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CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Centennial Founders Day Keynote Address

April 5, 2011

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Refocusing Our Lens: The Founding of Connecticut College in Historical Context

Founders Day. A centennial. One hundred years of an important liberal arts college in the state of Connecticut. This is a distinctive accomplishment to be celebrated. And, lest you think it's simply convenient public relations for the College to use a whole year to celebrate its centennial, let me emphasize that many years of effort were needed to bring Conn from an idea in the minds of several Connecticut advocates to the actual site where we sit today.

In considering this talk, it was very difficult for me to decide where to concentrate. I have one hundred years of stories, events, and people to choose from. Admittedly, there was a huge temptation to focus on the era I know best: the early 1970s when I was a student at Conn. But ultimately, I decided that the founding of this institution in 1911 deserves its own attention, and that as a historian of education, I could tell the story while setting it within a wider context of higher education. Let me, then, take us through the founding, adding a wide-angle perspective, and end with a speculation on why this story seems so less present than it should be in the daily life of this campus.¹

If we were gathered here in New London 100 years ago today, what exactly would we be celebrating and who would be alongside us? We might be among the townspeople of New London who had just raised over \$100,000 to create the new college in our city. We might be celebrating with Elizabeth Wright and Colin Buell who had devoted considerable time – in Buell's case, years – to generating support for a women's college in New London. We might be looking to thank the somewhat reticent but very powerful Morton Plant who had contributed the money that put us over our fundraising goal, and who was privately preparing to endow the new venture with a \$1M gift.

Most specifically, we would have just heard the news that the Connecticut General Assembly had chartered our new college, agreeing that we could create a Board of Trustees, hire a president, plan a curriculum, hire faculty, recruit students, continue raising money for buildings and furnishings, and otherwise do everything necessary to open within just a few years. Well, first, we would decide to change our name from the "Thames College" that appeared on the charter to the "Connecticut College for Women" that, upon reflection (and the encouragement of Mr. Plant), we agreed was a bolder name for our effort.

It would actually take four years until we opened our doors with 20 faculty members and 151 women students. But none of that was unusual in founding a new college. The work was large and ambition was high, since the new institution would be the sole four-year collegiate opportunity for women in the state of Connecticut.

How could it be, in a time when college-going was increasing, that a college-minded young woman from this area would need to travel to Massachusetts, Rhode Island, or beyond to receive a four-year degree? Understanding this absence requires us to pull back and think about the status of "college" at the turn of the twentieth century, and then to look at the state of Connecticut in particular.

Today we are easily able to distinguish between colleges and high schools, between four-year and two-year degrees, and between college degrees and technical diplomas. We know that engineers and teachers, for instance, need at least a bachelor's degree to practice their professions; anything less qualifies a student more for the role of technician or teacher's aide. Not so in 1911. College had not yet established itself as the basic training for most white-collar work; that would not happen until the great demographic changes of the 1950s and 1960s. Even today, less than three-quarters of American high school graduates go on to college.

In Connecticut in 1911, if you wanted to be a teacher, you went to one of the three normal schools spaced around the state in Willimantic, New Britain, and New Haven. The "normal school," a term borrowed from a French name for institutions that prepare teachers, served women and men alike, although women generally quite outnumbered men. These schools offered two-year programs that strengthened a student's preparation in English, history, mathematics, science, spelling, physical and manual education, and classroom practice. For some, this combination of courses represented remedial work, since many of these students would not even have finished high school.²

High school was itself a fairly new institution, just developing into the standardized four-year experience we know today. Before the 1910s, high schools were seen as somewhat exclusive, necessary mostly for students who expected to proceed to college. Within two decades, however, high schools had developed into the capacious, varied opportunity that we see today (one scholar called it “the shopping mall high school”), having done so primarily to inculcate vast numbers of immigrants into American expectations and to provide trained workers for America’s increasingly commercialized and industrialized workforce.³ Only in the 1930s did the three public normal schools in Connecticut start offering four-year degrees as state teachers’ colleges. They would not be known as Central, Eastern, and Southern Connecticut State universities until decades later.

