubbed the "gas trust university" or "Standard University" by easterners scornful of Harper's grandiose plans and contempt for tradition. [3](#)

However, many less traditional academicians viewed Chicago with excited approval. When G. Stanley Hall, psychologist and founder of Clark University, visited the Palmers, Alice reported, "You should have seen his enthusiasm--his conclusion that in the new university lay the leadership of the future." ⁴ Harper's innovations were myriad. For example, businessmen, rather than clergy, dominated the board of trustees. A university press dedicated to the dissemination of research and scholarship was to function as a full department of the university. An extension division modeled after the British experiment pioneered by the University of London was to provide outreach to the larger community, coeducation on all levels was to be the norm, and women were to be included on the faculty. Harper also offered high salaries and promised opportunities for his faculty to pioneer in new scholarly directions.

While innovations in higher education in the 1880s at Clark and Johns Hopkins had emphasized graduate study, specialization, research, and scholarship, Harper encompassed and enlarged these goals. He was prepared to pay for this emphasis on research and scholarship by providing fellowships for graduate students and light teaching loads for senior faculty. ⁵ But the University of Chicago also consciously attempted to avoid elitism. Harper's vision combined scholarly goals with a democratic commitment to the larger society, a populist appeal that found its embodiment in correspondence courses open to almost everyone, an extension division, a summer session that attracted many practicing teachers, and popular lecture series. As Chicago's historian has said, one way or another the University of Chicago "was a presence, a new but somehow ageless being actively at work in the land, to be watched sometimes with admiration and sometimes warily, as if it might prove to be other than it seemed." ⁶ Chicago was a force that could not be ignored.

Chicago and Stanford between them had created an upheaval in staid academic circles. What is more they had created a sellers' market for academicians who were suddenly blessed with job mobility they had never expected and monetary rewards to match.

Harper's planning was well underway by 1890 when the university was incorporated. He was formally named president in February, 1891, and began actively recruiting that year. Since he envisioned a coeducational institution from the beginning, as his administrative officer with responsibility for women he was eager to persuade Alice Freeman Palmer to join his staff. Also he had his eye on George Palmer. Harper's initial intention was to concentrate on building three great departments: Semitics, classics, and philosophy, and for philosophy George Herbert Palmer would make an eminently suitable head.

The Palmers were curious about Chicago as were most prominent academicians long before Harper first approached them. Alice was in New York City sitting for her Wellesley portrait when Harper first was expected to visit Cambridge, and she was truly afraid she would miss him. ⁷ Fortunately for her Harper did not arrive in Cambridge until about March 12, when he made a joint offer to the Palmers. He proposed that George become professor of philosophy and head of the department at the princely salary of \$7,000 a year, and Alice come as dean of the Woman's Department and professor of history at a salary that could range from \$2,000 to \$5,000. ⁸ The flexibility in Alice's salary no doubt reflected uncertainty over whether she would work full or part time. If she was paid \$5,000, she would be making more than George's Harvard salary at the time, no small sum.

Harper's offer to the Palmers is quite probably the first time a major university attempted to attract an academic couple to its professoriate, a practice that was not to be much repeated for nearly a century. It is also likely that Harper was more intent on capturing Alice than George. True, George's professional star was rising rapidly at this time. Less than two weeks before Harper made his move, President Eliot called George into his office and asked him if he could suggest his name as president of the young University of California at Berkeley. [9](#) George Palmer's books were being well received and his organizational talents widely recognized. It would have been a great coup for Chicago to have acquired him at the height of his career, but there were other promising philosophers to be had. Alice Freeman Palmer was unique. If Harper wanted an academic woman of real stature on the staff of his coeducational university, Alice was at that time the only woman with broad experience in educational administration who had a national reputation, to say nothing of a charismatic personality that attracted media attention. If Harper was to share administrative duties with a notable woman, he had no choice but to lure Alice Freeman Palmer to his windy campus at the hub of the continent.

Alice was more than willing to oblige. George Palmer was at first also tempted by Harper's offer, but for him Cambridge had strong competing attractions. For Alice, the opportunity for the Palmers to work as a couple in an exciting new educational venture could provide the ultimate in happy solutions to her problems.

2

The decision was agonizing. The Palmers spent nearly three weeks in Chicago in late March and early April, talking with Harper and his trustees and advisors, inspecting the Gothic quadrangle slowly taking shape on the marshy land at the northern edge of the city, attending concerts in Richardson's magnificent new Chicago Auditorium, and reviewing the progress of the Columbian Exposition of which Alice was one of the Lady Managers. George returned to Cambridge on April 11th, and Alice left the next day for a visit with her family to be followed by her spring lecture tour and a second Chicago stay on World's Fair business. The Palmers were not together again until May 5th, and the decision hung fire until Alice's return as they discussed the pros and cons back and forth in their letters. Alice Palmer was enthusiastic, full of plans, large and small, more and more convinced that they should accept Harper's offer. Almost immediately she advised George: "You'd better begin a file of applicants and other correspondence relating to your work here [University of Chicago]." [10](#) She passed on rumors she heard about men whom George might consider for the Chicago philosophy department. "Mr. Pond says that Mr. Dewey [John Dewey] has the reputation in Ann Arbor of being too much the dreamer." [11](#) She forwarded enthusiastic local publicity to George: "I send you a *Graphic*, full of the University, and a morning's paper. I was introduced to the Friday Club today as 'the most talked of woman in Chicago.'" [12](#) And she reported at length on a conversation in Minneapolis with Harry Pratt Judson, who was to join the Chicago faculty. "All his reasons for going are good. I must say I long to get my hands on the Woman's College," and then protected herself against disappointment by adding, "but the next moment I long to stay in our own pleasant place." [13](#) When Alice Palmer returned to Chicago to attend to her World's Fair responsibilities, Harper was away, but she continued to consult with and advise university officials. [14](#)

Letters from women eager for Chicago jobs poured in. Wellesley alumnae urged Alice Palmer to take the Chicago position. "Old Wellesley girls . . . long to see me take this untrammelled leadership and do something far greater before I die than I could ever have done at Wellesley." One graduate reported that "all the women of the Northwest will gather about my work if I will come. It does surprise me very much to see the strong feeling among my old friends everywhere about it. Mary Roberts . . . wants me to take all the Wellesley teachers whom we have talked of for their sakes. She thinks I could do so much in making a way for them in a broader place." [15](#) Once again women put pressure on Alice Freeman Palmer to pursue her career above all else. Duty to womanhood demanded that her position as an educator be exploited for the general benefit of her sex. She had gone too far to be allowed to retreat into domesticity.

Alice Palmer herself was thinking of the good she could do. She wrote her young friend and Collegiate Alumnae colleague, Marion Talbot, whom she had just installed at Wellesley, that if the Chicago offer was accepted she would "have the nomination of the other professors and I hope you know what that means and will begin to get your trunk ready." [16](#) She saw it as so splendid a chance for women "as makes one gasp for breath." [17](#)

Actually Harper was not as sympathetic to the aspirations of women as eager Wellesley alumnae or others believed. One historian argues that if Harper had followed his own preference, Chicago would have admitted no women students or had any women on its faculty. But western colleges were under considerable pressure to admit women at this time, partly because the shortage of teachers in the West was acute, and Harper could not ignore this populist demand. Also, if Chicago was to attract sufficient students to make Harper's dream come true, he must open Chicago's doors to women. [18](#) Forty percent of Chicago's student body when it opened were women, and by 1902 it enrolled more women than men. Women were a financial necessity. But the University of Chicago was not to prove as supportive of women faculty as Palmer and the Wellesley alumnae had hoped. Although he appointed women, pioneers like Marion Talbot and Elizabeth Wallace who spent their careers at Chicago were often given short shift and had to fight long and hard for proper status. However in 1891-92 women perceived Chicago as opening new educational doors and providing opportunities for academic women that they would not have in the East. And Alice Freeman Palmer agreed with them. Here she could do more, she thought, for women's education than she had ever been able to do at Wellesley.

Her choice of career course was clear. She unreservedly wished the Palmers to accept Chicago's call. She wrote George toward the end of her lecture tour, "Let's come to Chicago where we know nobody, and everyone is too busy to get acquainted, and where we may be together all the time after morning office hours and have the same kind of work." [19](#) This was the ploy she used most consistently. As George had played endlessly on the theme of Alice's poor health to convince her to marry him, Alice now played on his loneliness during their long separations. If they went together to Chicago they would never have to be apart again. Both George and Alice hated the long weeks apart that her lecture tours required. Chicago would permit them to work together, rather than forcing her out of Cambridge to perform on the national scene.

Their letters show clearly how their working partnership had developed. When they were apart Alice shared her professional concerns with George, but she also worried about an article he had written on college vices, the final draft of which she had not been able to see because she was

away. He took considerable trouble over professional responsibilities she had left behind in Cambridge, Wellesley affairs and concerns of the State Board of Education, as well as answering some of her correspondence. Their working lives were intertwined and yet of necessity separated because without an institutional base she must operate on the national stage. Both complained frequently about separations. She wrote: "But, dear George, this must be stopped. There is no fun in it." [20](#)

Alice also saw Chicago and its opportunities as putting an end to the nagging discontent and bouts of increasing irritability that had plagued her since their return from Europe and caused stresses and strains between them. When they were apart, Alice always apologized to George for her behavior when they were together. "If only I could change myself! That is what is needed, I know, and I always fancy it will come--but it does not. Perhaps less than ever this year, when I haven't been quite well!" [21](#) Although she was busy and doing useful things, her life lacked focus and challenge and the monetary rewards for her efforts were slim. In the last analysis, George was the family's breadwinner and on some level this left her feeling less useful than she knew she could be. She wanted real control of her professional destiny. In desperation, probably at her own irritable behavior, she once proposed that if they must stay at Harvard, they live in Boxford during the academic year as well as in summer. "All the heavy expenses would be stopped. I could devote myself to reading and writing--the distance would be ample excuse for resigning everything except Wellesley." [22](#) George would have more quiet writing time. The implication was that the fatigue caused by her heavy schedule interfered with the even tenor of his days. However, she must have known that the reclusive life was not for her. Despite her protests, she enjoyed the traveling, the receptions at the homes of wealthy alumnae, the applause and bouquets of roses that greeted her speeches, the press reports of her triumphs. But the nineteenth-century dual career marriage was no easier to achieve without stress than it was to be a century later.

