

# Faith of Our Mothers, Living Still

*Princeton Seminary Women  
Redefining Ministry*

Abigail Rian Evans  
and  
Katharine Doob Sakenfeld

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**FAITH OF OUR MOTHERS, LIVING STILL**  
**Commissioned by Princeton Theological Seminary**

8.8.8.8.8.8

Faith of our mothers, living still,  
through gifts derided, calls denied,  
striving undaunted through the years,  
till bolted doors have opened wide:  
    faith of our mothers, firm and strong;  
    voices long silenced rise in song!

Faith of our sisters, serving still,  
with towel and basin, cup and bread,  
tending earth's needs with patient care,  
till hurts are healed and hungers fed:  
    faith of our sisters' art and skill,  
    loving with heart and mind and will;

Faith of our daughters, hoping still,  
venturing pathways yet untrod,  
partners in witness to the world,  
seeking a living, moving God:  
    faith of our daughters, bold and true,  
    restless till Christ makes all things new;

Faith of our families, growing still,  
varied in gender, class, and race,  
patchwork of patterns, shapes, and hues,  
vast as the mantle of God's grace:  
    faith of our families, growing faith,  
    we honor you in life and death.

Mary Louise Bringle  
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The complete hymn, with text and music commissioned by Princeton  
Theological Seminary, can be found on pp. 262–63.

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# Foreword

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A portrait of Sarah Miller hangs on the wall of the president's conference room at Princeton Theological Seminary. It has a rightful place in watching over the daily deliberations that occur in that room, for she was one of the early pioneers of faith to whom we owe so much. Sarah Miller was a writer, teacher, fundraiser, and community leader, as well as a daughter, a mother, and the wife of the seminary's second professor, Samuel Miller. Sarah had her own ministry in the Princeton community as the founder and president of the Female Benevolent Society of Princeton, which served the poor and the sick in the community and raised scholarships for children to attend school, and as the superintendent of a weekly Sabbath School for children, which she ran from her home. She also helped to establish and raise significant funds for an orphanage near Princeton, and the endowment that she raised for that project eventually helped to fund Ashmun Institute, which was the nation's first degree-granting historically black college. It continues today as Lincoln University.

The story of Princeton Seminary's founding and early history is incomplete without noting the substantial contribution of Sarah Miller and her contemporaries to the flourishing of the young seminary and its students and faculty. But she is just one example of the many women connected to the seminary who were leaders in their own right in the church and in the community long before women were students or faculty members. This book tells the stories of these women and those for whom they paved the way, each of which is a narrative of calling, intelligence, perseverance, imagination, and deep Christian faith.



Over the last two hundred years since the days of Sarah Miller, women faculty and alumnae of Princeton Seminary have been faithful leaders in the church, in theological education, and in the world. They have served as seminary presidents, professors, pastors, and public leaders. They are missionaries, counselors, and writers. While their collective impact is impossible to quantify, their stories highlight the transformative role that they have had for individuals, communities, and even nations as they have responded to the call of God in their lives. With the publication of this volume, we celebrate the remarkable achievements of generations of women who have been faithful servants of Jesus Christ in many extraordinary and ordinary ways. Princeton Theological Seminary is incredibly proud of their legacy of service.

Among these stories is an astounding record of “firsts”—first woman graduate, first woman president of the American Historical Society, first African American woman elected as moderator of the Presbyterian Church, first woman appointed acting prime minister of South Korea, and the list continues. Yet the path to such achievements has not always been easy. Behind these impressive accomplishments are the realities of perseverance, sacrifice, and commitment. The stories collected here are profound testaments to the courageous and visionary leadership of women who frequently faced skepticism, resistance, or serious obstacles to fulfilling their calling. These women are pioneers who demonstrated strength and resolve. Their persistence and faithfulness despite such opposition are an inspiration to us all.

Yet their stories are only the beginning of a narrative that stretches into the future. As we celebrate the great gifts of these women, we know that God continues to call women to lives of ministry and leadership, and we eagerly anticipate the generations of women to come who will carry on the legacy of these pioneering mothers of the faith.

One of the most critical insights woven into the narratives of this book is the discovery of how instrumental women have been to the formation of our seminary’s own identity and mission. And that is just another reason why this book is so important. The stories of these women are woven into our school’s common story of faith and scholarship. As a Presbyterian seminary we join others celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation by remembering that the church is always being reformed. Through their hard work, tenacity, various personalities, and faithful response to God’s calling in their lives, these women helped reform Princeton Seminary into what it has become and shaped the trajectory for what it will be.

The seminary owes a particular debt of gratitude to the coordinators of the Women in Ministry Initiative and the authors of this book, Abigail Rian Evans and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. This project would not have come to fruition without their vision, commitment, and boundless enthusiasm for

sharing the stories of the women of Princeton Seminary. They have tackled this project with the relentless zeal that characterizes their scholarly work.

Not only have they led a research project to celebrate the history of women in ministry, but they themselves have made history at Princeton Seminary. Abigail Rian Evans, who is herself an alumna of the seminary, was the first woman to serve as the chair of the Practical Theology Department at the seminary. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld was the first woman to celebrate Communion in Miller Chapel and, with Freda Gardner, taught the first course in women's studies at Princeton Seminary. Professors Evans and Sakenfeld have been trailblazers in their own fields of study, and they have also been a source of inspiration to generations of students. Indeed, many of the women who are profiled in this book credit the influence of women faculty members as instrumental in their education and development as scholars, pastors, and leaders.

From the era of Sarah Miller until the present day, the women of Princeton Theological Seminary have responded to the call of God with courage and faith. The church, our seminary, and the world have clearly been shaped by their leadership. Thanks be to God.

M. Craig Barnes  
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## Story Contributors

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# Introduction

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*Faith of Our Mothers, Living Still* forms part of a larger project of Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS), the Women in Ministry (WIM) Initiative. WIM was established in 2011 to honor all women associated with PTS since its founding and also to offer ongoing support to, and advocacy for, women in their different ministries in service to God, the church, and the world. It is led by cocoordinators and a twenty-member committee that includes pastors, educators, executives, administrators, and chaplains, both laity and clergy. They organize (especially for alumnae) conferences, programs, women's networking, and archival library collections. The third floor of the PTS library features the Women in Ministry Room.

This book provides the first overview of the ministry of women associated with PTS over the last two hundred years, with an emphasis on the seminary's living graduates. It introduces a cross section of women, including international and multicultural women, and reaches beyond graduates and faculty to include others related to the seminary. By reflecting on these PTS women now and through history, we hope that this book will become an occasion for rethinking ministry in the changing church as well as inviting new reflections on theological education from the wider church. This book is only a snapshot of all the wonderful ministries of PTS women. There are thousands more stories that could be told, and we anticipate developing a larger collection in the Women's Archives in the PTS library.

The book's ten chapters are divided into several parts:

*Part I—Breaking New Ground: Pioneers and Trailblazers.* Chapter 1 tells wonderful stories of the early women of the seminary who—as faculty



wives, daughters, early students, and faculty—broke the mold of women's assigned roles in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to serve in numerous and creative ways by answering God's call. Chapter 2 introduces ten women, from the United States and abroad, who seized the opportunity to change the church and society through education, the pastorate, and administration, taking risks to overcome prejudice to redefine women's leadership and to pave the way for women today.

*Part II—One Ministry, Many Forms: Women's Voices.* Chapters 3–8 feature first-person stories by women in their own voices, selected to reflect a diversity of ministry settings and to show how the church is being reshaped by the innovative ways in which women are responding to God's call. While honoring the importance of parish ministry and traditional specialized ministries, the breadth of these stories also helps to redefine ministry within a broader interpretation of God's call to congregation, marketplace, community agency, seminary, nonprofit agency, prison, university, government, and other diverse settings where Princeton women have served and are serving today.

*Part III—Explorations in Ministry and Theological Education.* Chapter 9 develops an expanded understanding of ministry grounded in a biblical and theological context, where Christians serve God both inside and outside the church. The chapter then discusses the situation of clergywomen in the context of women's changing place in U.S. society. Women's experiences presented here and in the prior sections of the book inform the concluding chapter 10, which proposes a new vision for theological education for the whole person. Appendixes are provided with information on American women's church leadership and statistics on PTS alumnae.