What about the university at Storrs? Surely this large, public flagship had a place for women in 1911. What eventually became the University of Connecticut began as Storrs Agricultural School in 1881, only taking on the name “college” a dozen years later. The institution began admitting women two years after its founding. But, as with the normal schools, the education was limited. Partly because of its location in the center of the state and because of the land-grant legislation that created schools to serve agricultural needs, Storrs primarily reached and prepared farmers. In its two-year vocational program, students learned about improving soil, handling crops, using farm tools, and working with livestock. They also worked on the business side of farming, including handling accounts and inventory. Alongside this vocational training, students took classes in reading, speaking, and writing, plus arithmetic and geometry.

In 1914, the college expanded into four-year degrees, although the state’s residents continued to consider it a college for farmers, and the name remained Connecticut Agricultural College. Women who attended would not have received very expansive collegiate preparation. Only in 1933 was the public convinced that the college had sufficiently expanded to change its name to “Connecticut State College.” We should note that, one of the opponents of that 1933 name change was Connecticut College for Women, which argued from what we would today call a “branding” or trademark perspective: wouldn’t the new name encroach on the public’s understanding of the school in New London? At a legislative hearing on the name change, legislators listened politely to Conn College’s concern, but rejected the appeal, on grounds that a private institution could not stop the state from using its own name.⁴

What type of young woman or man sought a college education around the turn of the twentieth century? As I mentioned, college-going before 1900 was still an unusual opportunity. Only 3% of the age group attended, and we have also established that the definition of “college” varied. It might be more appropriate, then, to consider the numbers of students pursuing some sort of higher education, whether officially called “college” or not.

For instance, at Wheaton College, where I now work, female students had been attending since 1834, and clearly receiving an advanced education. Yet, until 1912, Wheaton was known as a Female Seminary, not a college. Mount Holyoke, too, started as Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1837, becoming a college only in 1893. The “seminary” name today conjures the idea of a specialized school preparing students for the ministry. Not so in the 1800s. A “seminary” or “academy” represented a cross between what we think of now as high school and college. Their students were often looking to become teachers and missionaries (both outside the United States and within its newly-developing areas to the west); others were seeking training that would allow them to help out in family businesses and to educate their own children.⁵

If college education was somewhat exclusive, did it also imply that only the rich attended? Again, no. Certainly there were children of wealthy families who used college to polish their backgrounds. But, there was always a group of middle-class students who paid their way through college, took advantage of scholarships, and lived at home or in boarding houses in hopes that college would launch them on a path of greater opportunity. During “the Roaring Twenties” college would begin to become a place students went to experience young adulthood and craft a new youth culture.⁶

Women who sought college, especially in the decades before 1910, were often quite serious scholars who recognized the unusual opportunity they had been given. Since women had to fight their way into most institutions, once there, they focused on study and learning. But before 1900, there were few respectable options other than teaching for females to earn a living outside their homes. In fact, in the 1880s, women graduates would ask “after college – what?”, as the title of various advice pamphlets queried. Jane Addams, for instance, an 1881 graduate of Rockford College in Illinois, would agonize about the tug between what she called the “family claim” to return home to be with family and the “social claim” of the public role she wanted to play.⁷

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, several of the well-known women's colleges were established. In considering these "Seven Sisters," Vassar came first, in 1865, followed by Wellesley and Smith in 1875, Bryn Mawr in 1885, and the coordinate colleges Radcliffe and Barnard in 1879 and 1889 respectively. As already noted, Mount Holyoke shifted from seminary to college in 1893. At such single-sex schools, a women's culture emerged where the students could pursue serious study while also creating a unique bond of friendship, free from the challenges by men.⁸

Yet, coeducation was the wave of the educational future. Once the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act created a new set of public colleges, most of those new state universities opened to both men and women. By 1900, 60% of the women in four-year institutions were in coeducational schools.⁹ Here in the Northeast, we have a somewhat skewed view of the prominence of single-sex institutions because this area had such a well-developed array of separate, private men's and women's colleges.