Lending weight to Alice's desire to accept the Chicago offer was the fact that the Palmers' financial resources were strained. At one point in April of 1892 George was down to his last five dollars, and Alice had borrowed from her brother Fred to meet tour expenses. [23](#) In a few days her checks began to come in, he received his salary for his Annex teaching, and they once more were solvent. But clearly they had difficulty maintaining the standard of living to which they aspired on George's salary and her incidental earnings.

Nonetheless, as Alice's enthusiasm for the new challenge from Chicago increased, George, back in Cambridge, found more and more reasons for staying at Harvard. Occasionally he was strongly tempted. William James agreed with him that "the Chicago staff would be a weightier one than we have here," and Phillip Abbott "was aghast at its splendor. He thought we should be perfectly justified in going on such terms." But George also cautioned Alice, "discourage Harper when you see him. I don't want to go." [24](#) Also his colleagues almost uniformly discouraged the move. William Jewett Tucker, president of Dartmouth, was "very earnest against Chicago. He considered it very wrong for persons of our years and position to enter into missionary work. . . . He thought another generation would pass before the West would have students fitted for a University of our sort, and believed the work of bringing them up to this point could be exactly as well performed by teachers of another grade than ourselves." [25](#) A few days later George "sent to Harper the half dozen conditions I had previously read to him, and accompanied them with a letter advising him once more to drop the entire matter for a year." [26](#) George's doubts

multiplied. "The whole scheme seems to me more and more improbable, especially improbable that it can be launched at present." [27](#) A week later he wrote: "The more I think of it, the more thoroughly distasteful the abandonment of Harvard for Chicago becomes. Perhaps on monied grounds we have no right to refuse. I half incline to believe we have not. But it will certainly break the power of our lives and unite us to something which we can never heartily approve." [28](#) For George, Cambridge's secure charms exerted themselves with increasing power as Alice dreamed enthusiastically of solving the dilemma with a new challenge.

George Herbert Palmer eventually found his rationale for staying in Cambridge through the connection of William Rainey Harper and the University of Chicago with the American Baptist churches. By the 1890s Palmer was very wary of evangelical protestant fundamentalism. He still attended Congregational church services regularly and professed a deeply held Christian faith, but his was an intellectual Christianity. Sentimental Jesus lovers repelled him, and he found a literal belief in hellfire and damnation as repugnant as clinging to the Savior's breast. He was also a firm believer in nonsectarian education. He had used Wellesley's and the Durants' evangelical associations as a deciding factor in his refusal to join Alice at Wellesley as co-president or in any other capacity. He was equally suspicious of Harper's Baptist antecedents and connections.

William Rainey Harper was not trained as a clergyman as were many of the older generation of college presidents, and he had not become a Baptist himself until he joined the faculty of Dennison University in 1876. He assiduously avoided clergymen as members of his board of trustees, and religious tests for faculty or students (unlike early Wellesley) were specifically banned, but Chicago's Baptist connections were very real. Original sponsorship of the university was by the American Baptist Educational Society. The president of the university and two-thirds of the trustees were required to be members of the Baptist churches, and Rockefeller, Chicago's chief benefactor, was a prominent Baptist layman. [29](#) George Palmer was aware of these religious ties as he considered Harper's offer. In late April the occasion of the transference of the Baptist Theological School to the University of Chicago to serve as its divinity school reinforced Palmer's apprehensions. At the ceremony of the transfer itself speeches by the prominent Baptist clergymen strengthened these suspicions. George wrote Alice that they were

by utterly fourth rate men; and apart from the cheap theological stuff of which they mostly consist, they occupy themselves largely with exultation of the University which now is theirs. Harper himself says, "This union makes possible one thing which otherwise would have been impossible--it gives the university a divinity school. As a Baptist university its divinity school must be Baptist. It will accordingly bind the University to our own churches and to all churches as nothing else could." [30](#)

These words were a red flag to George. He saw the divinity school infiltrating every department of the university. He dismissed Harper's promises of non-sectarianism. "The idea of any such genuine separation of Church and College as we intend . . . never enters their heads." [31](#) He reminded her of her troubles with evangelicalism at Wellesley and questioned "bending our necks to that yoke again." [32](#) Clearly Harper had given him the rationale he had been waiting for to stay at Harvard.

George Palmer also consulted with Arthur Marsh, whom he hoped would join him in Chicago if he made the move, and with William G. Hale, his Cornell friend, who had already accepted a Chicago chair, and Hale discussed Palmer's position with Harper and tried to reassure George without much success. [33](#) Alice also tried to reassure George. She quoted Harry Judson, who was himself a Baptist, and later to be a president of the University of Chicago, as saying that the

foolish and miserable speech making in Chicago at the Theological Anniversary the other night was the last wail of the dead party of their Church, . . . so the old party were allowed their wail, but that it means absolutely nothing to any man who understands the denomination today. [34](#)

George Palmer wrote William Rainey Harper on May 5th that he would publicly announce his refusal of the Chicago offer on Saturday and urged Harper "to drop all thoughts of us." [35](#) Poor Alice! She tried and tried, but she did not really have a chance. George Palmer could not be persuaded to go to Chicago, and the joint career would never become a reality. [36](#)

3

But Alice Palmer had not given up. She still campaigned to be allowed to play some role in the creation of the new university. In late May she herself wrote Harper that although she was not yet ready to make a commitment, "how gladly" she would assist him if some way could be worked out. And she laid down conditions for acceptance of a call, that "it would be understood that I was responsible . . . for the policy, the administration of the life, the management of the details, of the Woman's Department whether I was in Chicago or in Cambridge." She must be "Dean all the time," despite the fact that she would need to be absent two-thirds of the time, and that she would need the assistance of "an able woman on the grounds." [37](#) By late June Alice Palmer suggested to Harper that she was available for a flexible appointment and could arrange to spend October (when the university would first open its doors) in Chicago despite her reluctance "to break upon our home life so seriously." [38](#) Clearly she could not give up Chicago.

On July 6th she told Harper that if Marion Talbot would come to Chicago (and of course she had been trying to recruit her since April) she would "try some guidance from a distance." [39](#) And ten days later she laid out her proposition in detail. She must be (1) temporary dean or advisory dean, assisting only in the organization of the Woman's Department; (2) she would be in residence no more than twelve weeks, divided into two longer periods in September-October and January-February and two shorter periods as needed; (3) all matters that pertained to the Woman's Department would be referred to her whether in residence or not; and (4) that she would expect \$3,000 in salary plus traveling expenses for her trips to Chicago and be provided with her living while there. [40](#)

These were stiff conditions for Harper to meet. And one can imagine the intense discussions at the Palmers' Boxford home that preceded them. No doubt George Palmer helped frame these terms, hoping Harper could not possibly accept them. Harper would have to employ Marion Talbot at the junior salary level and then pay Alice a salary whose full-time equivalent would be

\$9,000, an extremely high academic salary indeed. Certainly no other members of his faculty were demanding traveling expenses. If Alice was to go, George must have decided it must be worth the Palmers' while financially. Alice confessed to Harper that George was most reluctant to have her make any commitment, but "would not utterly refuse consent." [41](#) Nonetheless George Palmer wrote in his bold emphatic script in the margin of Alice's letter to Harper, "I hope you will return an emphatic `no' to my wife's proposition!" [42](#)

She and George had been married less than five years, and once again she was pursuing an independent career. George Palmer must have found her decision almost intolerable. In his biography of Alice, although he discusses every other phase of her professional career with pride and caring, he mentions her work at Chicago only briefly and minimizes her substantial contributions there. [43](#) It was an interval that he obviously preferred to forget.

Although the appointment had been made, she and Harper had to unravel some minor misunderstandings that summer. She resisted being called dean rather than acting or advisory dean in official announcements and especially professor of history, a title that inspired letters from numerous women eager to take the courses that she obviously would not offer. She was alarmed that college bulletins gave no indication that she would not be in continuous residence. She protested that Harper's use of her name without these revisions would hurt both the university and her, that she might be accused "of having deserted my home and my husband or of being utterly unscrupulous toward the University." [44](#)

Harper briefly equivocated but soon completely agreed to Marion Talbot's appointment. Both Alice Palmer and Talbot had fully accepted appointments by August 12th, and the ambiguities concerning Talbot had been resolved. Talbot had received her release from Wellesley, and the two women not only conferred eagerly about their new shared responsibilities but embarked on a large correspondence concerning Chicago affairs. [45](#)

Marion Talbot was not only a colleague of Alice Palmer but friend and confidant. [46](#) Long before Talbot joined the Wellesley faculty in 1890 she and the Palmers were intimate partners in furthering the cause of women's higher education. George was as admiring of her talents as Alice. One of the roles they envisioned for Talbot at Wellesley was to be, according to George, at the center of "real college government," and they were about to see her installed as head of Waban cottage when the Chicago offer matured. [47](#) George was equally determined that she accompany Alice to Chicago. In fact Alice warned Harper during the negotiations that "Mr. Palmer says I shall not undertake this work unless she will go too!" [48](#) Talbot wanted a chair, hopefully as head of a Department of Sanitary Science for which she had trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Sanitary science (although later transformed into home economics) was envisioned by Talbot as a social science that could train experts to deal with the problems of urbanization. Since many of these problems were seen as a kind of municipal housekeeping, both women students and faculty were attracted to the discipline. [49](#) Its research focused on women, children, and communities, a kind of combination of urban sociology and public health. Sanitary science resembled, according to one historian, today's women's studies programs, but in the beginning it was also much more. [50](#) Talbot did not get her own department until 1904 and then it was called the Department of Household Administration (more akin to home economics), but she was appointed in 1892 as assistant professor of

sociology, her courses were taught in that department, and she found in its head, Albion Small, a supportive colleague. Her early publications appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*. [51](#) She remained on the Chicago faculty, becoming a full professor in 1904, until her retirement in 1925. When Talbot became a serious contender to head Barnard College in 1893 Alice Palmer both urged her to stay at Chicago and used the offer to impress Harper of Talbot's importance to the university. [52](#) Her appointment made possible Alice Palmer's flexible, commuting relationship to the university for she had a competent surrogate always in residence.