The methodology for this book was quite complex and lengthy. One of our principal research tools was an online survey developed by the authors and sent to a sample of PTS alumnae selected from twenty different categories of ministry as well as a random sample of alumnae pastors, to learn what PTS alumnae are doing and thinking, especially regarding call, ministry, and theological education. This survey is best described as qualitative rather than quantitative research and does not purport to be a scientific survey of PTS women's views on a variety of ministry-related subjects. Rather, it provided a general overview of alumnae perspectives. The thirty-nine-question survey (including twelve essay questions) was sent to 428 individuals; numbers were assigned by the IT department to ensure confidentiality. The 208 surveys returned (a 48.6-percent return rate) generated over three hundred pages of narrative data. To complete the entire survey took approximately eighty minutes.

In addition to this survey, we interviewed countless PTS women, both graduates and current students, as well as trustees, faculty, administrators, current and past staff, and experts on theological education. Additional

resources included numerous books and articles, material from the PC(USA) Board of Pensions and other denominational offices, and from the Association of Theological Schools. All this material enriched the findings of this book, which grew from our own previous writing, research, and teaching on these subjects in our decades of ministry at the seminary and in the church, both here and abroad.

Perhaps the most important finding of this book is how PTS women's firm, vibrant Christian faith shines forth even in the face of difficulties and challenges, giving witness to the strong power of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that all PTS women's experiences are happy and victorious ones, or that some have not suffered prejudice just by the fact of being female. But at the end of the day, so many praise God for the privilege of ministry wherever they find themselves, often in unexpected places and callings. For any small ways that PTS was able to help them on their faith journeys and preparation for ministry, we give thanks to God.

It has been a privilege in the writing of this book to give voice to some of these women, both sung and unsung, and to share their stories with you. It is our gift to PTS and the larger church, with the hope that it will help to encourage and inspire future women, and the men who support them, to respond to God's call to ministry wherever it may lead. Faith of our mothers is living still, in spite of struggles, pain, and tears.

## PART I

# Breaking New Ground: Pioneers and Trailblazers

## INTRODUCTION

The first chapter in this section, written by Kenneth Woodrow Henke, begins with the stories of early Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS) women up to 1960 and how they were engaged in ministry from the seminary's founding. It sets the stage for our broader definition of ministry, which follows throughout the book to embrace more than those who are ordained. The aim is to bring these women out of the shadows and into the center in order to honor and appreciate all they have done in service of Christ, the church, and the world. These pioneer women found creative and groundbreaking ways to do their ministry in a culture that did not always recognize women's leadership. Many of their ministries in music, hospitality, education, and nursing also shine through in the stories of contemporary women in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces the trailblazing work of contemporary women from the 1960s forward who also were pioneers in their ministries and illustrate the diversity of women and women's ministry. These trailblazers have been among the first women in significant positions over an extended period in this country and abroad, women who have been breaking in and breaking out, game changers who have paved the way for subsequent women in ministry. We highlight how their leadership has demonstrated their vision, advocacy, prophetic voice, and compassion.

# Princeton Theological Seminary Women Pioneers, 1812–1960

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Women did not come to Princeton Theological Seminary as students or faculty until the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> (James Moorhead, in his book on the history of the seminary, can speak of Princeton Seminary as “overwhelmingly a bastion of male dominance” for most of its history.<sup>2</sup>) Yet women played an important supportive role from the very beginning—as members of the households of the male faculty members, as contributors and benefactresses who helped to keep the seminary afloat financially and looked to its needs for scholarships and buildings, and as providers of services to the students, such as infirmary care, and, later in the nineteenth century, as cooks and house mothers of the various eating clubs. They also carried on their own important ministries, broadly defined.

## FACULTY WIVES

Of most of these women we have little record, but for some we can tell more of their stories. In the spring of 1801, Archibald Alexander, a young Presbyterian minister who had recently resigned his pastoral charge and the presidency of Hampden-Sydney College in rural Virginia, started off on a journey, the ultimate destination of which he was not yet sure. It had not begun as a

1. This chapter was written by Kenneth Woodrow Henke, Archivist, Princeton Theological Seminary library, based on his research in the PTS archives.

2. James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 497.

very auspicious journey. The first night after leaving home, he was robbed. Now he was sick, seized with a chill so violent that he determined to find some friendly nearby home where he could ask permission to simply lie down and rest for a while. In this state he came to the home of James Waddel and his daughter, *Janetta Waddel* (who will become his wife). She was born in Ireland and educated in Pennsylvania; her father, the Rev. Dr. James Waddel, was one of the most revered clergymen of his day. Known for his powerful preaching, in later years his sight failed, and by 1801 he depended on Janetta to read to him—Scripture passages, biblical commentaries, and even learned Latin tomes—as he prepared his sermons in his mind.

Archibald had visited the home before, but this time, when he had recovered enough to resume his journey a few days later, he proposed to the attractive, intelligent, and caring Janetta, and she accepted. His journey took him north to Philadelphia, Princeton, New York, and New England, and again back through Princeton, where, arriving in time for the commencement exercises, he was unexpectedly awarded a Master of Arts degree. Upon his return back home, he and Janetta were married on April 5, 1802.

Janetta's father died in the fall of 1805, and in 1807 the Alexanders moved from Virginia to Philadelphia, where they took up work in the important Pine Street Presbyterian Church. Sentiment had been growing in the Presbyterian Church for the establishment of a seminary similar to the seminary the Congregationalists had established in New England, one that would provide more adequately for the needs of the young and still growing nation. The old system, whereby college graduates intending to enter the ministry would apprentice themselves for a period to some senior minister to prepare for their licensing and ordination examinations before the presbytery, was simply not meeting the needs of the growing cities along the Atlantic coast and the new territories being settled to the west. Young Archibald Alexander joined with those calling for the establishment of such a seminary, and when the General Assembly of the church voted to do so in 1812, they chose him as its first professor.

Janetta and Archibald Alexander moved to Princeton to take up the new duties, and Princeton became their home for the next forty years until the death of Archibald in 1851 and Janetta's own death not long after in 1852. At the time of their deaths, seven of their children were still living—six sons and a daughter. Three of their sons had become ministers, two of these serving as professors at Princeton College and at the seminary; two had become lawyers; and one had taken up the medical profession. Looking back on those Princeton years, their son James remembered the way his mother had made their home a place of real hospitality. He remembered her conversation, “full of vivacity and humour,” as well her quick mind, her strong memory, and her

good taste in religious literature. He recalled the poverty of the first years of the seminary, and how his mother had been active in obtaining financial support for needy students. Above all, he remembered what a support she had been to his father. “When his spirits flagged, she was always prompt and skillful to cheer and comfort. And as his days were filled with spiritual and literary toils, she relieved him from the whole charge of domestic affairs,” he wrote. “She was such a gift as God bestows only on the most favored.”<sup>3</sup>

Another of the early women of Princeton Seminary was *Sarah Sargeant Miller*, the wife of Samuel Miller, the second professor at the seminary. She was the great-granddaughter of Jonathan Dickinson, the first president of the College of New Jersey (as Princeton College was first called), and was related to the famous Presbyterian missionaries David and John Brainerd. Her father, Jonathan Dickinson Sargeant, was a Princeton attorney and a member of the revolutionary Continental Congress. Her maternal grandfather was a Presbyterian pastor in Trenton and a trustee of the College of New Jersey.

The family of Sarah Sargeant moved to Philadelphia after her father was appointed attorney general of Pennsylvania, but in 1787, when she was nine years old, her mother died. The following year her father remarried, and from then until age fifteen Sarah attended a series of boarding schools. Of most of these she did not later retain a good opinion, though she did remember fondly her time at the Moravian Female Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where she felt that she had been surrounded by piety and good influence. In 1793 her father died in the great yellow fever epidemic that swept through Philadelphia that year. During the summer of 1800 Sarah was able to spend a few months with relatives in Princeton but then returned to Philadelphia to live with her stepmother, her older brother, and three stepsiblings.

