

WOMEN AT M. I. T.

Co-education was one of the earliest experiments at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 1871, barely ten years after the founding of M. I. T., Ellen H. Swallow, fresh out of Vassar, asked to enroll in chemistry. Her application for admission as the first woman student baffled the Faculty Committee. They had always assumed M. I. T. to be a school for men only, but a search of the Institute charter revealed no such restriction.

With the wisdom of their kind, the professors promptly hedged the issue. By the expedient of enrolling Miss Swallow as a special student and charging her no fees, they kept her name off the record. If the experiment did not work, they could pretend it never happened.

But the experiment worked very well indeed. Miss Swallow took a bachelor of science degree in 1873 and later married Professor Robert H. Richards, who for many years was head of M. I. T.'s Department of Mining and Metallurgy. As Mrs. Richards, she remained at the Institute as a lecturer in chemistry and achieved international prominence as an authority on food and sanitary chemistry.

That first coed. was to be linked throughout her lifetime with education at the Institute, but especially education for women. In 1876, when the only laboratory for women who wished to study science was a small chemistry lab in a Boston high school, she encouraged establishment of an M. I. T. Laboratory for Women. The Women's Laboratory was discontinued in 1883 when all courses were opened to women and all classes and laboratories became coeducational. In 1878, she influenced the creation of the Margaret

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Cheney Room as a center of activity for coeds; who, like all students, roomed in boarding houses or commuted to the Institute. In 1884, the year she was appointed to the M. I. T. faculty as instructor in Sanitary Chemistry, she was already unofficially performing duties of a dean of women and continued to do so for many years. In 1902, two years after its founding, she became the second president of the M. I. T. Women's Association, organized with her help "to promote greater fellowship among Institute women."

Since that baffling appearance of a woman entrant in 1871, many women have added their "firsts" to the record that has paved the way for today's coed. A distinguished designer of battleships, Lydia G. Weld, '02, was the first coed to receive an engineering degree and that degree was the first for a girl in the Department of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering. The first woman hired by the War Department as a draftsman during World War I, Ida Annah Ryan, '05, had been the first woman to win the architecture department's travelling scholarship and later, the first woman to earn a master's degree from the Institute.

Even as recently as the 1960's there have been "firsts." Linda Greiner Sprague, '60, was the first woman chairman of the student newspaper, The Tech; Sheila Evans Widnall, '60, was the first woman elected to Tau Beta Pi, national engineering honorary, and with Linda Greiner, the first to add the feminine touch to Beaver Key, junior class honorary. Frances Dyro, '62, a pre-med student, was the first woman editor of Tech Engineering News, student scientific and technical journal. And in the fall of 1962, Susan Hemley, '66, became M. I. T.'s youngest coed, at age 15.

For more than half of M. I. T.'s hundred-year history, education for the woman was very much confined to the classroom and laboratory, unlike undergraduate life as coeds know

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it today. The Margaret Cheney Room alone provided a place for women to meet, study, or prepare meals. When the Institute moved to its new site in Cambridge in 1916, women were left without a headquarters of their own until 1939, when a new Cheney Room was established.

Housing for women was started on an experimental basis in 1945 with the acquisition of 120 Bay State Road, formerly a private residence in Boston. Although part of the coed student body continued to live in apartments, that first M.I.T. women's residence provided quarters for women in all classes. Some years later, M.I.T. upper class women moved into Bexley Hall, an apartment building on the Institute campus, and the Boston residence became the dormitory for freshman women. Development of Institute housing for women, as well as an increase in coed enrollment and interest in undergraduate activities, began during the administrations of the late Dr. Karl Taylor Compton and Dr. James R. Killian, Jr., now Chairman of the M.I.T. Corporation. In part, these first advances for women at the Institute were due to the influence of Mrs. Compton and Mrs. Killian on the affairs of women.

In 1952, Miss Ruth Bean was appointed assistant dean of students and for eight years did much to develop the role of a dean of women. In the spring of 1963, just as the first permanent dormitory for women was rising on West Campus, the Institute appointed Mrs. Victor H. Mattfeld as associate dean of student affairs. The wife of the Institute organist and assistant professor of humanities was given, among her administrative duties, special responsibility for the welfare of women students.

Although opportunities for women at M.I.T. have been equal to those for men from the Institute's beginning years, the coed's preparation, growth in numbers, and participation in undergraduate life has been gradual. It has been the job of women, if they had the desire, to prove their own interest and ability.

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"By 1887," a recent survey of the M.I.T. Women's Association shows, "25 women were enrolled and in 1895 women constitute 6% of the total enrollment..." Before 1900 women generally chose one of four courses--architecture, chemistry, biology, and physics. Wider course interest was inspired by the greater demands of the World Wars and increased opportunities in nuclear physics and electronics. Today, more than 240 women, some 120 of them undergraduates, are studying in almost every department of M.I.T.'s five Schools--Architecture and City Planning, Engineering, Humanities, Industrial Management and Science.