4

On September 18, 1892, Alice Freeman Palmer said goodbye to bucolic Boxford, the Palmer's summer home, leaving George to preserve the last fruits of the season and move their household back to Cambridge. Accompanied by Marion Talbot, Alice left Boston the next day by train for Chicago, a long journey she was to repeat many times in the next three and one-half years. Both travelers were enthusiastic, as was William Gardiner Hale whom they picked up along the way. However, Talbot's New England friends were less sanguine and saw her departing civilization for the great unknown. They presented her with a chip off Plymouth Rock to tuck in her luggage. [53](#)

She needed her talisman, for the physical prospect that met this trio of venturesome academics at the end of their journey was not very promising. Women students, Palmer, Talbot, and assorted other faculty were all to be housed in the Hotel Beatrice, an unfinished six-story apartment building two blocks from the University of Chicago campus. The Beatrice still bore a sign, "World Fair Rooms to Let," that indicated its original purpose--to supply accommodations for visitors to Daniel Burnham's White City that was rising on the lakeshore nearby. Adjoining streets were unpaved, former farm buildings vainly attempted to fit an urban landscape, and plank walks provided access to the swampy campus where unfinished quadrangles had begun to show themselves amidst the mud. [54](#)

Inside the Beatrice conditions were not much better. Much of the furniture was still not assembled, no servants were on hand, and the electricity was not yet turned on. Candles in beer bottles provided the only illumination in this abstinent Baptist setting. Palmer and Talbot themselves cooked the first breakfasts for the arriving students. Soon ninety people occupied this makeshift dormitory. [55](#) The weather was damp and sticky and Alice found it particularly onerous in the unfinished university buildings "where we are stepping over shavings and piles of lumber and carpenter tools all the time." [56](#) Even at the Beatrice, which was to have been finished by September 1st, and which the university would have to vacate in April to accommodate the fair, carpenters were continually at work. [57](#)

But within two days of her arrival Alice Palmer had moved into her "Deanery," an office near the president's, with brick floors and oak woodwork, and opulently furnished with a "beautiful desk, sumptuous furniture." She was busy supervising student entrance examinations, buying chests of drawers, carpets, and bedding for the Beatrice, and offering copious advice to William Rainey Harper, whether solicited or not, on such matters as inviting women to serve on the board of

trustees. [58](#) She was enthusiastic, exultant. She toured the campus with Harper the night she arrived and pronounced it " *noble*." [59](#) Even George responded to her excitement and the depth of the challenge. "Few are the people who have been present at the birth of a University; and this is one which all the country watches and no part of it more than that which you superintend. A proud position indeed!" [60](#)

The city of Chicago's women were already organized and active on a half-dozen fronts when the University of Chicago opened its doors. [61](#) Chicago itself in the 1890s was a very exciting place where a plethora of innovations were welcome ranging from the new architecture of Louis Sullivan and Daniel Burnham to Marshall Field's consumer-pleasing department store. And women were showing the way. The Chicago Woman's League and the Illinois Woman's Alliance were in the forefront of progressive reforms. Hull House was the leading star in a growing settlement movement. The city was a center of militant trade unionism, some of whose leaders were women. [62](#) The Chicago Woman's Club, including among its members such social denizens as Bertha Palmer but also middle-class reformers like Frances Willard, was the motivating force behind several philanthropies, among them a legal aid service for the poor and an Industrial Art Association which provided Saturday vocational classes for working-class boys. [63](#) Now women were also to play a part in Chicago's new university.

No challenge was ever sweeter to Alice Freeman Palmer than her opportunity to help shape the University of Chicago. In a sense Wellesley had been thrust upon her, as had been the dozen volunteer tasks she had since undertaken for women's education. Her earlier teaching positions were an economic necessity. But Chicago opened up a new range of opportunities. Women were to be appointed to the faculty, admitted to graduate school, awarded fellowships on equal terms with men, and all as part of a coeducational institution of major scale. When Chicago opened it had more than 120 people on its faculty, more than Johns Hopkins had students in its early years, and twice as many graduate students as undergraduates. [64](#) In 1894 nearly a quarter (25 out of 110) of the students registered for graduate study were women. In its first decade Chicago trained more women than any other institution. [65](#) Alice Palmer understood from the beginning the implications of Chicago for women in higher education and was aware of her role as expediter. If she was vigilant and persistent, women would be able to pursue the Ph.D. untrammelled by the petty restrictions of Harvard and Yale, they could hold teaching and research chairs on a prestigious graduate faculty, and they could help to open wide the doors for women. And her own instincts about the role she could play were constantly reinforced by the expectations of other women. Not all of Palmer's hopes were realized at Chicago, but she knew the opportunity was there. [66](#)

Alice Palmer's role at Chicago was very complex. She was much more than a dean of women. Her function was to act as what we would now call a vice-president or assistant president (she was called a dean), although one whose administrative responsibilities were somewhat limited because she was not always in residence. Harper consulted her about everything from faculty positions to the style of caps and gowns. She had much to say concerning the physical facilities at Chicago, especially dormitories and eating commons, and was a major contributor to the university's stance on student life. At first glance her contributions to institutional housekeeping seem to overwhelm her truly academic roles. However, she also served, as did the whole faculty, as an admissions evaluator. More importantly she was an arbiter of faculty appointments, an

active participant in faculty meetings, a skillful controller of trustees, and a faithful solicitor of special funds, especially for women's concerns. In short she did everything (except teach) at Chicago that she had done at Wellesley with the added chore of manipulating Harper himself. At Wellesley she had been the president, now she had to carefully guide the president. Fortunately the president was eager for guidance. He hungered for her counsel, disliked her absences, and continued, long after George Palmer had made clear he would never leave Cambridge, to attempt to seduce him to Chicago so that Harper could have Alice full time.

The relationship between Harper and Palmer was complicated. She had his complete trust, certainly at the beginning. He confided in her as he may have in few other people. He depended on her and quite rightly felt he would have been hard-pressed to translate his elaborate academic dream into a functioning university community without her guidance and incredibly efficient hard work. He told her his own plans, was honest about financial matters, and heeded her advice in many substantive decisions. But he also saddled her with what he undoubtedly saw as essentially female chores. She ran all over Chicago finding bargains in linens for the dormitories, she trained cooks and housekeepers, she checked bathroom facilities. She bought the plates, the soup tureens, and the bed sheets for the University of Chicago. But if the university was to open and continue to operate these matters required attention. No university president today would hesitate for a moment to entrust these chores (seen as business matters) to a man. That is what the current vice president for financial affairs and his or her myriad bureaucrats are for. Men have done these tasks for countless institutions and not felt such jobs feminized them. Palmer wore the hats of at least three contemporary vice presidents: academic affairs, student affairs, and financial affairs, all rolled into one. Faculty appointments, graduate fellowships, student aid, and dormitory eating arrangements were all her concern.

Despite their long separations the lives of Alice and George Palmer continued to be closely interwoven. He asked her advice about candidates for Harvard's philosophy faculty and checked what she knew against his own information. Some of George's favorite students were placed in Chicago with Alice's help, and George provided a constant flow of information about Cambridge administrative practices. Her first letter home asked that he "send me the Harvard Calendar and some other Harvard documents showing the organization, resources, etc., and also the Wellesley statistics which you will find in the desk in the parlor." [67](#) Many such requests followed, and George always answered them promptly. But he also assisted Alice with such mundane matters as to see that the University of Chicago's china, bought in Boston, was delivered on time.

He seemed reconciled to being alone in Cambridge and basked in others' admiration of Alice. "Everybody warmly approves of your connection with Chicago." [68](#) However, he continued to complain about how her Chicago appointment was described in the university's publicity. "You have never accepted a position there for longer than a year; yet the implication is distinct that this is but the first year of a series. . . . You told them you were not competent for a Professor of History and could perform no such duties. But they think this title a good thing for them and do not hesitate to put you in a false position." [69](#) George could never accept any scholarly pretensions on Alice's part. She resisted being listed as a professor not because she felt incompetent, but because her interrupted periods of residence could not accommodate a teaching schedule.

Alice missed George and could not quite relinquish her vision of their joint career. She reported that both Harper and the senior professors frequently lamented: "If only Mr. Palmer were here he would know and have the power to bring it about." She added: "That is true, dear, and sometimes my heart cried out to take you one year--this troubled, struggling year--away from Harvard to shape this great, crude, eager life. . . . I only fumble at trying to do what you would have been expert at." [70](#) Harper proposed various devices such as a lecture series to attract George to Chicago at least for a few weeks, and during his vacations George did sometimes go to Chicago with Alice. Certainly he was more than generous with epistolary advice.

No doubt George Palmer's academic know-how contributed substantially to Alice Palmer's usefulness at Chicago. Her own administrative experience had been confined to an undergraduate residential women's college, but as George Palmer's wife, Alice had been exposed intimately to the inner workings of Harvard, everything from academic politics and power struggles to the new university emphasis on laboratories and advanced study. She personally knew almost every academician of any stature in the United States and some from abroad. She had entertained many of them in her home. They had to answer her letters and take her requests seriously. Wellesley and Harvard replaced the Michigan network she had relied on in the 1880s. Wellesley students came to Chicago for graduate work. Chicago-trained women like Edith Abbott were hired at Wellesley as faculty. Promising Harvard junior faculty launched their careers at Chicago.