In a remarkable document reminiscent of Puritan autobiographical accounts of an earlier period, Sarah Miller recorded her religious struggles as she experienced them in the earlier part of her life, up until 1807. This was fortunately preserved by her son and printed in part in the first volume of his *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., L.L.D.*, which he published following the death of both his father and mother.<sup>4</sup> In this document Sarah speaks of early religious reflections, intimations, and memories, but also of a period of “follies and temptations” that coincided with her boarding school years. The death of her father renewed a serious concern with religious matters, but she

3. James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854), 272–73.

4. The published parts of her memoir, on which the material in this section draws, are found in Samuel Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., L.L.D.*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869), 1:148–67.

reports that after a bit she was caught up again for a period of about five years when she “lived as if the object of life was self-gratification.” She amused herself by going to the theater and attending balls and parties, and she became especially addicted to card playing: “Every evening not thus employed was vacant and tedious.” One evening, not realizing the level of the stakes, she ended up losing all the money she had with her. Somewhat embarrassed, she considered applying to a relative for a loan but somehow was able to win back in the second night all she had lost the previous night, and more. “The sum which I had lost,” she wrote, “was more than restored, but without a restoration of my tranquility.”

Struggling to free herself from some of these habits but time and again falling back into them, Sarah at last began to sink into a depression: “The world rapidly lost all its attractions, and realized to my view the wilderness which the word of truth represents it to be. . . . From this time, for several years afterward, I was like a drowning wretch, ready at every instant to perish.” She suggests that she had possibly been prescribed laudanum (a tincture of opium popularly included in patent medicines of the day), but “soon discovered that such stimuli rather increased . . . than relieved my distress.”

Sometime around 1800 Sarah began to be courted by an older gentleman who had been a student and friend of her father. She writes,

He had visited us for some time, and I knew had serious intentions with regard to myself. He had large property, and I had already formed plans of universal benevolence, which were enlarged by becoming connected with a benevolent society in Philadelphia, the first of its kind, and just then formed for the relief of the poor. But besides other objections, this gentleman was probably double my age, and, had I married him, it would have been without any feeling of affection, as I deeply experienced at every interview. In the firm persuasion, however, that this step was duty, I knelt and prayed for direction and aid, not doubting but that both would be given in favor of my plans with regard to this object.<sup>5</sup>

She was convinced that she “had lived to little purpose in the world” and that having a “desire to be useful,” she might have more means and opportunity as a married woman.

In the spring of 1801 Sarah had also casually met a young Presbyterian minister from New York named Samuel Miller. Later that same spring Samuel Miller came to Philadelphia as a commissioner for the first time to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Although taking full part in the deliberations of the General Assembly, he also took the occasion to spend

5. *Ibid.*, 1:162.

as much time as possible visiting the Sargeant household. Writing in his diary on the occasion of his forty-fifth wedding anniversary, he reveals his side of the story:

It was not my own wisdom that selected this precious companion. I was led to make the choice by what we are accustomed to call “pure accident.” The circumstances of hearing her strongly recommended to another, in a confidential conversation, not intended to reach my ear, determined me to seek her hand. But for this circumstance, there is no probability that I should have dreamed of the connexion. . . . The Lord chose for me far better than I could have chosen for myself.<sup>6</sup>

Having not yet made any definite commitment to the first gentleman, when Samuel Miller proposed, she felt free to accept, and Sarah Sargeant and Samuel Miller were wed on October 24, 1801.

Even so, the event did not go entirely smoothly. Yellow fever was at the time raging in New York City, and the Health Committee of Philadelphia had put a fifteen-day quarantine into effect for all visitors from New York. Samuel Miller had to obtain a special dispensation to come to Philadelphia and proceed with the marriage. Further, the marriage was to be performed by the Rev. Dr. John Ewing, provost of the University of Pennsylvania and half uncle of Sarah Sargeant by marriage. He was seventy years old and somewhat forgetful in his habits, and his wife did not want him blurt-ing about the arrival of this visitor from New York who would not be undergoing quarantine. Thus his wife did not tell him until the very last minute that he would be performing a marriage that day or whose marriage he would be performing. Arriving at the Sargeant home where the wedding was to take place, he stated that he did not like being kept in the dark about these things and, as it was a Saturday, he would only perform the wedding on condition that Samuel Miller would preach for him the next morning!<sup>7</sup>

After many years of marriage, in a long diary entry on October 24, 1847, Samuel Miller reflected on how much Sarah’s support had meant to him in his work over the years. He praises her abilities at managing the household, her knowledge of people, her “energy, and physical and moral courage,” and her taste and judgment in making household purchases. In one paragraph in particular, he makes note of her skill in ministry and the value he placed on her ministry and the contributions she made to his own ministry:

6. *Ibid.*, 2:481.

7. *Ibid.*, 1:143.



She is really better qualified than many ministers to instruct the inquiring, and to counsel the perplexed and anxious. Hundreds of times have I profited by her remarks on my sermons, and other public performances, more than by the remarks of any other human being.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to raising a large family (the Millers went on to have ten children, though one of them died in infancy), supporting the work of her husband, and entertaining students and guests at the seminary, Sarah Miller gave much time to organizing the women of Princeton for benevolent work. “She was never happy unless she had some schemes for doing good in hand,” wrote John Frelinghuysen Hageman, Princeton’s nineteenth-century historian.<sup>9</sup> She had a special interest in the education of children. As early as 1816, she had helped form the Female Benevolent Society of Princeton, which she served for many years as its president. Its work included visitation work among the poor, especially those who were sick. It also raised scholarships for poor children to enable them to attend one of Princeton’s private schools in the days before public education. She herself organized a school in her home, where she gave daily instruction for children from Princeton’s sizable African American community and also ran a weekly Sabbath School for children from her neighborhood.

By 1825 the Female Benevolent Society had opened a school of its own for free instruction for the poor, an institution that continued more than forty years, even after public education became available. Sarah Miller was the chief manager of the school and was often in attendance herself to oversee operations. On other occasions, she would send one or more of her children to assist the teacher in the work of instruction. She also helped establish the Mount Lucas Orphan and Guardian Institute near Princeton and raised a considerable endowment for it. The funds were well managed, and when the Orphan Institute was no longer needed, the endowment she had raised was transferred, with her help, to the new Ashmun Institute in Chester County, Pennsylvania. This was the first institution for higher education established specifically for the education of African Americans, who at that time had limited opportunities for higher education. In 1866, after the assassination of President Lincoln the year before, the Ashmun Institute was renamed for him, and Lincoln University continues its work to this day. Among its many notable graduates are Thurgood Marshall, Langston Hughes, and Kwame Nkrumah.

Despite Sarah’s complaints about the various boarding schools she had

8. *Ibid.*, 2:496.

9. John Frelinghuysen Hageman, *History of Princeton and Its Institutions*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1879), 2:411.

attended, it is clear that she had a sound education, on which she continued to improve throughout her life. According to Hageman, she was

accustomed to mingle in the society of strong-minded and learned men who partook of the hospitalities of her home. . . . She was, even to the very end of her life, a close student of the Bible, and was accustomed to spend a portion of the day, generally after breakfast, at her table with her Bible and Commentary, in reading and studying the word of God, as though she were a teacher in the seminary; and she was always prepared to take part in the discussion of religious questions that might arise among the clerical guests at her house or among her own children.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, she was particularly concerned in the matter of the education of her own children. She helped found and lead a Maternal Association that met to pray for their children, to encourage one another in their child-raising endeavors, and “to stir each other up to greater parental fidelity.” Of her husband she even “once queried whether some of the lectures which he was delivering at the Seminary might not be useful to his own family,” and accordingly he began to set aside time to gather the family in his study several times a week “reading to them his Seminary prelections upon Biblical and Ecclesiastical History and Chronology, and examining the older children afterwards upon them, and requiring them often to write out from memory and outline of what they had heard.”<sup>11</sup>

Samuel Miller died in 1850, but Sarah Miller went on to survive him another eleven years. Her interest in the education of the young and her other charitable activities continued, though her energy slowly declined with the passing years. “By day, she reclined upon a couch in the family sitting-room,” remembered her son, and one day “quietly as an infant drops asleep, she closed her eyes, at length, upon all earthly scenes.” The date was February 2, 1861, and she had celebrated her eighty-third birthday just a month before.<sup>12</sup>

Janetta Waddel Alexander and Sarah Sargeant Miller, the first two faculty wives at Princeton Seminary, will have to stand in as representatives of generations of faculty wives to follow. They raised their children, supported their husbands’ work, entertained students and visitors to the seminary, and made their contributions to the social, religious, and charitable organizations of Princeton, and often to wider ecclesiastical circles and innumerable good causes.