So, this brings us back to Connecticut. Where does the 1911 founding of Connecticut College for Women fit in the scope of this history, and why was it created as an institution for women only.

For those answers, we must hold our founders in abeyance for a bit longer, so that we can set the proper context for Elizabeth Wright, Colin Buell, Morton Plant, and first president Frederick Sykes. We must also take a detour from New London, and start our story about 40 miles to the north and west, and forty years earlier at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. (In fact, in a small nod to how simple technology can reflect symbolic truth, when I wanted to find out exactly how far Middletown is from New London, I put into my smart phone's GPS: "start: Wesleyan University; end: Connecticut College.") And that is exactly what happened. The impetus for building Connecticut College for Women in New London in 1911 became much greater when Wesleyan decided in 1909 to stop admitting women. Wesleyan's rejection of coeducation, after a forty-year "experiment" provided the spark for our founders to organize New London's energies, people, and money to create a college where women's attendance would depend not on the sufferance of its male students and administrators, but instead, be crafted solely for their experience.¹⁰

Wesleyan chose coeducation with more pragmatism than enthusiasm. The all-male college had been founded in 1831 by Methodists, although its early ties to the Methodist church were much less than they would later become. Methodists were more committed to coeducation than most congregations; in fact, 83% of their collegiate institutions served both men and women. When Methodists opened Boston University and Syracuse University as coeducational institutions in 1869 and 1870, the older Wesleyan determined to tighten its ties with the Methodist church. In 1871, Wesleyan announced it would admit women; the following year, four women joined the first-year class.

There was little enthusiasm for the decision within the student body, however. The male students disliked having women join their classes, although the early opposition was not egregious. After all, women were few in number, never more than 10 women per class for the first two decades. Nor were women students visible everywhere. For instance, they were not permitted to use the gymnasium – an issue of some import as sports and physical education grew more prominent. Women also did not live on campus, where there was a tradition of men's residence halls and eating clubs. When the total number of women reached about 15, the Wesleyan president provided a house for them. That dormitory soon acquired the nickname "the Quail Roost," as "quail" became the unfriendly term applied to female students.

Throughout the 1870s, men tolerated their female classmates, noting in the college annual that "we are glad to see such good representatives of the sex, but hope that the number may never greatly increase" (*Olla Podrida*, quoted in Oliveira, p. 95). Like other institutions, Wesleyan began to change with the 1880s and 1890s, as more graduates turned to careers in education and business, rather than the traditional ministry. Likewise, college life became more masculine, with the rise of fraternities and football, both places where women were not particularly welcomed. At the same time, Wesleyan's women – like many across the country – were becoming increasingly successful college students.

These pioneering women were extremely focused on academic success, especially in coeducational settings, where they felt they had to justify their presence. At Wesleyan, women grew in numbers and in accomplishment. In the 1890s, women's percentage of the entering class began to creep upwards, at 15-25% (the high was nearly 30% in 1897, the year Connecticut College founder Elizabeth Wright graduated from Wesleyan). In addition to sheer numbers, women were doing well scholastically. In that first class of 1872, all four women earned Phi Beta Kappa (compared to 25% of the men), and women continued such success. In 1882, the student newspaper noted that,

“during the last seven years less than 25% of the gentlemen and more than 80% of the ladies have graduated with honors” (*Argus*, quoted in Oliveira, p. 96).

As the numbers grew, women began to assert their place. They created their own organizations, including sororities and a literary society. An uproar over the editors’ treatment of women in the class yearbook of 1895 crystallized tensions between male and female students. In that year, the college annual harassed individual female students, along with coeducation in general, in a way that felt unseemly to those who had tried to keep civility over the years. The yearbook openly mocked women and described a secret men’s organization called PDQ, or Press the Damsels Quietly.