5

Alice Palmer's most immediate task during the fall of 1892 was, as she saw it, "to produce decent results out of the most impossibly vulgar plans for [campus] life," to somehow create suitable and comfortable "arrangements for the life of a hundred young lady students," to replace what she saw as a "cheap and inadequate" scale of living as planned by Harper and the trustees. [71](#) And she performed this task superbly. After a few weeks the Beatrice was providing gracious quarters and food of sufficient quality that most of the faculty wanted to board there, and she managed this miracle without alienating either Harper or the trustees. Her strategy with Harper was to "tell him as little as I can, and take every bit of responsibility I dare to assume." [72](#) The trustees were forced to tour the Beatrice and view firsthand the squalid conditions fostered by their parsimony. Afterwards "there was a very serious hour" in her office when she "explained what I meant by suitable arrangements . . . everything inexpensive but exquisitely kept and in good taste." [73](#) And their wives were enlisted to aid in the improvements.

She shamelessly made use of every connection she had in both the Boston area and Chicago to expedite her plans for comfortable well- run dormitories. She had been in Chicago only a week when:

I went into the city in the morning after breakfast and bought linen and cutlery. Mrs. A. A. Sprague [wife of the partner of a major wholesale grocery firm] took me in her carriage [Palmer was to become a close friend of the whole Sprague family], and we asked merchants whom she knew to give the University what I

needed. Mr. Barlett, at whose home we parted, promises to give the cutlery we need, and at Marshall Field's we got about a hundred dollars worth of linen for \$40.00! Dr. Goodspeed [secretary of the board of trustees] is so pleased with the way I have been bamboozling furniture, etc., out of the merchants that he is like a summer morning, and I mean to paint the rooms out of the University money before I am through. [74](#)

This vignette is repeated many times in her letters. And this particular effort I have quoted here was only to make the temporary quarters at the Beatrice habitable.

At the same time she was planning the new dormitories, the first of which was to be ready in the spring. The day before Snell Hall opened in April, she wrote George: "Have gone all over Snell with the plasterers, carpenters, and plumbers still at work . . . I have seen the head janitor, the head plumber, and now have a talk with President Harper." [75](#) When she would return to Cambridge from Chicago she would check plans with knowledgeable people on the Harvard staff and enlisted the aid of Ellen Richards, MIT's pioneering professor of sanitary science with whom Talbot had trained, to plan the common kitchens that would feed all the residential students. [76](#)

But her main task, as she saw it, was not to set Chicago's campus style and living standards, although that was important to her, but to assure women an equal place in the university community. Her initial achievements were substantial. Eight women were on the first Chicago faculty and six of the forty-three graduate fellows in 1892-93 were women. [77](#) She lobbied Harper relentlessly for both women faculty and fellows. Almost as soon as she had accepted her appointment she wrote that "some splendidly equipped women are writing me about work for a Ph.D.," and mentioned Mary Calkins the psychologist whom Charles Eliot had prevented from being admitted as a formal candidate for a Ph.D. at Harvard and who was now on the Wellesley faculty. [78](#) Ten days later she was making a case for Alice E. Pratt and continuing to argue the importance of women Ph.D. candidates at Chicago. [79](#) Palmer herself and Talbot were, of course, the first female appointments to the faculty, but both Martha Foote Crowe (English) and Alice Bertha Foster (physical culture) were essentially Palmer's appointments. [80](#) In appointing women Chicago was far ahead of other universities of similar stature. Not until 1898 did the University of California get so much as a part-time woman physician as professor of hygiene, and she had to be funded privately by Regent Phoebe Hearst. With over a third of its students women, only one graduate fellowship was held by a woman. [81](#) Despite the fact that it had admitted women since 1870 and trained perhaps half the women faculty of the women's colleges, the University of Michigan did not acquire its first woman faculty member until 1896 when Eliza Mosher was appointed dean of women and professor of a nonexistent department of hygiene because no existing department would accept her. [82](#) Although women played a lesser role than she had hoped, Alice Palmer's relentless lobbying produced concrete results immediately at Chicago.

Palmer demanded academic excellence of the women she championed for the Chicago faculty. Martha Crowe proved invaluable in her role as residence hall manager and counselor but a failure in the English department. Palmer encouraged Harper to transfer her teaching duties, to Crowe's distress, from the university proper to the extension division. [83](#) Palmer respected and

needed Crowe's administrative skills in the dormitories, and she would find a suitable place for her, but she would not pretend that Crowe met Chicago's high academic standards when the evidence pointed the other way. Excellence in the English department was more important than smooth-running women's residences.

But securing faculty appointments and fellowships for women was only part of Alice Palmer's vision for Chicago. Precisely how did Alice Freeman Palmer see her role in furthering the status of women at this new university? Palmer wrote many letters but few formal pieces, and letters are rarely careful expositions of position. Marion Talbot did write about her aims at Chicago. Certainly Palmer and Talbot shared many of the same goals, although Talbot had many more years of actively implementing them. Talbot defined what they were trying to do as liberty, equality, unity, and social responsibility, a vague, amorphous set of goals to be sure. [84](#) Although their ideas might differ from those of modern feminists, I am quite certain that equality was a goal that both women championed. Palmer's lobbying for women faculty and women's access to graduate fellowships fits under this rhetoric and never ceased as long as she had a platform at Chicago. She was responsible for the hiring of women as senior fellows in English and history in 1893. [85](#) She tried to hire the poet Harriet Monroe as at least an occasional lecturer in 1894. [86](#) Palmer also supported the Chicago club women who unsuccessfully agitated for representation on the board of trustees. [87](#) She was both incensed and amused when the Presbyterian Union gave a banquet to the faculty and invited only the men. [88](#) Talbot and Palmer expected women to perform in faculty governance and administration as the equals of their male peers. They also espoused the hope that all women on campus would be equal and opposed sororities among the students as elitist and divisive.

Their concept of liberty is more difficult to understand. Both women had experienced coeducation early in their lives without rules and without special protection for women, Palmer at the University of Michigan, Talbot at Boston University and MIT. Nonetheless at Chicago they aimed to create a protective environment for women. Their later experience in Wellesley's carefully nurtured College Hall and cottages, where responsibility rather than liberty was the watchword, seemed to have shaped the way they envisioned women in a university setting. Chicago approached its women students in the protective manner of the eastern women's colleges rather than the free benign neglect that midwestern state universities employed when women first joined their student bodies. But this protective atmosphere was to be administered and enforced through self-government in which the whole community of women undergraduates, graduates, and faculty was to participate, rather than imposed from above. For example, strongly as Palmer felt about sororities she endeavored to persuade the students of her point of view rather than make an arbitrary ruling. She fought successfully with Harper when the university opened in 1892 to ward off a tangle of petty meddling rules designed to regulate social intercourse between men and women students. He wanted no coeducational rooming houses, no male students or unmarried instructors taking meals at the Beatrice, only purely official relations between instructors and their students. Alice commented, "I don't think he knows what to make of such sentiments as mine . . . he is good to me, and says, 'Have your way,' and adds, 'you know, I can't help it.'" [89](#) And she had to fight repeatedly against inappropriate rules. Three years later Harper was proposing that students who marry be dismissed. She moaned to George, "Oh dear!--the childishness." [90](#)

The house system of dormitory living was designed to implement self-government and the sense of community as well as provide a protective residential setting. In the early years, when women faculty and graduate students almost invariably lived in the residence halls, progress was made toward achieving this goal. It was the prospect of developing this feeling of community that made all the tedious hours spent on housekeeping chores worthwhile. But the unity of a single women's community was not easily achieved. For one thing many Chicago students were commuters who lived at home and did not share in residence hall life. Palmer hoped to integrate non-resident students into the life of the campus through a Woman's Building for which she assiduously raised money throughout her Chicago tenure. [91](#) But it was a wish not realized during her Chicago years. The Chicago Women's Union was installed finally in Livingston Hall in 1904 and not until 1915 was a real women's building, Ida Noyes Hall, dedicated. [92](#)

Secondly, despite Palmer's and Talbot's attempts to avoid it, elitism and cliques were inevitable. In 1894 the possibility of sororities threatened the idea of a unitary, residence-based community of women at Chicago. Although Harper was opposed to fraternities, fearing they would exacerbate class differences and the early faculty agreed with him, fraternities were reluctantly permitted on campus in 1892 and eventually incorporated within the house system. [93](#)

Alice Palmer opposed secret societies from the beginning. Although fraternities did not control University of Michigan campus life when she was a student as they did by the 1890s, her Michigan experience, where the literary societies and Student Christian Association dominated the campus scene and fraternities were often disruptive, predisposed her against Greek societies. She wrote George more than once that she did not "want the boyish foolishness of it," but she also did not wish to begin by forbidding something. [94](#) In the end Harper took that decision out of her hands. Chicago had fraternities.

By 1894 women demanded similar club privileges. As Alice Palmer wrote George, "the girls have been stirred up to form 'sororities' . . . I want to prevent it, without forbidding it, and it takes time and strength." [95](#) Harper left this decision to Palmer and Talbot. Alice thought she won. She wrote ten days after the women had first requested sororities that "this morning our great anxiety is done away. The girls came in today to say they will not start sororities, and they seem intelligently to accept my reasons for not wishing it, as well as to very sweetly wish to follow my inclination." [96](#) National sororities never did find a place on campus, but secret "clubs" with all the trappings of sororities soon appeared. However, they did not possess their own houses and in that sense Palmer was successful. [97](#)

Social responsibility was another goal of Palmer and Talbot. From the beginning Harper had seen his university influencing public policy in the community and helping society achieve the reforms that would create a decent society for all. He had enthusiastically espoused the ideals of service and reform so dear to turn-of-the-century progressives. Major universities and their officers were quick to concern themselves with public questions in the 1890s. Palmer and Talbot saw women on the campuses as supplying much of the idealism that would make this concern effective. Women would set the tone of life and morals at Chicago.