10. *Ibid.*, 2:411.

11. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 2:420–21.

12. *Ibid.*, 2:550.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH LEADER

A very different story may be told of another woman connected to the early history of Princeton Theological Seminary who went by the name of *Betsey Stockton*. The Stockton family was one of the oldest families of Princeton. Richard Stockton had moved to the area of what is now Princeton in 1696, and in 1701 he purchased over five thousand acres from William Penn. Upon his death, this property was divided among his sons, who married and reared their own children in the Princeton area. Richard Stockton's grandson, also named Richard, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. His cousin, Robert Stockton, served as a quartermaster in the Revolutionary War. Sometime near the end of the eighteenth century, a slave, given the name of Betsey, was born on the family estate of Robert Stockton in Princeton. Robert's daughter Elizabeth had married a Presbyterian clergyman and graduate of Princeton College named Ashbel Green, and he decided to give the young slave girl to his daughter as a present. Thus Betsey, as a small child, came into the home of Ashbel Green.

Ashbel Green, as his father before him, was a strong opponent of slavery. He was the chief author of the 1818 antislavery resolution of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, which stated that the church considered "the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature . . . and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Ashbel Green raised the young Betsey as a member of the household, tutoring her along with his own children and eventually formally manumitting her when she came of age. For a few years, in her early teens, she went to live with his nephew, who ran a school in South Jersey, but she came back to the Green household again when they moved from Philadelphia to Princeton. In 1812 Ashbel Green had become the president of Princeton College and, in the same year, the first president of the board of directors of the newly formed Princeton Theological Seminary. In the winter of 1814–1815 there was a revival of religious concern that swept through Princeton College and the seminary, and Betsey, who had been attending Sabbath School classes taught by some of the Princeton Seminary students, underwent a religious experience that led her to apply for full membership in the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton. After examination, she was duly baptized and admitted into communicant membership.

13. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from Its Organization A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 692–94.

Simple membership in the church, however, did not seem to be enough for Betsey. She began to develop a desire to go abroad and serve as a missionary. When she learned that Charles Stewart and his wife, Harriet, had been accepted to serve as missionaries to the Sandwich Islands (as Hawaii was called in those days), she began to dream of going along with them. The Stewarts had been frequent guests in the Green home, and she knew them well. She shared her interest with the Stewarts and with Ashbel Green. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had been formed only a few years earlier, in 1810. Ashbel Green had already been helpful in preparing and aiding in the financing of some of the earliest missionaries of that board. The idea of sending a single woman as a missionary, however, especially a single African American woman who had been born into slavery, seemed entirely novel. Nevertheless, Ashbel Green wrote a persuasive letter to the American Board of Commissioners recommending her for missionary service:

. . . she has been, for a good while, exceedingly desirous to go on a mission and I am willing that she should. I think her, in many respects, well qualified for this. . . . There is no kind of work in a family at which she is not very expert. She is an excellent nurse. But I think her well qualified for higher employment in a mission than domestick [*sic*] drudgery. She reads extremely well; and few of her age and sex have read more books on religion than she; or can give a better account of them. . . . She calls herself Betsey Stockton.<sup>14</sup>

Michael Osborn, one of the Princeton Seminary students who also knew her well, sent along a long additional supporting letter, which gives further insight into her character and the way she impressed people:

I would say in general, as the result of an intimate acquaintance with her, that I think her pious, intelligent, industrious, skillful in the management of domestic affairs, apt to teach, and endowed with a large portion of the active preserving, self-sacrificing, spirit of a missionary . . . for about a year and a half she has been a member of my class in the Sabbath School at this place. Her recitations have been chiefly from *S[acred] Scriptures*, the *Larger Catechism*, *Jewish Antiquities*, and *Sacred Geography*. She has a larger acquaintance with sacred history and Mosaic Institutions than almost any ordinary person, old or young, I have ever known. . . . I recollected a multitude of instances where, for my own information, I have questioned her about some fact in Biblical history, or some minute point in Jewish Antiquities, and have immediately received a correct answer.

14. The text of the letter is reproduced in full in Constance K. Escher, "She Calls Herself Betsey Stockton," *Princeton History* 10 (1991): 77–78.

She has enjoyed unrestrained access to the private library of The Revd. President [i.e., Ashbel Green] of Nassau Hall (in whose family she was raised, with the exception of three or four years, from her infancy) and I am persuaded has improved the privilege. I will mention but one of many instances of her love of study. At the commencement of one of our six week vacations, I lent her a copy of Bishop Horne on the Psalms, intending she should transcribe the table in which he has classed the psalms under their appropriate heads, and read his remarks on a few of them, preparatory to committing them to memory. At the end of the vacations, she had made time to study the whole book, preface and all. That she had studied it thoroughly, I was convinced by her frequent and appropriate references to his remarks. She loves to teach children, and has sometimes during vacation acted as a teacher or superintendent of a sabbath school. During some months she has appropriated a part of every week to the instruction of a number of coloured children. For a considerable time, she has been studying with the ultimate view of taking charge of a day school for coloured children. . . . I am of the opinion that few pious young ladies of her age will be found to equal her in knowledge of the Bible, and general theology.<sup>15</sup>

With these strong testimonies, Betsey was accepted for missionary service and a special contract was drawn up allowing her to accompany the Stewarts as a help especially for the four-month-pregnant Harriet, but also specifying that she was not simply to be regarded as a servant but also employed in the mission as a “teacher of a School, for which it is hoped she will be found qualified.”<sup>16</sup>

Betsey Stockton had been saving up the wages that Ashbel Green had been paying for her domestic help in his household, and Green added some additional funds of his own “to prepare her outfit for the mission.”<sup>17</sup> She joined the second company of missionaries who were setting out for the Sandwich Islands in the late fall of 1822. In addition to Betsey, at this time about twenty-five years old, and the Stewarts, there were others, including Artemas Bishop, another former Princeton Seminary student, along with his wife, Elizabeth, and several young men who were natives of the Sandwich and Society Islands and who had studied theology at the Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut. These young men would be able to serve the mission as translators when they reached their home islands. They left from New Haven, Connecticut,

15. *Ibid.*, 79–80.

16. *Ibid.*, 81.

17. *The Life of Ashbel Green, V.D.M. Begun to Be Written by Himself in His Eighty-Second Year and Continued to His Eighty-Fourth*, ed. Joseph H. Jones (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1849), 326.

on a whaler, the *Thames*, for a five-month journey with no stopovers around Cape Horn and into the Pacific.