Mrs. Stanley McCormick (Katherine Dexter, '04), whose gift of Stanley McCormick Hall for undergraduate women establishes for the first time at M.I.T. coeducational life as well as co-educational study and activities, graduated from M.I.T. in biology in 1904. She recalls the day when most women came ill-prepared in the sciences and consequently began or continued as special students. "Very few were headed for degrees," she says. "I had grown up on French and music." She attended Tech for three years as a part-time special student until she had built a knowledge of science and could pass the entrance examinations. She then attended four years as a regular student and won her degree.

The coed today who comes to M.I.T. takes it for granted that she will register immediately as a freshman, and many hope to receive advanced standing credit for required work already mastered in high school. Women form an even smaller fraction of the student body numbering 6,600--3,500 undergraduates and 3,100 graduate students--but their own larger numbers and accomplishments have made them a well-established part of the Institute community. Unlike the days of Boston Tech, when coeds tended to be local residents, the woman at M.I.T. now may come from across the country. Of the 74 countries represented, one undergraduate woman comes from Poland, and many more as graduate students are from such countries as Chile or Japan, India, Canada, or Egypt.

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Just as women do on campuses throughout the country, the M. I. T. coed worries about quiz grades, works late over assignments and papers, or becomes overloaded with activities. She sails a Tech dinghy from the M. I. T. Sailing Pavilion, or writes for the student newspaper, or contributes her own paintings to the M. I. T. art sale. Or, as one senior is this year, she may be concert mistress of the M. I. T. Symphony Orchestra.

Like her college counterpart of other schools, she's quick to recognize new opportunity. The latest challenge at M. I. T. is the glass enclosed top floor of the new dormitory overlooking the Charles River. She's now planning a weekly social, coeducational event to be known as "Open Penthouse."

In the kind of work that she is undertaking, however, the M. I. T. coed still perhaps is pioneering among women, for it is not unusual to find a young lady building a cosmic ray space probe, working over an architectural drafting board, juggling differential equations, or designing a computer program to solve a senior thesis problem.

For women students as well as men, M. I. T. provides an exhilarating opportunity to work hard and seriously at one's own education.

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October 1, 1963

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Chronological History of Women at M. I. T.

- 1871 Ellen H. Swallow enters the Institute of Technology in Boston, the first woman student at Tech.
- 1873 Ellen H. Swallow earns S.B. degree in chemistry, thus becoming the first woman graduate of the Institute. The degree was her second; the first she received from Vassar College. She later achieved fame as a teacher and authority on food and sanitary chemistry and as founder of the home economics profession.
- 1876 A Laboratory for Women is opened for instruction in chemical analysis, industrial chemistry, mineralogy, and natural history, with Ellen Swallow, now Mrs. Richards, serving as its head. The laboratory was discontinued in 1883, when all courses were opened to women and all classrooms and laboratories became coeducational.
- 1878 Girls are admitted to M.I. T. on the same footing as men. In addition, the Margaret Cheney Room is established in memory of one of Ellen Richards' most promising students. In 1939, after the move of M. I. T. from Boston to Cambridge in 1916, the Cheney Room was reestablished in the present main building of the Institute. In both Boston and Cambridge, it provided a place for women students to meet, to study or relax, to prepare meals, and to hold social functions.
- 1884 Ellen Richards is appointed instructor in Sanitary Chemistry, to serve in that position until her death in 1911. From that time, too, she unofficially performed the duties of a dean of women.
- 1899 The Association of the Women of M. I. T. is founded "to promote greater fellowship among Institute women." Mrs. William Barton Rogers, wife of the founder and first president of M. I. T., served as its first president. Ellen Richards became the second president, in 1902.
- 1902 Lydia G. Weld is the first woman to receive a degree in engineering by virtue of being the first woman to receive her degree in the Department of Naval Architecture

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- and Marine Engineering. She was later to distinguish herself in the field of ship design, and, during World War II, as head of draftsmen for Moore Drydock Co., San Francisco, designers and builders of battleships.
- 1905 Ida Annah Ryan is the first woman to win the architecture department's travelling scholarship, later the first woman to earn a master's degree from M. I. T., and still later, the first woman to be employed in a drafting room of the War Department.
- 1919 M. I. T. seeks the talents of a former woman student in landscape architecture, Mable Babcock, '08, to design the grounds for the Institute, newly situated in Cambridge since 1916.
- 1945 The first women's housing is established at 120 Bay State Rd., Boston, as an experimental venture. Mrs. Margaret Alvord served as housemother for the next ten years. At that time, during the presidency of Dr. Karl Taylor Compton, Miss Florence Stiles, '20, a librarian in the Department of Architecture, acted unofficially as advisor to women students. During this period women were taking a more active part in undergraduate activities, and further housing was provided in Bexley Hall.
- 1952 Ruth Bean is appointed assistant dean of students and for eight years acts also as an advisor to women.
- 1963 Mrs. Victor H. Mattfeld, associate dean at Radcliffe College, accepts appointment as associate dean of student affairs with special responsibility for the welfare of women students.
- 1963 On October 7, Stanley McCormick Hall, the first permanent residence for women, is dedicated during a ceremony in the new dormitory's courtyard. Mrs. Stanley McCormick (Katherine Dexter, '04) formally presents her gift of the dormitory to Dr. Julius A. Stratton, President of M. I. T.

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