The women’s annoyance at their treatment prompted those in the junior class to refuse to pay their \$5.00 “class tax” unless they were given a chance to approve material in the yearbook. The male editors were equally furious, and for a few years, simply kept women out of the book entirely. In 1898, advocates on both sides of the coeducation question took the concerns public, reaching to newspapers and magazines in Hartford and beyond. These publications seemed to enjoy highlighting Wesleyan’s discomfort with a situation that was still causing concern thirty years into the decision. An editorial even appeared in *Harper’s Bazaar*, indicating that the men felt “inconvenienced” by the women and wanted them out of the way.

Far from garnering support for the female students, however, the effect was to embarrass Wesleyan and annoy its male students and alumni. One alumnus pleaded in the campus newspaper, “Wesleyan’s pride and boast has been masculine strength and virility.... Save us from becoming a namby pamby college, and a nonentity among our fellow institutions” (*Argus*, quote in Oliveira, p. 101). One current student worried that women represented a Trojan Horse on campus, that would soon eliminate masculine efforts like baseball and football, replacing them with a “croquet club and sewing circles.” Another redefined coeducation more as “co-toleration” by the men and “co-endurance” by the women.

Certainly, there were supporters of women on the Wesleyan campus, many of whom chided their classmates for not offering proper respect for “the fair maidens.” One man in the class of 1888 implored, “In the name of all gallantry, young men who love your college, call a halt to this anti coed agitation” (Oliveira, p. 98). Generally, however, the feeling was unease with women at Wesleyan and what their presence meant for the college.

In 1900, the institution set up a committee to examine Wesleyan’s role in the education of women. The all-male committee explored whether Wesleyan should remain coeducational, return to an all-male student body, or perhaps create a “coordinate college” like those recently established at Brown, Harvard, and Columbia. In the coordinate arrangement, men and women were taught separately, lived separately, and graduated separately from a women’s “branch.”¹¹ The committee examined ideas ranging from such a completely separate, coordinate school; to instruction in separate classrooms; to giving women their own distinct catalogs, honors listings, graduation ceremonies, chapel services, and Phi Beta Kappa criteria. It also suggested that women’s enrollment should be limited to 20% of the total Wesleyan student body. Reaction to the report was swift but varied, which persuaded the trustees to decline some of the recommendations. But, Wesleyan did create separate honors listings and catalogs, as well as graduation ceremonies. Most significant, however, was the creation of a quota. Henceforth, women could constitute no more than 20% of an entering Wesleyan class.

Dramatic as these changes were, they did not satisfy the growing concern. Rather than continue to air the issues in public or via committees, the next several years witnessed a sort of underground student effort to freeze women out. Male students adopted a strategy to make women increasingly uncomfortable, especially in the social aspects of college life, through what one scholar called “a culture of hostility.”¹² New male students were told not to talk to women, and in fact, not even to meet their eyes when walking across campus. Some men slammed doors in women’s faces. One man in the class of 1911 later told, with great embarrassment, how he was instructed to sit outside “the Quail Roost” with a toy wooden gun, and point it at all the girls who came outside the building.

By 1907, the situation was deteriorating, just as some financial challenges began to hit the college. A 1905 fundraising campaign had proved less successful than expected, including a lesser than hoped contribution from the Methodist Church. Wesleyan’s president Bradford Raymond (1889-1908), who was a clear supporter of coeducation, became wearied by the public challenges, the fundraising issues, and the Methodist relationship. As his health began to suffer, he announced his resignation in 1907. In the search for a new president, Arnold Shanklin, the president of Upper Iowa University, emerged as a strong candidate. However, Shanklin refused to take the position unless Wesleyan rejected coeducation. Although there remained considerable support for women by many faculty and by the acting president, this time the Board considered the issue rather quickly (although they did delay for a

while to be sure that no financial endowments were adversely affected). The Board voted in 1908 to stop admitting women, effective with the next class. Those already in place could finish their degrees, but no new women would enter as Wesleyan freshmen until a coordinate college could be established alongside Wesleyan.