In 1822 Ashbel Green reached the age of sixty and, retiring from Princeton College, moved back to Philadelphia, where he accepted the editorship of a religious newspaper, the *Christian Advocate*. Betsey Stockton kept a journal of her voyage to Hawaii, in which she recounts her experiences aboard the ship, including seasickness; the shipboard ceremonies at the crossing of the equator; her marvel at the beauty of the ocean (“If it were in my power I would like to describe the Phosphorescence of the sea. But to do this would require the pen of a Milton: and he, I think, would fail, were he to attempt it”); the birth of the Stewart baby at sea; and reflections on her own spiritual state and those of the sailors aboard ship. Although her original journal is lost, she sent a copy to Ashbel Green. He in turn printed the text serially in his newspaper.<sup>18</sup> “Some of her letters,” he wrote, “were so well written, that, with very few corrections, I inserted them in the *Christian Advocate* . . . and they were greatly admired.”<sup>19</sup>

Betsey Stockton remained as a missionary in Hawaii for somewhat over two years. Shortly after landing in Honolulu, she, the Stewarts, and another couple were invited to Lahaina on the island of Maui, at that time the capital of the kingdom of Hawaii. We learn from her journal how she began a school there with ten students, both English and Hawaiian. In a later letter, also published by Ashbel Green in the *Christian Advocate*, she reports, “I have now a fine school of the *Makeainana*, or lower class of people, the first I believe that has ever been established.”<sup>20</sup> Charles Stewart, in reporting on the progress of the mission, mentions in particular Betsey’s good command of the Hawaiian language. After the birth of their second child, however, Harriet Stewart was increasingly unwell, and it was finally determined that her health required that the Stewarts return to North America. With Betsey’s close ties to the family, she decided to go with them to help care for Harriet and the children. The Stewarts returned to upstate New York, the home area of Harriet. Betsey spent time there with the family but also in Philadelphia, where she began a school for young children. She even accepted an invitation to sojourn in Canada for a few months to help organize schools for indigenous people at Grape Island, in today’s Ontario province.

In 1830 Harriet Stewart died. In the meantime, Charles Stewart had resigned his missionary position and accepted a post as a chaplain in the Navy,

18. “Religious Intelligence. Sandwich Islands,” *Christian Advocate* 2 (May 1824): 233–35; *Christian Advocate* 2 (December 1824): 563–66; *Christian Advocate* 3 (January 1825): 36–41.

19. *The Life of Ashbel Green*, 326.

20. “Religious Intelligence. Sandwich Islands,” *Christian Advocate* 3 (April 1825): 189.

which kept him away from home for long periods. Betsey became the chief caretaker of the orphaned Stewart children, and in 1833 she decided to move back to Princeton, bringing the children with her. Although Ashbel Green had moved back to Philadelphia, one of the Green children with whom Betsey had grown up, James Green, had married and settled down in Princeton. When Charles Stewart remarried in 1835, he was able to take the children back again, and Betsey decided to remain in Princeton.

Over the next years of her life, Betsey Stockton became a leading figure in the Princeton African American community. In 1836 a fire destroyed the sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church. The congregation decided to meet temporarily in the Princeton Seminary chapel, which had been constructed only a few years before, but it was not large enough for the entire congregation and had only a small gallery. Free and slave African Americans had traditionally sat in the much larger gallery of the old church building. The African Americans began worshiping separately in a building in their neighborhood on Witherspoon Street. They eventually incorporated as The First Presbyterian Church of Colour of Princeton, which became the Witherspoon Street Church in 1848. Betsey Stockton became one of the most prominent leaders of the new African American congregation, and both a plaque and a window were later dedicated there to her memory.

She also put her educational skills to use, founding a Sabbath School for children and youth in the African American community. The superintendents of the school were usually students at the seminary, who would take up their duties for two or three years at a time while pursuing their studies. But the long-term teachers were literate African Americans, many of whom had been trained by Betsey Stockton and who then went on to teach others, just as Betsey had trained native Hawaiian teachers to spread learning in their communities on the mission field. She also helped found and run a “common,” or district, school for Princeton African Americans and an evening class for young working adults, for which she enlisted the help of Princeton College and Princeton Seminary teachers and students.

The younger Charles Stewart, the child Betsey had helped raise when he was young, eventually grew to manhood. He attended West Point, graduating first in his class of 1846, which included such other future luminaries as George McClellan, Stonewall Jackson, and George Pickett. An officer in the Corps of U.S. Engineers, he was able to purchase a house for Betsey in Princeton in the vicinity of the Witherspoon Church. At one point during the Civil War, sick from the battlefield, he retreated there to recover and wrote, “[Betsey] cared for me as she had done when I was a child.”<sup>21</sup> In 1865, a few

21. Escher, “She Calls Herself Betsey Stockton,” 96.

months after the assassination of Lincoln, Betsey herself died. Her obituary was printed in both the *Freeman's Journal* and the *New York Observer*, recounting her many accomplishments. It records that at her funeral, in addition to “a highly respectable congregation of her own colour,” were found representatives of the leading families of Princeton’s white community and clergymen and friends from as far away as New York and Philadelphia. The service was conducted by John McLean, president of Princeton College, who preached the sermon, assisted by Charles Hodge from the seminary and Professor John Duffield of Nassau Hall.<sup>22</sup>

### CIVIL WAR NURSE

Still another woman of the first part of the nineteenth century whose life was closely intertwined with Princeton Seminary, the wider Princeton community, and the great events of her day was *Margaret Elizabeth Breckinridge*.<sup>23</sup> She was born in Philadelphia on March 24, 1832. On her father’s side she was related to the Breckinridge family of Kentucky. Her paternal grandfather, John Breckinridge, had served in the Senate and as attorney general of the United States under Thomas Jefferson. His second son, also named John Breckinridge, was Margaret’s father. He had come to New Jersey to study at Princeton College. While a student, he became caught up in the religious revivals of 1815 that had swept through the college and seminary, and although originally intending to study law and follow in his father’s footsteps, he changed his plans and decided after graduation to enter the seminary and study for a career in the ministry. He also met and asked for the hand of the eldest daughter, Margaret, of Princeton Seminary’s second professor, Samuel Miller. They married in 1823. Elected and serving for a short time as chaplain of the House of Representatives, John Breckinridge resigned the position to return to his native Kentucky and serve as a pastor in Lexington. A few years later he was called to Baltimore for a second successful pastorate. In 1831 he was called to Philadelphia as the corresponding secretary of the board of education of the Presbyterian Church, and it was there that Margaret Elizabeth Breckinridge was born. In 1836 her father was elected to the faculty of Princeton Seminary to teach pastoral theology and missions, which brought the family back to the seminary campus again.

22. Transcription of obituary from *The New York Observer* 43 (Nov. 9, 1865): 355, in “Betsey Stockton” files, Women’s History Project, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

23. The biographical material in this section is taken from *Memorial of Margaret E. Breckinridge* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1865).



Margaret Miller Breckinridge, however, had long been suffering from ill health, and when young Margaret Elizabeth was just six years old, her mother died. Margaret Elizabeth was left in the care of her grandparents, Samuel and Sarah Miller, while her father undertook a fundraising tour on behalf of the Board of Foreign Missions. Just three years later her father died as well, at the age of forty-four, leaving behind Margaret, her brother, and two sisters. Margaret developed a penchant for reading and study, and she was a good letter writer and conversationalist. From her grandmother, Sarah Miller, she learned the habit of a regular time set apart each day for prayer and the devotional reading of Scripture. As her grandfather, Samuel Miller, lay dying in early 1850, the seventeen-year-old Margaret read to him from the Bible each day and listened to his words of religious reflection and instruction. It was that same year that she decided to join the local Presbyterian church.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Margaret decided to do what she could. She organized her Princeton friends into a Soldiers' Aid Society, which met regularly to knit and sew clothing items and gather various articles of food, such as pickles, dried fruit, and jellies, to send to the soldiers at the front and in hospitals. But eventually she wanted to do more, and in April 1862 she left home for the west, via Baltimore, where she went to learn the needed nursing skills. She began her work in the hospitals of Lexington, Kentucky. Toward the middle of July, the war reached her directly when a Confederate cavalry began raiding the Lexington area, followed by the invasion of a Confederate army, which held Lexington until early fall. When Lexington was finally freed from Confederate control, she was able to travel on to spend the winter with her brother, Samuel Miller Breckinridge, who had moved to Missouri, served in the Missouri legislature, and now was a circuit judge based in St. Louis. There she again took up her hospital work among the sick and wounded.