Talbot undoubtedly had the broader social vision. Perhaps Alice Palmer had been overexposed to zealous reformism by her mother and father. In any case she often took a slightly amused view of

"causes" and strong convictions (other than women's education). Palmer knew Jane Addams and was close to the reform-minded, public-spirited women of the Chicago Woman's Club, but her primary interaction with them was to secure money for her own purposes. However, as early as 1894 University of Chicago women were involved in settlement house work in the city's stockyard district. Jane Addams herself addressed the original committee of the Christian Union that initiated the project. Although a building was not erected for several years, five rooms were rented, five residents installed and additional professors and students assisted in the work. [98](#) Addams's connection to the university was close. She served on the university's extension staff, and at one time Hull House was used as one of the university's extension centers. [99](#) The Chicago uplift community and the university interacted constantly, but the interaction was not really of Palmer's doing. It was Talbot, not Palmer, who engaged in reform commitments that influenced the larger Chicago society.

However, if one credits Alice Palmer with being a major force in creating the opportunity for women to obtain specialized university training, she must have indirectly contributed to women's major reform role in the Progressive Era. [100](#) For example, at Wellesley Palmer at least passively facilitated the exploration of social movements by Vida Scudder, her close friend and colleague. She ensured the success of Scudder's Wellesley career, providing her with a secure base from which to expound her radical ideas and launch her settlement house schemes. Women were trained at Chicago in part because of Palmer. They were not only exposed to liberal professors like Albion Small, but also formed a tightly knit community of academic women who consistently contributed their expertise to the building of the early twentieth century's "better world." They also made use of their relationships with each other formed in this community that Alice Palmer had so consciously created.

Marion Talbot did participate in the interests and goals of these progressive reformers. But there is virtually no mention, for example, in Palmer's correspondence of the social upheaval in Chicago brought on by the Panic of 1893, the hordes of unemployed wandering the streets, the scores of homeless sleeping in the parks. The university community was not unconcerned. The Chicago Woman's Club was active in philanthropic work. Palmer played a key role in creating the setting that activated women's political and reform impulses, but she eschewed this route herself. Why? Perhaps her relationship to her parents provides the answer. She may have associated her father's deep political commitments with his tendency toward irresponsibility, and her mother's reform causes with her exhausting demands on Alice's time and energy. During much of Palmer's early life, politics represented a restless quest for change, and a strong drive for reform was associated with intolerable burdens thrust on her. Nonetheless her parents' legacy was not easily escaped. Palmer may have made fun of the suffragists and stayed clear of most reform causes, but she worked indefatigably to create an environment where women could make a social contribution.

Although Marion Talbot's social vision may have been more all-encompassing than Palmer's, Palmer nonetheless joined her in one radical vision, a campus where women were slightly more than equal. In a sense Palmer and Talbot were invoking the last vestiges of the nearly century-old spheres doctrine, that in a large area of life that involved nurturance and morals, women were better governors than men. Palmer demanded equality for women in faculty status and governance and in access to academic disciplines, but she wanted more than simple equality in

the social sphere. Women were to set the tone, define the social patterns of campus life. Men's values, especially if they did not conform to the ideal, were to be subordinate to women's. Women had always aggressed in this sphere, and almost always men had fought back. Palmer and Talbot at Chicago pioneered in this concept of women's role on coeducational campuses. The concept was tried with less success at other coeducational universities. Sometimes it failed even to get a real hearing, as at Palmer's alma mater, the University of Michigan.

During Alice Palmer's tenure at Chicago, women's influence on campus was pervasive, reflecting the pervasiveness of her own influence and power. Social, if not academic, control of the campus was in the hands of women, but women also made their presence felt in the classroom, the faculty meeting, and the president's office. Alice Palmer's ideal of a women's community within a large university came very close to realization. Women flocked to educational institutions in unprecedented numbers. By the turn of the century so many women filled Chicago's classrooms that they threatened to overwhelm the men whom they already outnumbered in the junior college. Women received over 56 percent of the Phi Beta Kappa keys in 1902. Because women came so close to dominating the University of Chicago campus, a frightened Harper, with considerable male faculty support, proposed in late 1901 to limit their influence by confining them to segregated classes. [101](#) Palmer had long since departed the quadrangles and was to die before the end of 1902, but Marion Talbot led the opposition, which was sizable and vocal and included all the women faculty, staff, and students, several male faculty, like John Dewey, and a large group of alumnae. Women all over the United States responded with alarm and petitioned the trustees and Harper to desist. Nonetheless separation was adopted by the faculty in principle and partially implemented in some junior college classes for several years after 1903 before it was quietly allowed to die. Women were no longer a threat, men by that time greatly outnumbered women on campus and clearly controlled campus life. [102](#) It can be argued that the issue of separatism at Chicago was a direct reaction to Palmer and Talbot's success in putting women at the center of university life. [103](#) The measure of their success inevitably bred their failure. Many decades were to pass before women again occupied the position in Chicago's quadrangles that they had achieved during their first years.

Palmer also concerned herself with preventing two aspects of student life rampant at other universities from gaining a foothold on the Chicago campus: a sexist male milieu in which hazing and rowdiness could flourish and narrow evangelical sectarianism. And she expected a strong women's community to be the most effective means of negating these undesirable aspects of student life. She had Harper's full support in the first. The sometimes violent pranksterism that marred student life at most nineteenth-century colleges and universities never flourished at Chicago. For example, Harper refused to tolerate boisterous celebration of football victories.

Alice Palmer also met head-on any attempt at Chicago to introduce rowdy, sexist patterns. The first months after Chicago opened were probably too chaotic to provoke much undergraduate mischief, but by midwinter of 1893 normal adolescent rebelliousness and an understandable need for fun and games showed itself in the Chicago male undergraduate community. Palmer was not in residence when the first outbreak occurred, and Marion Talbot had to cope alone with only Alice's advice and sympathy to aid her. Palmer wondered why the men "can't wait when their main business should be study and when Chicago has no place for parties. In another year we'll show them what good times can be." [104](#) But the trouble did not subside, and when she returned

in April she had to spend "every other minute over the trouble in Drexel--the undergraduate hall for men, where boorishness of every sort has been going on and a small knot of men going into vice. Two dozen of them came to the Snell Tuesday night and gave the girls a very rough serenade, and so I got my hands on them, and they will discover before I leave that bar-room behavior here must be put down." [105](#) She blamed the difficulty on Harper's failure to provide proctors for the men's residence halls. But she would not tolerate this kind of behavior. Essentially Harper agreed with her and made his own contributions to requiring an adult atmosphere on campus. But Alice saw herself as the real arbiter of "social and domestic matters" at the university and told Harper so. [106](#)

Harper had to be convinced of the dangers of narrow evangelical sectarianism. She fought that battle early in her Chicago career. The struggle focused on whether the Young Men's Christian Association should be permitted on campus. Both Alice and George, like many intellectuals in the 1890s, became increasingly liberal in religion and were adamant against the "Y." They saw it as narrow, bigoted, and antagonistic to the ecumenical, tolerant, eclectic Protestantism they espoused. For example in the 1890s, the YMCA could not tolerate Unitarians, a position that was anathema to the Palmers. To Alice "the rampant Y.M.C.A. man is wild lest `skeptics' get any influence" on campus. [107](#) She and her friends, Professor Hale, Laughlin, and Judson, spent hours with Harper arguing the wisdom of a locally controlled non-sectarian student religious association such as the Student Christian Association she had known at Michigan and fostered at Wellesley. All four told Harper that they could not in conscience join a "Y," and he agreed that if "we could not conscientiously join it . . . the influence would be disastrous." She hoped "a spirit was introduced which may prevail." [108](#) And they did succeed in having a broadly-based Christian Union accepted. [109](#) Eventually Chicago did have a YMCA but it was always more liberal than most.

6

Although Alice Palmer may have seen her primary mission at Chicago as assuring full equality for women in the new university, she did not limit her concerns to issues of gender. For example, she played as active a role in choosing male faculty as she did in selecting women. One of her main concerns was building a strong English department dedicated to teaching writing to underclassmen. Chicago was not successful at attracting Harvard senior professors, but both the Palmers knew the young "comers" in Cambridge, still unrewarded and unknown but likely to acquire enviable reputations with time. Her first candidate was young Robert Herrick, their friend and protégé and a distant cousin of George. The English department was in the midst of a conflict over whether extension teachers should be used to instruct undergraduates in the university proper, a practice Alice strongly opposed. She began her campaign in February of 1893, argued her views strongly to Harper, and planned strategy with Palmer friends like William Hale and J. Laurence Laughlin who held the senior positions in the department. By April she had convinced Harper to offer Herrick an instructorship in rhetoric at a salary of \$1,500 for the next academic year with the promise of an assistant professorship in two years if all went well. She herself was authorized to make this offer to Herrick. [110](#) Herrick, later a popular turn-of-the-century novelist, came to Chicago in the fall of 1893.

To further strengthen the English department, Alice Palmer played a major role in bringing Robert Morss Lovett to Chicago despite the fact that Harvard was actively trying to keep him. [111](#) In order to ensure Lovett's prompt appointment before Harvard could convince him to stay, she promised Harper that three friends of the university would guarantee his \$1,200 salary at least for the first year. Although the trustees were not to know their identity, the three friends were Alice, George, and J. Laurence Laughlin. However, she hoped actually to raise the money elsewhere. [112](#) Lovett came to Chicago, funds were raised elsewhere, and the Palmer's usually strained exchequer remained intact.