Although there was a mild commitment to help raise the money, little energy from Wesleyan ever followed.

And this is where the founders of Connecticut College for Women come more fully into the picture. Rather than continue to work with a Wesleyan that had already eliminated women's opportunities and was clearly dragging its feet about a new coordinate institution, women's advocates including Wesleyan alumna Elizabeth Wright determined to go and find a town that would welcome – rather than simply tolerate – a college for women.

But, before we are totally harsh to Wesleyan, we should note that it was hardly the only institution backing away from a commitment to women in the early twentieth century. Although Wesleyan was one of few to actually withdraw women's admission, other institutions did establish quotas and segregate women and men, and they did so for the same reasons as Wesleyan: worries about feminization.

By 1900, women constituted nearly 40% of all college students, and their rate of enrollment increase was more rapid than men's. Many worried that women seemed to be taking over higher education and threatening to become the majority in certain fields. The president of the University of Wisconsin, Charles Van Hise, described this as "sex repulsion": as one sex assumed dominance of a field, the other would be driven away. Van Hise segregated many fields at Wisconsin, where women were 50% of the student body. Likewise, the University of Chicago, which had grandly welcomed women at its opening, also saw women becoming the majority. In 1902, Chicago's President William Rainey Harper separated by sex all courses offered to first- and second-year students, although his effort to create completely separate colleges was thwarted by students and alumnae. Stanford University, too, saw women's proportion reach half of its student body. In response, its president first tried to keep women out of certain courses, but later – with the complete assent of female founder Jane Stanford – settled for establishing a quota in 1904 whereby one woman could be admitted for every three males.¹³

Some institutions took a different approach. Coeducational Boston University and Northwestern University both organized what was called a "more men movement." They added programs in business and engineering, expanded men's dormitories and fraternities, created men's clubs, started recruiting campaigns, and shifted scholarship money to men. As the Northwestern alumni magazine explained, "The campaign for men does not signify a desire to decrease the attendance of women. Northwestern is fortunate in having as fine a company of college women as can be got together, and it desires and expects more of them. But just at this time when the new residences for men will be ready for use it seems wise to put special emphasis upon the advantages Evanston offers for young men" (*Northwestern University Bulletin*, quoted in Oliveira, p. 86). Although we could find similar supportive statements throughout Wesleyan's coeducational years, its decision to abolish coeducation revealed a different sentiment that had always existed alongside the toleration of women. As the Wesleyan student newspaper analyzed in 1909, once the decision was in place: "Theoretically, coeducation may be an excellent arrangement, but it certainly has had a contrary result at Wesleyan. It has been a decided financial drain on the institution and has given nothing of benefit in return" (*Argus*, quoted in Oliveira, p. 121).

Elizabeth Wright, Wesleyan class of 1897, firmly disagreed. During the years since Wright had graduated from Wesleyan, she had developed a career in education, both as a teacher and principal, first in Portland, Connecticut, and later, Hartford. Elizabeth Wright was a clubwoman; that is, she joined other college-educated women in the large network of community-oriented women's clubs that was effecting great change in America's towns and cities by creating schools and neighborhood programs, raising money and visibility for health campaigns, and helping women emerge as leaders in a time when the professions were just opening to them.

Wright belonged to the Hartford College Club, which was watching the events at Wesleyan unfold with great concern. If anything, the Club had been working to expand collegiate options for women of the state; now, they saw the sole college-level opportunity closing to women. Frances Scudder Williams, Wellesley graduate and president of the Hartford College Club, agreed with Wright that the club should challenge Wesleyan's decision, first looking to see how serious the school was about creating a coordinate college for women. Williams named Wright as chair of a committee to establish a women's college in Connecticut.

