

MAKING IT ALL WORK



WHA was formed in 1897 as a social club for women. Shown here about 1909, the group took the name of Alpha, Alpha, Alpha, becoming a Greek letter society in 1911. It evolved into Chi Omega in 1915. Other early sororities were Pi Kappa (1910) and Pi Alpha Phi (1913).



An artist's drawing of Smith Hall in 1909 advertised the first women's dormitory. It was constructed through a gift from Alice Hamilton Smith with some state funding. At this time women students were required to live in a dormitory or at home. Smith Hall was recently refurbished and is still in use today as a dormitory for international students. Alice Hamilton Smith also gave funds to build Congreve Hall (1920).

The addition of new courses and the creation of new departments such as Home Economics at New Hampshire College provided a better infrastructure more supportive of women's participation in state higher education at the beginning of the 20th century. Part of what made for a more welcoming environment was that the new generation of women students also included women who worked at the college as staff and faculty.



The Nymphs of Spring dance in 1920 was performed by college women at the May Day Pageant, an annual celebration.

Gifts to the new institution by Alice Hamilton Smith were significant for the era and demonstrated how women's presence and active contributions were a part of the visible expansion of the campus at Durham.



Stenographers at the New Hampshire College in 1926.

Until the outbreak of World War I, women's social life at college was experienced through house parties, clubs, and sororities, and outings such as canoe trips and dances. The "aggie" image of the school was enhanced by the foundation of the Extension Service in 1914-1915. Women students worked on war gardens and then participated in war preparedness. Sarah Pettee, class of 1908, and an instructor in French and English, served in the armed forces.

With the passing of the 19th amendment in 1920 which guaranteed the right to vote to all women, the local branch of the National College Equal Suffrage League disbanded. Acting from a suffrage platform, women on campus created a viable presence through many social and student government groups. Women assumed positions as faculty members and became more visible in the academic community of the college.

A new social realm of community activity, which included fund-raising and special events, outings and clubs was created by women students in the teens and twenties. The Girls Council supervised women students and enforced dorm rules providing women with leadership and mentoring roles. Clubs also offered opportunities on campus for fun and entertainment. The Women's League included alumnae and faculty spouses, who organized fund-raisers for scholarships for women students. The League advocated for and created a rest room for commuting students at Thompson Hall, furnishing it with a piano.



The Women's Executive Council of 1927 was a successor to the Girls Council created in 1920 and the Girls Student Government Council, which had representation on The Student Council for a few years. The Women's Executive Council was eventually a separate organization for women, succeeded by the Association of Women Students in 1940. ASW was absorbed into The Student Senate in 1951, thus combining men's and women's student representation.



Woman driver at Tractor School, c. 1919. Outdoor clubs such as walking and hiking were also popular with women students in the post World War I era on campus.



Elizabeth Pickering DeMerritt was dean of women from 1919 to 1931. Previously, she had been a house-mother following the death of her husband, Albert DeMerritt, a respected advocate for the college with the state legislature. Elizabeth DeMerritt House is named after her.



Harriet Stanley was the librarian at New Hampshire College in 1916. A graduate of New York State Library School, she was the school reference librarian in Brookline, Mass., and an assistant in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Library before she came to New Hampshire College.

The community of women on campus extended to the housemothers of women's dorms and to the staff of the library. Female staff modeled visible trends toward female independence and professionalism. Middle-class women from the 19th century onward had worked to professionalize library work. While New Hampshire College did not have a library school, many of its librarians were experienced professional women who had come from town or school libraries or from other colleges with library programs.



Charlotte Thompson, fondly known as "Aunt Lottie", was the Durham town librarian. When the town and the college libraries later joined, she was appointed assistant librarian.