Her efforts to control and strengthen the English department did not cease with these two crucial appointments. When another senior professor of English was to be appointed in the fall of 1894, she wrote Harper that it seemed impossible that George Lyman Kittridge could be lured to Chicago, and of the other candidates she believed Francis Gummere of Haverford would be "a better man for us, altogether the strongest in the country [of those] who could be moved, more balanced than Cook of Yale, a man of thorough scientific training who has kept his charm as a teacher." [113](#)

She also politely but firmly vetoed the appointment of her Cambridge neighbor, Arthur Gilman, to the history faculty, writing Harper, "It would never have occurred to me to think of him as a candidate for any professorship," and negatively assessing his qualifications. "Many know far more of American history than he does." [114](#)

Along with faculty appointments Alice Freeman Palmer's fine hand appeared in other major academic policy decisions. She was involved in the planning for graduate study and used George's knowledge of Harvard's graduate department to help shape the one at Chicago. George shared private departmental communications with her to assist in the planning. [115](#) She worked hard to achieve full faculty governance of the university and spent hours with Harper and key faculty members before the crucial faculty meeting in February of 1893 when standing committees were to be appointed with authority over admissions, fellowships, honors, and advanced standing. [116](#) It was difficult for Harper to share formal power, and he preferred to settle controversial issues with a *fait accompli* by making a speech announcing a policy, but Alice did her best to convince him of the necessity for permitting the faculty to play a part in decision-making. Harper was not always tractable. It took much hard work to convince him to appoint Lovett. They disagreed on money-raising for the Student Fund Society. [117](#) But she continued to give him advice, whether he wanted it or not.

Her wide acquaintance in academic circles meant that she was privy to all academic gossip. She reported to Harper, but also refuted, charges that the "Chicago faculty were materialists, agnostics, godless men in great numbers." [118](#) When the Panic of 1893 resulted in a severe cash shortage for the university that left no money to pay some ten faculty salaries including Alice's, rumors became rampant in the East that the new university was doomed and would have to close its doors. [119](#) She discussed the rumors with Harper and told him he should make a statement at convocation to counteract the damaging effects. Harper did, but failed to do it to her satisfaction. [120](#)

Although they did not always agree Harper continued to confide in Palmer and make her one of his major consultants during her first two years at Chicago. When he conceived his plan of bringing E. Benjamin Andrews, president of Brown University, to serve as a resident president or co-president at Chicago for six months of each year while Harper was away raising money, Alice was his primary confidant. Andrews was also to serve as dean of the graduate school and head of the philosophy department. She wrote George: "you can imagine what difficulties I foresee and how anxious I am. As far as I know no one knows it but me." [121](#) Actually when the appointment became known the faculty were much upset. The senate reprimanded Harper for presenting them with an accomplished fact, an appointment made. Alice agreed with them that the faculty should have been consulted, but supported Harper, believing "this is as good as any arrangement that could be made." [122](#) Andrews's tenure was short-lived, and Alice's friend Harry Judson eventually took over his duties and became Harper's successor.

Another administrative area in which Palmer worked tirelessly was money-raising. She seems to have been somewhat more successful than she had been at Wellesley. Much of this fund-raising focused on a women's building and student aid funds, but she did not confine her efforts to money for women's activities. For example, she also found donors to fund Robert Morss Lovett's original salary. Her money-raising efforts with the Chicago Woman's Club were particularly successful. During 1892 and 1893 they were responsible for raising more than a million dollars for women students. [123](#) Palmer attended their every meeting when she was in the city, sometimes with less than satisfactory results, as in the fall of 1894 when she went to the opening meeting of the season, and "as I feared, the Chairman and Secretary of the Committee simply did nothing." [124](#) The student aid fund-raising had not been started. She constantly chased after Bertha Palmer, wife of hotel baron Potter Palmer, luring her to the campus, dining at the Palmer mansion, writing her many letters, and eliciting many promises but with few concrete results. [125](#) Sometimes her efforts bordered on the frenetic.

Monday the Committee on the Building, Tuesday the Loan Fund at Mrs. Wilmarth's . . . Mrs. Ela invited north side ladies to hear me tell about the Woman's Building Thursday at 1:30, and Mrs. Sprague Friday. Yesterday I went to the Fortnightly Club . . . and saw scores of women several of whom I got a chance to ask to help, and they promised to talk to their husbands and to tell their friends. Two ladies subscribed \$100 each on the spot. . . . I feel like a pick pocket. . . . However I shut my teeth and go ahead. [126](#)

Nor were her efforts confined to her Chicago sojourns. She and Marion Talbot called on a Beecher niece in Massachusetts during the summer holidays of 1893 hoping for a gift toward Beecher Hall, a new woman's dormitory. [127](#)

Whether in Chicago, at home in Cambridge, or on the road (for Alice Palmer frequently combined speaking trips and visits to her family with her Chicago stays), she had the university on her mind, and she was at work promoting its interests in one way or another. When she was not in Chicago she wrote frequently to Talbot and Harper and occasionally to Laughlin, Hale, and other close friends. After Robert Herrick joined the faculty in 1893, he was her constant informant, sometimes messenger, and occasional confidant. She read the Chicago newspapers when away to help keep informed. When she returned to Cambridge after nearly six weeks in

Chicago in the fall of 1892, she wrote Marion Talbot that when Talbot's letters came her inclination was to start back immediately to Chicago herself. [128](#) Talbot received detailed almost daily instructions on personnel and dormitory matters. Palmer's correspondence with Harper during 1892-93 shows how hard it was for her to entrust the crucial decisions of those early months to others and how she longed to be in Chicago attending to problems herself. "I long to be in the midst of it," she lamented. "At least give me more to do for you." [129](#)

7

During those years Alice Palmer was indeed a busy lady. Her Wellesley responsibilities did not cease. She continued as an active member of the State Board of Education. She had other Cambridge obligations including a husband whose family lived nearby, and two homes, one of which had just become the Palmers' Cambridge residence. She was also a member of the Lady Board of Managers of the Columbian Exposition of 1893. George and Wellesley were the most demanding.

She could not abandon Wellesley. She was still both a trustee and a member of the executive committee. She did not consider relinquishing either post. Her interventions were probably less frequent, but she struggled to make board meetings. Eben Horsford's death in 1893 did not make things easier. She had lost a powerful surrogate who kept an eye on Wellesley affairs. As commencement approached in 1893 she was busy winding up the academic year in Chicago. She wrote George, "I must of course go to Wellesley for the Trustees' meeting next Tuesday morning, and that means Commencement in the afternoon and no way of reaching Boxford that night. . . . I wish you could go over for the public exercises. They are so unhappy, and feel so sore at my `leaving them to raise money for the Annex, and to spend my time in Chicago' that I long to either go or have you there." [130](#) A number of major policy decisions were made at Wellesley during those years. It is surprising because of the strong stand she took on sororities at Chicago, but she seems to have participated minimally in the decision to allow society houses on the Wellesley campus. [131](#) Bible study was further curtailed in 1893, but Palmer was not present at the meeting. [132](#) The Academic Council received formal recognition by the trustees in 1894 and Palmer played an active role. [133](#) Helen Shafer, her successor, was often ill and died early in 1894. Again Alice Palmer was deeply concerned in the problem of finding a new president. Fortunately Palmer was in Cambridge for the many crucial meetings in January and February, and the board finally settled on one of Alice Freeman's recruits when she was president, Julia Irvine, a classical scholar who had trained in Leipsig. [134](#) Irvine consulted Palmer frequently on policy. [135](#)

Midway through her second year at Chicago the Palmers moved into the house on Quincy Street that was to remain their home for the rest of their lives. Alice's larger income undoubtedly helped make this move possible. Fortunately, George as usual attended to the details of an extensive remodeling and the move itself. However, Alice's family continued to make demands. Her father appeared unannounced in Chicago during the hectic opening week of the fall term in 1893. Of course, he wanted to see the fair and expected her to show it to him. Her always helpful friends, the Spragues, took him in. Alice tried to find a little time for him. [136](#) George's family gathered

at the Palmers for Thanksgiving. [137](#) George's older brother Julius was dying and needed additional succor. She accompanied George to the concert and drama series in Cambridge.

The World's Fair continued to demand some of her attention although her responsibilities had peaked earlier, and she had severed her official ties as a Lady Manager when she accepted the Chicago job. Although George was crushed that it kept her away from Cambridge for a few extra days, she participated in the opening ceremonies in October of 1892. She participated in all the festivities, sat on all the platforms. [138](#) It was a great moment, 150,000 people under one roof, "grand bands playing the Star Spangled Banner, everybody is shouting wildly. . . . It is so superb that my heart is in my throat." [139](#) Alice loved pageants. But there was World's Fair business too. Space for education was below that allotted in 1876, and she enlisted President Harper's help in getting it increased. [140](#) The pageantry thrilled her but she was keenly aware of the exposition's importance to women--enlarging their outlook and "proving they could organize independently toward a complex end." [141](#)

With this kind of schedule of responsibilities, it is no wonder Alice Palmer got sick. Halfway through her first year a severe cold put her to bed at the Beatrice for a week, but she worked on, receiving a succession of callers with whom she dealt with everything from dormitory charges to faculty appointments. [142](#) In an attempt to better protect her time she stayed with the Otho Spragues the next year, but again illness harassed her. In addition to her usual colds, she developed hemorrhoids. As she often did, she looked to her old classmate Eliza Mosher for help. Probably Mosher operated on her in November in New York. [143](#) Although Mosher's treatment did not eliminate the problem permanently, she seemed to get relief. A wicked tooth tormented her in the fall of 1894, but her first serious illness in several years struck her in the spring of 1894. She returned to Cambridge in May seriously ill after a Herculean fund-raising marathon that left her completely exhausted. One of her severe colds developed into peritonitis and in mid-June, a month later, although she was out of danger, she was still too weak to sit up for more than brief periods. Harper had been told she was ill and unable to travel. Nonetheless she saw him as angry that she did not return to Chicago and the money-raising circuit. She wrote plaintively to Laurence Laughlin that the women's committee to raise money for a women's building did not respond to her letters. Could he get information for her, had any money been raised? [144](#) Her interest in women and Chicago did not flag, but once more her body was telling her she had done enough.