Wright first gave Wesleyan a chance to make good on the coordinate idea. She exchanged letters with William North Rice, a Wesleyan professor who wrote on behalf of President Shanklin. However, it soon became clear that Wesleyan's offer of access to its library and museums would not be accompanied by any financial support. In fact, Rice made it clear that, in order to found the new institution, it would need at least \$400,000 to be raised from

sources outside Wesleyan's regular supporters. Wright wrote back that she and her club had no intention of raising such money for a school that might back away from a new coordinate institution as easily as it had from coeducation.

Once that option was closed, the women's college committee vigorously began to generate and then entertain interest from places around the state. They eventually received strong expressions of interest from almost two dozen Connecticut towns. One of these – in fact, the one that expressed the greatest commitment – was New London

While Elizabeth Wright had been promulgating interest in a women's institution to serve Connecticut, school principal Colin Buell of New London had also been working to generate support for a women's college specifically in New London. Buell, a Yale alumnus, was principal of the Williams Memorial Institute, a secondary school for girls. He watched as his graduates looked for collegiate options, finding very few within commuting distance, and he had promoted the idea of a women's college in New London since at least 1891

Buell and Wright made a formidable team, once they recognized the serendipity of their interests. The more Wright learned of Buell's energetic advocacy of New London, the more she recognized that the city might be the ideal location. Whereas Hartford and other towns expressed some interest, New London – through Buell's energies – soon provided interest, commitment, land, and money.

In 1910, New London moved quickly to assert its claim for the new college. On the back of Buell's persuasion and knowledge of the community, along with the energized support of Mayor Bryan Mahan, the town committed itself to a fundraising campaign, seeking \$50,000 to accompany the offers of 280 acres of land already on hand from the Allyn, Palmer, and Bolles families. To ensure that the new college would truly have a strong beginning, the initial Board of Incorporators insisted that at least \$100,000 be raised

The town rallied behind this new civic cause, and the archives are filled with breathless stories of how the town inaugurated a ten-day campaign to raise the additional money. As college historian Gertrude Noyes relates: "Men and women volunteered as solicitors, and almost every citizen worked in some way toward the goal. Children raided their piggy banks, their parents rang neighborhood doorbells, and on Sunday in every church in town the clergy preached the gospel of education. In front of the *Day Building* a huge clock with a face twenty-five feet wide was set up with midnight marked \$100,000, and on the First Church Green a thirty-foot thermometer appeared, the highest temperature being \$100,000. Every afternoon at two o'clock all business came to a standstill, as everyone listened to the fire alarm reporting by its blasts how many thousands had been collected during the preceding twenty-four hours" (Noyes, p. 12). By March 1, the town hit the goal, and more. With a last-minute gift by industrialist Morton Plant, \$134,000 was offered to start a college for women in New London.

These, then, are our founders: Elizabeth Wright, who advocated the idea of a women's college in the state; Colin Buell, who knew how to engage New London in this effort of civic pride and who understood the education of women; Morton Plant, a summer resident who not only gave that initial \$25,000, but enabled Connecticut College to open four years later with the gift of a \$1M endowment for operations; and the townspeople of New London, who saw the college as both a civic commitment and an investment in the future.

We should also add Frederick Sykes, who in 1913 became the first president. It was Sykes who, for two years from his home in New York City, worked to engage architects, hire faculty, arrange for services, and otherwise organize the new college. Elizabeth Wright came on as Secretary to the Board (and eventually college Bursar). Buell continued to raise money, touring the state of Connecticut during summer breaks from his principal's job, and remained involved with the college for many years.