As demanding as her hospital work was, the most trying work she undertook was her service on the hospital boats that were sent down the Mississippi to bring up the sick and wounded from the various battlefields farther south. Together with a few other women volunteers, she made two such voyages, lasting about a month each. The boats went down the river empty or carrying soldiers rejoining their units, but on the return trip every corner was filled with the sick and dying, even the cabin floors and decks. Nursing care on these voyages was a twenty-four-hour-a-day job. Here is how she wrote about the situation in a letter home to her friends in Princeton:

It would be impossible to describe the scene which presented itself to me as I stood in the door of the cabin. Lying on the floor with nothing under them but a tarpaulin and their blankets, were crowded fifty

men, many of them with death written on their faces; and looking through the half-open doors of the state-rooms we saw that they contained many more. Young, boyish faces, old and thin from suffering, great restless eyes that were fixed on nothing, incoherent ravings of those who were wild with fever, and hollow coughs on every side,—this and much more that I do not want to recall, was our welcome to our new work. . . . We asked each other, not in words, but in those fine electric thrills by which one soul questions another, “Can we bring strength and hope and comfort to these poor suffering men?” and the answer was, “Yes, by God’s help we will.”<sup>24</sup>

Contagious diseases threatened to spread to the whole boat. Typhoid fever was rampant. The intense cold weather was another trial for the men. On a second trip, in late winter, the problem was heavy rain. “The rain dashed through the roof and kept the beds so wet I was in despair,” she wrote. The nurses improvised some “India-rubber cloth,” which they cut into strips and spread over the men, moving it from place to place continually “to meet the new streams which trickled down in fresh places every moment.” When the rain finally stopped, the nurses were exhausted and went back to their staterooms, only to find their own rooms full of water as well. Seventeen of their patients died on the first trip up the river, and twenty-one, on the second. Yet not every story was a sad one. “It was a happy thing to see many of those who seemed so wretched at first, reviving gradually under a little care and nursing.” She informed her friends about how moved she was by the gratitude she had received from the men for her services, about the ministry she was able to accomplish as she prayed with the men and sang the familiar hymns for them that she had sung at home in Princeton, and how glad she was to be able to bring some comfort to friends and relatives of those who had died by telling them about “the last sad hours of those they love” and passing on to them the dying messages of love with which she had been entrusted.<sup>25</sup>

In March Margaret hoped to make a third voyage down the river, but her health was no longer up to it. She spent her time in the St. Louis hospitals, looked after a family of refugees, and helped organize sewing and knitting for the soldiers. Finally, with her strength failing and struggling with complications of the typhoid fever she had picked up in the course of her work in the army camps on the lower Mississippi, she determined to return east for a period of rest and recuperation. Over the next year she struggled to regain her health, and by the spring of 1864 was hoping to respond to a call for experienced nurses to attend to the casualties resulting from the battles in

24. *Ibid.*, 67–68.

25. *Ibid.*, 80, 61–62, 70–71, 74.

the Fredericksburg area. However, it was not to be. She experienced another relapse, and the final blow came when she learned of the death of her beloved brother-in-law, Colonel Peter A. Porter of Niagara Falls. Porter had died in the battle of Cold Harbor on the outskirts of Richmond. The last words heard from him were “Boys, follow me” as he led his New York State regiment in a charge against the Confederate entrenchments. Margaret traveled to Baltimore to join the family in accompanying the body home for burial in Niagara Falls, but the excitement over the death of her brother-in-law and the fatigue of the journey proved too much. Arriving in Niagara Falls, she once more became alarmingly ill, and on July 27, 1864, she died. She was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara, near the spot where the family had so recently buried her brother-in-law.

## BENEFACTORS

While the stories told so far dealt with women in the immediate Princeton households of persons connected with the seminary, a very important part in the life of the seminary was played by women who lived some distance away but were interested in its program and success. As Samuel Miller wrote in his 1822 *Brief Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States at Princeton*,

The greater part . . . of the support which has been hitherto furnished to indigent Students, in this Institution, has been derived from the contributions of Female Cent Societies, in different parts of our Church. . . . A few pious females, by associating, and contributing annually two or three dollars each, may become the happy instruments of furnishing funds which will nearly, if not entirely, carry through the Seminary, a youth, who may be long an eminent herald of the cross, and a means of blessing to thousands.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to scholarship funds, these churchwomen’s groups also donated articles of clothing, such as shirts and hand-knitted socks. In later years they would also sometimes furnish a dorm room.

There were also individuals who could individually contribute much more.

26. Samuel Miller, *A Brief Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States at Princeton* (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1822), 57. For further information about these Cent Societies and other early Presbyterian women’s benevolence work, see Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status*, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 1–7.

Some of these were wealthy women. The first and second fully endowed scholarships set up for deserving students at Princeton Seminary were made possible by *Martha Banyar LeRoy* of New York City, a widow whose father and deceased husband had been prominent New York merchants and bankers. Another important woman donor of the nineteenth century was *Isabella Brown*. Her husband was the son of the founder of the first investment banking firm in the United States and was himself one of the founders and the treasurer of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Following his death in 1859, Isabella donated the funds to build a much-needed new dormitory, Brown Hall, in the 1860s. It was the only building of significant size to be constructed in Princeton during the Civil War.

*Mary McCrae Stuart* was the wife of Robert Leighton Stuart and the sister-in-law of Alexander Stuart. The Stuarts were consistently among the most generous donors to Princeton Seminary throughout the nineteenth century, making substantial gifts for the general endowment, for operating expenses, for faculty housing, and for the establishment of the Stuart Chair in Philosophy. They also contributed books to the library and paid for the erection of the seminary's major classroom building, Stuart Hall. For twenty years Mary Stuart personally funded a faculty position in biblical theology. She was also active with a women's group at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, the Princeton Seminary Association of Ladies. They regularly raised funds for seminary needs (including a new reading room stocked with current periodicals for the parlor of Alexander Hall one year) and, for graduating students who could not afford it, provided cloth to have a proper suit made for preaching the gospel. When Mary McCrae Stuart died in 1891, her entire estate, valued at \$5,000,000 at that time, was given almost entirely to charitable, educational, and religious institutions, many connected with the Presbyterian Church. The very first bequest in her will was a portrait of her husband, painted by Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta (1841–1920), one of the foremost portrait artists of his day, whose paintings now hang in some of the finest art galleries in the world. "It is given," she wrote in her will, "to the Princeton Theological Seminary, to be kept and preserved in perpetuity in some place in the seminary."<sup>27</sup> It now hangs on the landing of Stuart Hall, matched with a portrait of Mary McCrae Stuart herself on the opposite wall. She also left to the seminary the funds for constructing Hodge Hall.

27. Photocopy of an undated newspaper article describing the will of Mary McCrae Stuart. "Mary McCrae Stuart" file, Women's History Project, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

## ADMINISTRATORS AND PROVIDERS OF HOSPITALITY

While some women wove their stories into the larger story of Princeton Seminary because of their connection to seminary-related households in Princeton, and others did so through their care and interest in the seminary from afar, still another set of women made themselves a part of the seminary story through seeing to students' needs on an everyday, practical basis. Unfortunately, of these women we often have scant knowledge. In 1847 the seminary constructed a refectory for student dining on its campus. A steward and his wife served this facility. Along with an apartment for the steward's family, the basement of this building also housed the seminary's infirmary, where sick students could be looked after by the steward's wife. As the century wore on and the refectory became less popular and eventually closed, students organized eating clubs. The very first of these was the Benham Club, founded in October 1879. It was named for *Anna Amelia Benham*, a Princeton widow who was glad to be asked to make regular meals by a small group of six Princeton Seminary students who had gotten tired of the refectory food. When news got out about what great meals she was preparing, the club expanded rapidly and soon other such eating clubs were formed as well. By 1881 Anna Amelia Benham had to move to a larger house to accommodate the students, and in 1894 even that house had to be expanded to seat everyone who had joined the club. She is remembered fondly in the official Benham Club history:

She was an excellent housekeeper and business woman, with unusual commonsense and rarely devoted to her "boys" as she called them. She seldom saw them indeed, being occupied in the kitchen at meal times, but she knew them all and followed their course both in the Seminary and later with a genuine sympathy and pride that was almost motherly . . . all who were in the Club during her lifetime remember not only the overabundant supply of things she provided three times each day, unfailingly, year after year, and the unwearying patience that must have been sorely tried sometimes, but also the numberless little additions that showed she was mindful of the weather, the classroom, a holiday, a birthday, an examination or anything else that might affect the mood of the Club.<sup>28</sup>