However, halfway through her second year of commuting Alice Palmer's enthusiasm for Chicago's new academic challenge began to wane slightly. Harper, mercurial, impetuous, and sometimes petty, was not the easiest person with whom to get along. He was beginning to rely on Palmer less as his academic enterprise was more solidly underway and increasingly used her as a convenient handmaiden rather than as a trusted advisor. He consulted her less and less about academic appointments and university policy. He continued to draw on her talents as an administrator of residential institutions (and she was less and less interested in housekeeping), but essentially he converted her into a fund-raiser. Finding donors had never been one of her Wellesley successes. She tried hard for Chicago with some success, but the job only made her sick and reactivated all her old physical weaknesses: the debilitating colds, the cough, the fatigue. Cambridge and the Quincy Street house began to beckon alluringly.

When Palmer returned to Chicago after Christmas in January of 1894 she found President Harper furious because she had recommended Elizabeth Wallace, a Chicago instructor, for a position at Knox College. Harper thought her "disloyal." She in turn was critical of Harper because everything was in the hands of a few with "the sad results of centralization." [145](#) George suggested she discuss with Harper ending her connection with Chicago at the end of that year. [146](#) But what he really had in mind was only a ploy to stimulate Harper's positive assessment of Alice. It was that spring that Palmer was offered the supervisorship of the Boston Board of Education. She considered it seriously, but George was negative. "I have never supposed that place could compare in power and dignity of work with the one you have now." He argued further, "I do not know an occupation for you which presents so little hardship as this . . . I do not want you to sit about the house at the absolute mercy of committees, callers and alpaca women. . . Don't give up a place which offers tolerably good work until you see your way to something better." [147](#) About that time Harry P. Judson, an old friend and ally, was made dean of the graduate school at Chicago instead of Andrews, and Judson was someone with whom Palmer had always worked easily. Faculty governance in policy matters was again in the ascendency. She had agreed to stay at Chicago for another year, but it would be her last. [148](#) In May she so advised Harper, although she did not formally resign until December, effective the end of the academic year. [149](#) Harper forwarded her resignation to the board of trustees but took no personal notice of it. He greeted it with absolute silence. This was the unkindest cut of all.

Palmer was convinced that Harper no longer wanted her at Chicago, that she was too quick to organize faculty against schemes of his which she opposed. She always favored faculty over administrative decisions at Chicago. Also she fought him bitterly over Wallace's release which he opposed to the end. [150](#) Palmer felt "the value and influence of work such as mine here, coming and going as I do, depends very much upon mutual confidence between the president and myself." [151](#) Confidence in Harper she could no longer feel, and she believed this lack to be mutual. Nonetheless she wrote Harper an affectionate note as she sailed for Europe in August and a congratulatory letter from Paris when the university received a new Rockefeller gift. [152](#) With time the bitter memories faded. She remembered instead the exultant sense of creation that marked Chicago's early months. She wrote Laurence Laughlin: "Here I sit and the buildings of old Harvard vanish, and turn into the new University a thousand miles away. And I live it all over again, even the old Beatrice days . . . and laugh over the toothpicks, and faculty meetings, and all the rest of the mad, merry, desperate, friendly time." [153](#)

Alice Palmer had one more formal relationship with Chicago. She was invited to make a major address at the dicennial celebration in 1901 and participate in the dedication of Foster Hall. [154](#) Harper's invitation came very late, barely five weeks before the event. She was insulted at its tardiness. Her busy schedule was already set. She at first refused and then shuffled her many June speaking engagements to accept. She wanted the accolades and she cared about Chicago. She sat on the platform with Harper and John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller, whom she had never met, grasped both her hands and thanked her for what she had done. [155](#) The occasion was bittersweet. Harper did not use the occasion to confer on her the honorary LL.D. that was appropriate. Nor did the University of Michigan a few days later where she went to speak and participate in the twenty-fifth anniversary of her class. Neither of the universities that meant the most to her saw fit to give her what George knew she most wanted. By this time she had several LL.D. degrees, but honors from Chicago and Michigan would have capped her career.



Alice Palmer in the formal portrait made for the University of Chicago's dicennial celebration. (Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.)

What honors Chicago chose to bestow came after her death and that of President Harper. A campanile in her memory was dedicated on the University of Chicago campus in 1908. Her neighbor Charles Eliot wrote on that occasion, "I have never known a woman who better deserved to have her name and work recalled at a seat of learning in insistent and serviceable harmonies." [156](#) Alice Palmer would have liked those adjectives. She saw herself as both serviceable and insistent and as untiring as a set of bells.

What did Alice Palmer give to the infant University of Chicago? Her friend, William Gardner Hale, thought he summarized her contribution at her memorial service. First of all, he said, her name--she was known. In 1892 the University of Chicago was not. That is only partly true. Second, she "established the standards of refined and hospitable living which still prevail," a worthy goal that she certainly aspired to; third, she collected and institutionalized the interest-free student loan fund which enabled many impecunious students to attend the university. [157](#) Hale was Palmer's friend. He had often followed her guidance when both were on campus, but he had forgotten Palmer's most important contributions: insistence on an equal place for women at all university levels, her fight for faculty governance against an arbitrary administration, for self-governing student life free of petty rules.

Alice Palmer's influence and performance during the University of Chicago's early years is impressive. Until very recently few women have exerted the kind of power that she exercised over academic policy decisions of fundamental importance. Undoubtedly she thought she had made a breakthrough, that women henceforth would be privy to the highest councils of academia, equal to men in shaping American universities. Actually she was participating in a fluke of history. Personality in juxtaposition with opportunity had provided her a unique occasion. She was an experienced, knowledgeable administrator with a dozen hands-on skills useful to a president beleaguered with problems. William Rainey Harper needed Alice Freeman Palmer's talent for solving practical affairs and her ability to make decisions expeditiously. In a modest way Alice Palmer did provide women with a stronger place in coeducational universities in the 1890s, but that foothold proved ephemeral and it was not until the 1970s that her hopes were realized. Chicago women like Marion Talbot and Elizabeth Wallace had a toehold and by persistent vigilance parlayed the toehold into a permanent place for women in the university, but hardly more than their sisters were able to secure in other institutions (especially state universities) which had not benefited by the pioneering zeal of Alice Palmer.

Alice Palmer was full of energy, willing to expedite practical problems, well connected in the academic establishment, and basically free economically of the job she had undertaken. All this gave her true independence from academic bureaucracy and free rein for her practical, eclectic way of approaching problems, but it did not provide women with a pattern for subduing male bastions of power. She herself experienced the negative implications of her approach as Chicago and Harper became more confident and needed her less. The great expectations to which she had responded in 1892, her own expectations and those of the women who had urged her to

encompass their destiny, did not come to pass. Women neither took their places with men as scholars and scientists and academic administrators, nor did they control the social spaces of campuses, set the style, as Alice would have had it, or establish higher behavioral standards than those at male universities. Her goal would have made universities not only exemplary oases of scholarship but incubators of progressive reforms and bastions of a new morality. She failed. Perhaps knowing intuitively that she had failed, she gradually withdrew into Cambridge's safe, still waters, where she was who she was--an educator valued, respected, and loved, and George Palmer's equally respected wife--and lived out her short life as a mover rather than a shaker.

Chapter Nine Notes

[1](#) Richard J. Storr, *Harper's University: The Beginnings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), is still the best account of Chicago's early days.

[2](#) Darnell Rucker, *The Chicago Pragmatists* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 14-15.

[3](#) See *ibid.*, 16; and Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 1. For a critical and analytical contemporary account of the Chicago experiment, see the *Nation*, 55 (September 22, 1892): 216-17.

[4](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to J. Laurence Laughlin, December 21, 1892.

[5](#) W. Carson Ryan, *Studies in Early Graduate Education* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 93-115.

[6](#) Storr, *Harper's University*, 211. The University of Chicago's outreach was not bound by class or social status. Hilda Polacheck, a bright Polish immigrant who worked in a shirt factory attended for one term in 1904 on a scholarship arranged by Jane Addams (Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull House Girl*, ed. Dena Polacheck Epstein [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989], 86).

[7](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 18, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[8](#) *Diary*, March 12, 1892. Alice Freeman Palmer to Marion Talbot. Marion Talbot Papers, University of Chicago Archives. Two women, Elsa Lovina Ames and Ellen Louise Lowell, were on the faculty of Stanford University when it opened in 1891, but both were in junior positions. One taught drawing and the other physical education (Orrin L. Elliott, *Stanford University: The First Twenty-Five Years* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1937]), 61- 63). However, the next year Mary Sheldon Barnes, a University of Michigan graduate who taught at Wellesley in the 1870s, became assistant professor of history at Stanford and taught and published there until 1897. She had come to Stanford without an appointment the previous year with her husband Earl Barnes, head of the department of education. (Robert E. Keohane, "Mary Sheldon Barnes," in Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women, 1607- 1950* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971], 1:92- 93.) The Barneses were certainly an academic couple, sometimes publishing together, but they were not hired together. It was his career, not hers, that sparked Stanford's interest and brought them there.

[9](#) *Diary*, February 29, 1892.

[10](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 11, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[11](#) Ibid.

[12](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 22, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[13](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 29, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[14](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 22, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[15](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 26, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[16](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to Marion Talbot, March 16, 1892. Marion Talbot Papers, University of Chicago Archives.

[17](#) Ibid.

[18](#) See Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 30-31.

[19](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 26, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[20](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 22, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[21](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 30, 1889. Wellesley Typescripts.

[22](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 30, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[23](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 17, 1892; Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 22, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[24](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 14, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[25](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 16, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[26](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 19, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[27](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 17, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[28](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 24, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[29](#) Rucker, *Chicago Pragmatists*, 10-11; Storr, *Harper's University*, 18, 43.

[30](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 24, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[31](#) Ibid.

[32](#) Ibid.

[33](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 29, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[34](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 29, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[35](#) George Herbert Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 5, 1892. Harper Papers.