Sykes was the person who put in place many of the ideas that Buell had sought for the new institution. Sykes began a traditional professorial career, well-trained in English literature at Johns Hopkins University, but later moved into a broader approach to collegiate education. He came to Connecticut from a post as Director of Technical Education in the Schools of Industrial and Household Arts at Columbia University Teachers College. As such, Sykes organized the initial curriculum of Connecticut College for Women as a mix of traditional liberal arts alongside opportunities in library economy, household economics, landscape gardening, and dietetics. No longer facing the same sort of demand to prove women's capacities that had animated the early Seven Sisters, Connecticut could afford to experiment with a range of courses that prepared women with liberal arts strengths matched by practical elements.¹⁴

It would take me a whole additional lecture to more fully describe how the college changed over the next 100 years. We could trace how long the curriculum stayed as this mix of liberal and vocational, as it certainly was during the

presidency of Katharine Blunt, a former president of the national Home Economics Association. Doing so, we would likely recognize the 1950s presidency of Rosemary Park as an intentional turning point when Conn dropped its vocational elements and became a more traditional liberal arts institution. We could also trace how the college slowly became more national and, eventually, international, bringing students from across the country and the globe, rather than the Connecticut natives of its early years. We would certainly see the single largest change in the college's history, with the advent of coeducation in 1969. A college that had been created specifically because women had not received equal treatment in a mixed environment now understood that very mix to be an advantage and a change worth cultivating.

But, I was invited for only one lecture. So, as I conclude, let me turn to the personal for a few minutes, and do so as a way of connecting Conn's beginning to its present. Once invited to give this talk, as you might imagine, I spent a great deal of time thinking about what aspect of the history to focus on. After a twenty-five year career as a historian of education, it's easy – and in fact, natural – for me to explore Connecticut College in the context of higher educational history. But Conn isn't just any other school I might study; it's the place where my own scholarly inclinations were nurtured and my intellectual perspectives developed. In fact, I realized much later that I became a historian of women's education because Conn, and the gift of its scholarship (both intellectual and financial, I might add), completely changed my life's course.

Yet I tried to think back to what I knew of Conn's history while I was a student here from 1971 to 1975, and the best I could come up with was recalling that grainy black-and-white photo of Conn's community – all those women in long coats – passing hundreds of books hand-by-hand to populate the new Palmer Library. I lived my first two years in Park Hall without ever knowing that Rosemary Park was one of the most notable presidents in the college's history, and well-known beyond New London. I served as dorm president in Wright Hall without ever recognizing that the building – even in its incongruous 1960s Plex style – honored one of the college's founders. I assumed New London Hall was just a convenient name for one of the older buildings.

Not focusing on history was a casualty of the 1960s on college campuses. Remember that, when I arrived as a freshman in 1971, the college had recently experienced its own civil rights challenges, it had survived a student strike that threatened to cancel final exams in the spring of 1970, and it had just graduated its first men. In one fell swoop, outdated notions like dorm parietals had disappeared. As new students, we needed the seniors to explain to us that “bell desks” – seemingly places just to hold soda machines – were the spot where they had had to report their off-campus comings and goings. By the 1970s, students had asserted and inserted themselves in college social life, curriculum, living arrangements, and campus decision-making.

These national seismic shifts perhaps made collegians everywhere dismissive of history. But I wonder whether Conn attended to its history less energetically than many other colleges? Certainly, one reason might have been its interest in moving toward coeducation as quickly as possible. Emphasizing our history as a women's institution might have discouraged, rather than enticed, the young men we wanted to apply. In fact, Conn has been cited as a school that transitioned easily to coeducation, even though we often observed in the 1970s how quickly student government had shifted to male presidents and officers.¹⁵ In the 1970s, I would also have had no idea that Conn started with a mix of liberal arts and vocational offerings. In my experience, the college trumpeted its deep liberal arts commitment, without a whiff of suggestion that it had ever been otherwise. I wonder if President Park's resolve to “upgrade” the college had sparked – intentionally or otherwise – a revisionist history of our past. And, third, although relations with New London would get closer with the presidency of Claire Gaudiani, we in the 1970s felt New London as quite distant from the life of the campus, not at all reminiscent of the civic pride story we have highlighted here today.