At her death she bequeathed to the "Benham Club of Princeton" a sum of \$500 and all the dining room furniture, dishes, table linen, silverware, sideboard, kitchen utensils, club pictures, "and my portrait in the parlor," and she expressed the hope "that the said Club may always continue in spirit and

28. *The Benham Club of Princeton, New Jersey* (Princeton, NJ: Club House, 95 Mercer Street, 1912), 23.

name as they are now.”<sup>29</sup> Other club histories are not so extensive, but the Friars Club histories mention a Mrs. Vreeland from the 1890s and a Mrs. Johnson from the 1920s, the latter of whom the students of that generation remembered especially as “cook, boss, and mother.”<sup>30</sup>

The first woman administrator at Princeton Theological Seminary was *Edna Hatfield*. Her career at the seminary spanned forty-five years. From 1914 until 1930 she served as the secretary to President Stevenson, the second president of Princeton Seminary (the office of president of the seminary was not established until 1902, when Francis Landey Patton was invited to become Princeton Seminary’s first president). In 1930 Edna became the assistant registrar, serving until 1937 in that position, at which time she was then appointed assistant to the dean of students. In 1945 she was appointed registrar and continued in that position until her retirement in 1959. In addition to her regular duties, Edna Hatfield also served as private secretary to Professor Charles Erdman, helping him prepare his books for publication and providing any other assistance he required. The local newspaper, *Town Topics*, featured her as “Princeton’s Woman of the Week” in their October 12, 1952, issue. After her death, a former doctoral student and later faculty member arranged to commission a portrait of her in memory of her devotion to the seminary and its work. He remembered especially how students would come to her for counsel and advice, and the long hours she gave preparing the seminary catalog for many years.<sup>31</sup> By the twentieth century other women support staff begin to be mentioned in the seminary records, particularly a series of single women who came to work in the library. The longest lasting of these was *Isabelle Stauffer*, who came as a temporary hire to do some special cataloging in the mid-1930s and ended up staying for over forty years.<sup>32</sup>

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY FACULTY WIVES, STUDENTS, AND FACULTY

### Faculty Wives

A highly revealing exploration of the rather heavy ministry expectations for pastors’ wives in mid-twentieth-century American Protestant churches may

29. *Ibid.*, 4.

30. *Musings from a Monastery: The Story of the Friars* (Princeton, NJ: The Friar Club, Twenty-Two Dickinson Street, 1952), 23.

31. Unpublished memoir by Daniel J. Theron. “Edna Hatfield” file, Women’s History Project, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

32. “I Was in the Brewery,” *Alumni News* 18 (Autumn 1977): 25–26.

be found in a book published by *Carolyn Philips Blackwood*, the wife of Princeton Seminary's professor of homiletics, Andrew Blackwood. Written as a kind of guidebook for future ministers' wives and based on her own years of experience, *The Pastor's Wife* was published in 1951. Wives who were here in the late 1940s recall presentations concerning proper dress when answering the manse doorbell and reasons for avoiding sex on Saturday nights.<sup>33</sup> Carolyn Blackwood followed this work with an even broader set of reflections on the role of unordained women in the church in her 1955 volume *How to Be an Effective Church Woman*.<sup>34</sup> In the days of President Stevenson (1914–1936), a few student wives (there were very few) met with his wife, *Florence Day Stevenson*, and the wives of faculty members for socializing and prayer. When John Mackay came to Princeton Seminary as president in 1936, his wife, *Jane Wells Mackay*, organized this group into a formal Student Wives Fellowship, with just seven women. By the time John Mackay retired in 1959, the Student Wives Fellowship had approximately two hundred members.<sup>35</sup> They met for social occasions but also for Bible studies and for lectures on topics chosen by the wives and delivered by members of the seminary faculty or visiting missionaries and guest speakers. In 1953 a study group was established to look at the role of women in the church. Seminary wives joined with interested female students from the School of Christian Education to explore this topic.

## Students

While women were a part of the seminary story to some extent in a variety of ways from the very beginning, there were no women students formally

33. Carolyn Philips Blackwood, *The Pastor's Wife* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951). This book touches on a wide range of social expectations of a minister's wife in a Protestant church at mid-twentieth century and makes clear how much real work of ministry a pastor's wife was doing and was expected to do in that period. Among the topics treated are homemaking, hostessing (complete with recipes), presiding at meetings, counseling, taking care of finances, offering "kindly criticism" to her husband, and dealing with criticism directed at her. In a subsection under the title "She fills many gaps," the prospective pastor's wife is told to be prepared to "attend all board meetings; lead many devotionals; help train the junior choir; sing occasionally in the adult choir; serve as a substitute teacher; play the organ when needed; teach mission study classes; organize cradle roll and church nursery; assist at bake sales and suppers; help with the husband's correspondence; run off the bulletins on duplicating machine; mail out notices of meetings, and so on. . . ."

34. Carolyn Philips Blackwood, *How to Be an Effective Church Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955).

35. "Letters and Reflections from the Student Wives Fellowship, May 1959," John A. Mackay Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, series 9, box 14.

enrolled in the first one hundred years. Beginning in the early teens of the twentieth century, the seminary catalog starts to occasionally list women as “partial” (or as we would say today, “part-time”) students. Usually they were the wives of students or missionaries on furlough who had signed up for a course or two of special interest. In one case it was the daughter of a faculty member. It was understood that sometimes, beyond these officially recognized students, other wives would audit courses or attend a few lectures that interested them while their husbands were there for formal studies, even if they did not specifically enroll as part-time students. This would particularly be the case if they did not have the requisite college degree. We have informal accounts of women who would start to attend a course at the beginning of a term but then drop out for some reason, such as becoming pregnant or finding too many other things they wanted to do.

That changed in 1928, when *Muriel Van Orden* applied to come to the seminary with the intention of earning a degree.<sup>36</sup> At Radcliffe College she had been impressed with several teachers in women’s colleges who had responsibility for teaching courses in history and Bible. She herself was a history major and had a strong interest in Bible study, and she desired to prepare herself for a similar position. Upon graduating from Radcliffe, she wrote to various schools and seminaries, trying to find a school that taught Hebrew and would accept her. Her search was fruitless until she drove down with her mother from their home in North Jersey to inquire about the program at Princeton Seminary. Her original interview with the male registrar was discouraging, but she then was invited to talk with J. Ross Stevenson, president of the seminary. He, in contrast to the registrar, was very welcoming. He explained that she should not expect to get a degree but that she would be welcome to audit courses. Muriel insisted that she did not simply want to audit courses but wished to take exams and work toward a degree. President Stevenson told her that he would have to take the matter up with the board of directors of the seminary.

Two weeks later she got a phone call to return to Princeton. The board had granted permission for her to enter in the regular program with the possibility of earning a degree, provided that several conditions were met. First, she was “not allowed to disturb the gentlemen taking classes.” Second, she was expected to complete the full program of courses that the male students took, keeping up with them academically. Third, when it came time to graduate, all of the faculty would need to agree that she deserved a degree. Quite content

36. The biographical material in this section draws on several unpublished oral history transcripts in the “Muriel Van Orden Jennings” file, Women’s History Project, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.



with these conditions, Muriel showed up at Princeton Seminary in the fall of 1928. By all reports her reception at the seminary was excellent. "Everyone was kind to me. Everyone was like a big brother to me," she later remembered. Of course housing was a problem, as there were only male dormitories. The first year she rented a small room with the family of the Scotsman who had charge of the seminary grounds. The second year she and another young woman shared a room over the old Princeton post office, where they could look outside their window and see Charles Lindbergh come in to pick up his mail each morning. At the end of her second year, President Stevenson arranged for her to rent an apartment with his Scottish secretary. There was also no common dining room for meals. Thursday was "Ladies Night" at the seminary eating clubs, and she could always count on an invitation to eat at one club or another. Faculty also would invite her for a meal from time to time. Otherwise, she purchased a meal ticket to eat at one of the local Princeton hotels five nights a week until, sharing the apartment in her last two years, she could prepare her own meals there. As there were no facilities in the classroom building for women at the time, President Stevenson gave her a key to his own washroom.