[36](#) George Herbert Palmer's brief account in his *Life* of the Chicago offer and Alice's reaction to it is almost pure fiction. He wrote that she was "from the first against accepting the calls" because "she loved her home" and thought his roots "were too deep in Harvard soil for removal to be quite honorable" (Palmer, *Life*, 233).

[37](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 28, 1892. Harper Papers.

[38](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, June 25, 1892. Harper Papers.

[39](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, July 6, 1892. Harper Papers.

[40](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, July 16, 1892. Harper Papers.

[41](#) Ibid.

[42](#) Ibid.

[43](#) Palmer, *Life*, 242-45.

[44](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 13, 1892. Harper Papers.

[45](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 22, 1892, Harper Papers; and Correspondence of Marion Talbot and Alice Freeman Palmer, 1892. University of Chicago Archives.

[46](#) See Marion Talbot, *More than Lore: The Reminiscences of Marion Talbot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936); Geraldine Joncich Clifford, *Lone Voyagers: Academic Women in Coeducational Universities, 1870-1937* (New York: Feminist Press, 1989); and Correspondence of Alice Freeman Palmer and Marion Talbot, Wellesley College Archives and University of Chicago Archives.

[47](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to Marion Talbot, July 5, 1892. Marion Talbot Papers, University of Chicago Archives.

[48](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 6, 1892. Harper Papers.

[49](#) See Virginia Kemp Fish, "'More than Lore': Marion Talbot and Her Role in the Founding Years of the University of Chicago," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 8 (May/June 1985): 228-49; Rosalind Rosenberg in Faragher and Howe, *Women and Higher Education*, 119-20.

[50](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 35.

[51](#) Fish, "More than Lore," 234.

[52](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to Marion Talbot, May 23, 1893. Marion Talbot Papers, University of Chicago Archives; Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 23, 1893. Harper Papers.

[53](#) Talbot, *More than Lore*, 6.

[54](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

[55](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

[56](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 25, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[57](#) *Ibid.*; Talbot, *More than Lore*, chap. 6.

[58](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 22, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[59](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 20, 27, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[60](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, September 23, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[61](#) For a discussion of Chicago's women's network in the 1890s see Bordin, *Frances Willard*, 149-52.

[62](#) Mary Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 71- 73; Louise C. Wade, *Graham Taylor: Pioneer for Social Justice, 1851-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) chap. 3; and David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), chap. 4 all contain good accounts of the Chicago ambience in the 1890s.

[63](#) Lena Ruegamer, "Chicago Women Reformers, 1863-1893: The Development of an Elite Network." Paper presented at the Conference on Female Spheres, New Harmony, Indiana, October 1981.

[64](#) See Ryan, *Early Graduate Education*, 119-20.

[65](#) Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 29-30; Rosenberg, "Academic Prism," 326; Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 138.

[66](#) Chicago's promise to open up all of academia to women was better than its performance. Of the nine women who received Ph.D.'s in the social sciences in its first decade and a half not one received an appointment at a coeducational university while two-thirds of the males did, and the percentage of males on the Chicago faculty steadily increased rather than decreased (Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade*, 72-73).

[67](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 20, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[68](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, October 19, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[69](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, September 25, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.

[70](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 21, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[71](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 25, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[72](#) Ibid.

[73](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 27, 29, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[74](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 26, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.

[75](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 14, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.

[76](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, March 16, 1893. Harper Papers.

[77](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 87-88. Gordon's book is the first major study of the role of women at the University of Chicago and the pioneering role played by Palmer and Talbot. Interestingly, more attention previously has been paid by historians of women's education to Alice Freeman Palmer's career at Wellesley than to her truly pioneering work at the University of Chicago.

[78](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, June 3, 1890. Wellesley Typescripts, Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 13, 1892. Harper Papers.

- [79](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 24, 1892. Harper Papers.
- [80](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, Fall 1892. Harper Papers. Gordon, *Higher Education*, 87.
- [81](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 58-62; Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres* stresses the importance of women's access to graduate work at Chicago, chap. 3.
- [82](#) Peckham, *The Making of the University of Michigan*, 94.
- [83](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 1, 23, 1893. Harper Papers.
- [84](#) Talbot, *More than Lore*, 90.
- [85](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, June 13, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [86](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, November 30, 1894. Harper Papers.
- [87](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, September 20, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [88](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 12, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [89](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 10, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [90](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 15, 1895. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [91](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 18, 1893; October 6, 18, 23, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [92](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 98-99.
- [93](#) Storr, *Harper's University*, 168-70; Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, *A History of the University of Chicago: The First Quarter Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 252-53.
- [94](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 2, 10, 11, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [95](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 9, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [96](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 18, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [97](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 105-6.

[98](#) Goodspeed, *University of Chicago*, 447-48; Steven J. Diner, *A City and Its Universities: Public Policy in Chicago, 1892-1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 123ff.

[99](#) Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 108.

[100](#) For a discussion of the role played in progressive reform by University of Chicago women see Dorothy Brown, *Setting A Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 34-5; and especially Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade*, chap. 3.

[101](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 112-20. Charles Van Hise, president of the University of Wisconsin, also favored sex segregation. Leland Stanford's founding grant had stipulated that the trustees provide equal advantages to men and women, and Mrs. Stanford was especially welcoming to them. But the increasing percentage of women among the students was soon perceived as a threat not only by Stanford men but also by Mrs. Stanford who herself stipulated a quota of 500 by charter amendment (Elliott, *Stanford University*, 132). By 1907 women outnumbered men in seven of the thirteen state university colleges of arts and sciences. Men feared the so-called "culture" courses like literature would become the preserve of women and drive out the men (Geraldine Clifford in Faragher and Howe, *Higher Education*, 169). See Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 43-45 for a discussion of the fear of feminization at coeducational universities.

[102](#) Goodspeed, *University of Chicago*, 405-8; Talbot, *More than Lore*, chap. 10; Gordon, *Higher Education*, 112-20.

[103](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 190.

[104](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to Marion Talbot, February 26, 1893. Marion Talbot Papers. University of Chicago Archives.

[105](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 20, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.

[106](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, February 14, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.

[107](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 21, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[108](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 11, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.

[109](#) The tolerance of the Christian Union is documented in a student memoir "First Impressions of the University of Chicago" by Madelin Wallin (Madelin Wallin Papers, University of Chicago Archives), who arrived on campus in 1893.

[110](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, February 14, April 14, 18, 20, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts. Alice Freeman Palmer to Robert Herrick, June 8, 1892. Robert Herrick Papers, University of Chicago Archives.

- [111](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 3, 1893. Harper Papers.
- [112](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to J. Laurence Laughlin, August 31, 1893.
- [113](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, November 3, 1894. Harper Papers. Gummere, a long respected scholar, stayed at Haverford despite many attractive offers. Interestingly he was the one man M. Carey Thomas might have married (Dobkin, *Making of a Feminist*, 129).
- [114](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, March 16, 1893. Harper Papers.
- [115](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 20, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [116](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, February 2, 10, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [117](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, June 19, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [118](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 1, 1893. Harper Papers.
- [119](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, September 25, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts. Storr, *Harper's University*, 249ff.
- [120](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 18, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [121](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 10, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [122](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 5, 10, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts; Storr, *Harper's University*, 90.
- [123](#) Gordon, *Higher Education*, 89.
- [124](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 4, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [125](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 22, October 4, 10, 23, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [126](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 6, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [127](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 31, 1893. Harper Papers.
- [128](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to Marion Talbot, October 30, 1892. Marion Talbot Papers, University of Chicago Archives.
- [129](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, December 1, 1892. Harper Papers.

- [130](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, June 15, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [131](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 20, 1893, November 2, 1893. Wellesley College Archives.
- [132](#) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 1, 1893. Wellesley College Archives.
- [133](#) Minutes of the Executive Committee, February 1, 10, 1894. Wellesley College Archives.
- [134](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to Robert Herrick, January 31, 1894. Glasscock, *Wellesley*, 42-55.
- [135](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, October 15, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [136](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 18, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [137](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to J. Laurence Laughlin, Thanksgiving Eve, 1892.
- [138](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 13, 18, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [139](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, October 21, 1892. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [140](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, December 1, 1892. Harper Papers.
- [141](#) Palmer and Palmer, *The Teacher*, 362.
- [142](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, February 14, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [143](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, November 25, 26, 27, 1893. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [144](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to J. Laurence Laughlin, June 13, 1894. Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, June 13, 1894. Harper Papers. Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, June 5, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [145](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 4, 5, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [146](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, January 13, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [147](#) George Herbert Palmer to Alice Freeman Palmer, April 4, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [148](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, April 6, 7, 11, 18, 1894. Wellesley Typescripts.
- [149](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, May 9, December 14, 1894. Harper Papers. In fact, both Palmers were offered chairs at the University of Michigan in the spring of

1895; George promptly refused for both of them. Michigan was about to embark on creating a Dean of Women and Alice was first choice. See George Palmer to James B. Angell, March 31, 1895. Angell Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

[150](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 8, 9, 1895. Wellesley Typescripts. Wallace returned to Chicago after a year and a half at Knox and a year studying at the Sorbonne to a distinguished Chicago career that ended only with her retirement. Her autobiography, *The Unending Journey* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952), is a delightful, beautifully written account of Chicago's early decades.

[151](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, January 15, 1895. Wellesley Typescripts.

[152](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to William Rainey Harper, August 17, November 18, 1895. Harper Papers.

[153](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to J. Laurence Laughlin, Christmas Day, 1898.

[154](#) William Rainey Harper to Alice Freeman Palmer, May 2, 1901. Harper Papers.

[155](#) Alice Freeman Palmer to George Herbert Palmer, June 16, 1901. Wellesley Typescripts.

[156](#) Charles Eliot to Harry Pratt Judson, June 6, 1908. Harry Pratt Judson Papers, University of Chicago Archives.

[157](#) William Gardner Hale's remarks at the Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Service, University of Chicago, 1903, as printed in *A Memorial to Alice Freeman Palmer*, 20-21.