As you heard in my introduction, I have subsequently sent both of my sons to the coeducational Conn College; they graduated in 2003 and 2007. I wanted to check my own sense of Conn's as an arm's-length history, and asked each of them whether while on campus they had been taught or absorbed any particular connections to its past. My older son Dan (now a lawyer) quickly cited the Honor Code, and explained how it had been impressed on him that each student's commitment to the Honor Code came from being a part of a community that for decades had believed in and supported this approach to student behavior and responsibility. It made observing the Code a part of something deeper. My younger son Matt had three answers. First, he quickly knew the founding date, recalling his favorite t-shirt that asserts “Conn College: no football since 1911.” Second, he responded that the architecture made him feel the college's history, and he had found himself wondering about the campus's odd mix of stately buildings and small houses. But I liked his third answer best. Matt said there was a sense of the history in “the way students carried themselves and in the way the college presented itself.” For him, the college was clearly looking ahead to

the future, trying to make itself better. Specifically, he said – and there was absolutely no prompting here – that once President Lee Higdon arrived, there was a clear sense of building the future on the strength of the past.

So, what does the Centennial mean for how Connecticut College understands its past and its present? What value is there in examining our history bit by bit over the course of this wonderful year of recognition? I think my son said it best in that we must use the strength of the past as a base for constructing the future. There is much power in this history, and I am delighted that we are focusing our lens on it.

¹ For my historical review of Connecticut College, I have relied primarily on the histories written by scholar and former dean Gertrude E. Noyes, *A History of Connecticut College*, New London, 1982; and Paul Marthers, *"Eighth Sister No More: The Origins and Evolution of Connecticut College"*, New York: Peter Lang, 2011; and material on the College's website.

² For the history of normal schools, see, for example, Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School: "An Instrument of Great Good,"* Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

³ For more about the development of high schools, see, for example, William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School*, Yale University Press, 1995.

⁴ Information on the history of the University of Connecticut appears on its website.

⁵ For background on the history of women in higher education, see, for example, Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*, Yale University Press, 1985; Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, Yale University Press, 1990; and Linda Eisenmann, ed., *Historical Dictionary of Women's Education in the United States*, Greenwood Press, 1998.

⁶ A good general history of colleges and universities is John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

⁷ For a good discussion of this issue, see Joyce Antler, "'After College What?': New Graduates and the Family Claim," *American Quarterly*, 32, 1980, pp. 409-435.

⁸ A good history of the Seven Sisters, along with several other women's colleges, is Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s*, Knopf, 1985.

⁹ Claudia Golden and Lawrence Katz, *Putting the Co in Education: Timing, Reasons, and Consequences of College Coeducation from 1835 to the Present*, NBER Working Paper No. 16281, August 2010.

¹⁰ Information about Wesleyan University has been gathered primarily from David Potts, *Wesleyan University 1831-1910: Collegiate Enterprise in New England*, Yale University Press, 1992; Laura McPhie Oliveira, "Gendered Anxiety Thresholds: An Analysis of Reactions to Increased Female Enrollments at Three Private Universities, 1867-1917," Ed.D. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Boston, 2008; and the Wesleyan University website.

¹¹ For discussions of coordinate colleges, see Eisenmann, *Historical Dictionary* and Eisenmann, "'Freedom to be Womanly': The Separate Culture of the Woman's College, 1891-1930," in Polly Kaufman, ed., *The Search for Equity: Women at Brown University, 1891-1991*, Brown University Press, 1991.

¹² Oliveira, "Gendered Anxiety Thresholds."

¹³ On feminization concerns, see especially Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, and Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*.

¹⁴ Marthers does a particularly good job of outlining the impact of Sykes' initial approach and the long-term curricular consequences for the College.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Leslie Miller-Bernal and Susan L. Poulson, eds., *Challenged by Coeducation: Women's Colleges Since the 1960s*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2006