Faculty also tried to help her out in other ways. In those days classes were either Monday–Wednesday–Friday or Tuesday–Thursday–Saturday. Although tuition was free, she still had to meet her other expenses and had accepted a job at a Presbyterian church in Newark, teaching religious education classes, doing youth ministry, and holding special services at a home for unwed mothers, at the city jail, at a county hospital, and at the Newark "Home for Incurables," a residence for women who needed ongoing medical care. This meant taking a 3:00 p.m. train on Friday up to Newark and a return train that reached Princeton at 2:00 a.m. on Monday morning. As a result she missed an hour of Hebrew on Friday afternoon and all of her Saturday classes. The Hebrew professor, George Wailes, gave her extra help with her Hebrew studies and was so fond of her that he remained in touch with her regularly even after she graduated until shortly before he died. Professor Caspar Wistar Hodge, who taught systematic theology, told her, "Muriel, you have so much to do that you just take this book and read it and when you are finished I will give you an examination and this way you can make up for the year of systematic theology that you missed." President Stevenson also arranged for her to earn some extra money by teaching released-time religious education classes at the First Presbyterian Church in Trenton. This was a class of forty-eight seventh-graders who were being given time out of the regular school day to attend classes in religious instruction once a week. While the students enjoyed being free from their regular classroom, they were a bit on the rambunctious side. "They had no more interest in studying their Bible

than they had in fleas,” Muriel later remembered. “I think they would have liked fleas better. They came in tossing their hats in the air, just having a high old time.” For the first three weeks of the class the church had tried three different male seminarians, none of whom was able to keep discipline. When they approached President Stevenson for “another man,” the president recommended Muriel instead. By her own report, she quickly established order and then strove to present the material in a way that was appropriate to their grade level and caught their interest. She got to keep the job.

Muriel also tried to stir up social life at the seminary. She began to befriend two single young women who worked in the library, some faculty daughters, and other available young women. They organized a monthly hike on full-moon nights to which they would invite seminarians and especially some of the foreign students, and they would head up into the hills north of Princeton, where they would build a fire, roast marshmallows, and sing. Over three years she estimates that some ten couples found each other on these hikes and ended up marrying.

In her first year at the seminary, for about six months she dated a young seminarian named Carl McIntire, who would go on to become a well-known, fiery, fundamentalist radio preacher. “He was so opinionated, terribly so, but he was a marvelous ice skater, and I would put up with anything to go ice skating,” she remembered. “He was the only person I ever knew who could walk with a girl around a lake on a moonlight night and fight the whole way. He would still be arguing when he said, ‘Goodnight. I will see you in class tomorrow.’ He was a real nice fellow but he sure had ideas of his own.” Finding Princeton Seminary not fundamentalist enough, young McIntire left with a number of his classmates and Greek professor J. Gresham Machen at the end of his first year to found Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, but he soon quarreled with that group as well and eventually founded his own separatist fundamentalist denomination and seminary.

In her second year Muriel was invited by Mrs. Stevenson to help out at receptions by pouring punch. One young man kept coming back for glass after glass at one of the receptions. “Who is this person?” she thought. “Doesn’t he do anything besides drink punch? He has already had fifteen glasses.” The young man was a new seminarian by the name of Harvey Jennings. She later discovered that he was also very eager to gather sticks for everyone for her marshmallow-roast outings and that his interest was not so much in the punch as in her. Over the course of the next few years, Muriel and Harvey got to know each other better and planned to marry after Harvey’s graduation.

Muriel did outstandingly well in her studies at Princeton Seminary, and when she had completed the three-year program, the faculty was polled on whether she should be awarded a degree. All the faculty were in favor with

the exception of one—in fact, the youngest of the faculty members—who had strong reservations about women receiving a theological degree.<sup>37</sup> As a result, she was not able to receive a degree with the rest of her class. However, since her fiancé Harvey Jennings had still one more year to complete before finishing his program, she decided to stay on for additional coursework. When she showed up to register for that final additional year, she was ushered into President Stevenson's office. Asking her to sit down, he explained that the objecting faculty member had resigned his position for health reasons. As a result, when Muriel Van Orden graduated from Princeton Seminary in 1932, she was not only the first woman graduate but the first person to take two degrees at the same time. She received both a bachelor's and a master's degree in theology that year, and a few weeks later she and Harvey Jennings were married.

Harvey and Muriel went on to a fruitful life of ministry together. In addition to serving congregations, they had a long-term connection with the Montrose Bible Conference in Pennsylvania. Regularly bringing young people to Montrose for youth gatherings, in 1940 they were named codirectors of the youth conference, positions that they held until 1966. In 1948 Muriel began a children's camp at Montrose as well, and by the 1950s scholarship funds were being raised to offer the camp experience for needy children from New York City. This allowed them to integrate the camp with children from various national and racial backgrounds and provided an opportunity for promoting greater interracial understanding. She and her husband also taught evening Bible classes for adults at the Hyde Park (Scranton) Bible Institute for many years.

An indication of how much Muriel had impressed her teachers at Princeton Seminary came when the seminary began its doctoral program in the early 1940s. They made a special effort to invite her to come and be one of the first students in this program. Although appreciating the offer, she felt that she had to turn the opportunity down. The Second World War was on, which meant that gas was rationed. Her husband needed the limited gas available to do parish and hospital visiting, making it difficult for her to commute to the seminary for classes. But a second reason, she felt, was even more compelling. She already had two degrees while her husband had only one. If anyone in the family should have the opportunity for further studies, she thought that it should be her husband. "I just did not feel that it was the right thing to do, so I did not accept the invitation. I did appreciate the offer very much,

37. Finley D. Jenkins outlined his arguments against the movement to license and ordain women in "The Self-Destruction of the Movement to License and Ordain Women," *The Presbyterian* (March 27, 1930).

however,” she remembered. In 1981 she was honored with a special Service of Recognition for fifty years of children’s and youth work at the Montrose Bible Conference.<sup>38</sup> In 1982 she received the Distinguished Alumni/ae Award from Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>39</sup>

After Muriel Van Orden had opened the way, it would be another ten years before a second woman would apply to take the full degree program. *Eileen Bergsten Remington* graduated with a Princeton Seminary degree in the class of 1945. By the time she graduated, however, a major change had taken place regarding women at the seminary. This change involved the Tennent School of Christian Education, which moved from Philadelphia to the Princeton campus in 1944, offering a three-year Master of Religious Education degree. In 1947 the first class of six students graduated from the School of Christian Education at Princeton Seminary. Out of this first group of six, four eventually went into the mission field, serving in Japan, Brazil, Korea, and Cameroun. *Anna Jane Molden*, who received her MRE in 1952, was Princeton Seminary’s first African American female student. Altogether, about 180 female students earned an MRE degree at Princeton Seminary between 1947 and 1970.

In 1956 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. opened the path for women to become ordained ministers, and slowly the number of women students coming to Princeton Seminary for full training as pastors would increase. Clearly, the “bastion of male dominance” was giving way to a new, more inclusive social form. But not until the 1970s would more women come for the BD (MDiv) degree than those coming for the more traditional women’s degree in Christian education.

## FACULTY

With the arrival of women students in the new MRE program in 1944, the seminary seems to have felt the need to include female instructors in Christian education on an adjunct or short-term basis. Over the years from 1946 through 1960, these included *Jessie Dell Crawford*, *Bertha Paulssen*, *Dorothy Fritz*, *Jean Boleyn Cassat*, *Dorothy Faye Kirkwood*, and *Harriet Prichard* (see appendix C for dates). Each of these women made important contributions beyond the seminary. Harriet Prichard, for example, founded the nonprofit

38. A brochure commemorating this event can be found in the “Muriel Van Orden Jennings” file, Women’s History Project, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

39. “on&off Campus,” *inSpire* 5 (Summer/Fall 2000): 7.

organization Alternative Gifts International; in her twenty-three years as president, the organization raised over \$424 million in support of more than one hundred nonprofit organizations in dozens of countries. *Freda Gardner*, who joined the faculty in 1962, would become the first long-term woman faculty member, but not until the 1970s would women faculty members be hired in areas beyond practical theology.