

V W A: Serving Victoria Since 1897

In looking back at some of the achievements of the VWA (Victoria Women's Association), we recognize the remarkable impact that the Association has had on the education of women, particularly in the early years: the Association not only encouraged women to attend university but also aided them financially whenever possible. It also offered them a "convenient and comfortable home" in Toronto which, it hoped, would prove as beneficial to them as their formal studies. In conjunction with its support of women students, the VWA assisted Victoria University by promoting it, organizing innumerable events over many years and contributing to its welcoming spirit and reputation.

The story began when Victoria, a Methodist university, moved from Cobourg to Toronto in 1892 after federating with the University of Toronto. Finding safe and pleasant places to live in a large, crowded and perhaps bewildering city proved difficult for out-of-town female students, partly because boarding houses preferred men. Women were concerned. Among the most prominent of these were two visionaries: Margaret Proctor Burwash, a former teacher and wife of Vic's Chancellor-President Nathanael Burwash, and Margaret Addison, Vic 1889, who was then teaching at Stratford Collegiate. They began discussing the need for a residence, first evidenced in letters in 1895. Others were also interested in the young women's living arrangements and well-being. These included the Massey women and Margaret Hopkins Cox, who, by the way, laid the cornerstone of Vic in June 1891 and was wife to Vic's treasurer Senator George Cox. Fortunately, in 1896, businessman and outstanding Vic philanthropist Hart Massey, who had attended Vic in the 1840s in Cobourg, bequeathed \$200,000 to Victoria. Influenced by the women in his family, he reserved \$50,000 of this sum for a residence for these women students.

The VWA's Formation: The following year in February 1897, Vic's Board of Regents authorized the women to form an association and raise money through the press and personal canvassing for land and furnishings for this residence. In March, Margaret Burwash and a few other influential women met in the Vic chapel with some Vic staff and Board of Regents members. Rev. Albert Carman, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church Conference and supporter of women's education, served as the respected presiding officer. At first, he objected to the Chancellor's wife taking the chair, but, backed by her husband, she prevailed. During this meeting, Margaret Burwash became president, Margaret Cox, treasurer, while Mary Jane Carman (Mrs. Albert) became the first vice-president of what was initially named the Barbara Heck Memorial Association after the United Empire Loyalist pioneer. (In this short history, for ease of identification, the Association is only called the VWA.)

These advocates lost no time in writing a letter "To the Women of Methodism," starting with the salutation "Dear Sister." They stated that their mission was threefold: to build a residence for women students, to honour Barbara Heck "the Mother of Methodism in America" by naming the residence after her, and to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee by the advancement of "the future queens of the homes of our Church and land." They made clear that they wanted to raise \$25,000 for land and furnishings for this residence, plus an additional sum as an endowment. They asked that public meetings be held in every church to create interest in women's higher education and to raise funds for a "College residence for the women students of the future."

The plan for a women's residence at Vic proved popular enough for the VWA to attract new members, including some Vic alumnae, wives of professors and administrators, women from Methodist churches and other interested women. In its first year, the Association could claim fifty members, some of them

conveniently connected to wealth and power; the membership fee was \$1.00. The VWA also encouraged the formation of the Alumnae Association the following year in 1898 to assist with fundraising for this new venture; Addison would become the Alumnae's first president.

Fundraising: From the time of its formation in 1897, fundraising has been a constant for the VWA. The difficulty of raising money, particularly in the early years, should not be underestimated. There was a general belief, not just on the part of some men but also on the part of more conservative-minded women, that university education for women was a waste and possibly a destabilizing influence on society. In addition, the average person did not have supplemental money to donate. It is fortunate that these early fundraisers did not realize how exhausting, lengthy and discouraging raising money would be. However, even with periods of disappointments, the Association persisted, and it was not unusual for some members to pressure their wealthy husbands repeatedly for donations. These feisty and formidable champions had been relentlessly speaking, writing hundreds of letters, visiting Methodist churches in Toronto and sending delegates to Methodist conferences to raise interest and, of course, contributions. After extending their efforts, support and money would eventually arrive from Newfoundland, from across Canada, and even from Japan, thanks to some enthusiastic missionaries. By 1900, the VWA had banked over \$5,000. That same year, because it believed in the pairing of a healthy body and a healthy mind, the Association was also able to pay for gym classes for female students in the basement of Vic. Their belief also resulted in the installation of a gym with showers in the basement of the new residence.

The Building: Following some lively discussions, the name of Barbara Heck Hall for the residence was wisely rejected; it would be called Annesley Hall after another admired woman, Susannah Annesley, mother of the Wesleys. This precipitated a name change for the Association in 1901 to Victoria Women's Residence and Educational Association; the words Residence and Educational were later dropped in 1912. While the VWA was continuing to fundraise and promote women's education, Victoria was involved in several years of frustrating negotiations with U of T to buy land for the residence. Finally in 1901, U of T relented and sold Vic some four acres, a cow pasture north of Czar (later Charles) Street, for the building and for a men's campus to the east. Margaret Cox pledged \$10,000 towards the purchase price of \$55,000, and the VWA transferred \$5,000 to Vic. A sub-committee of the Board of Regents took charge of the planning and construction of the building, having hired Canadian architect George Martell Miller who chose for it the Queen Anne Revival style; he would later design the Lillian Massey building to its north. Unfortunately, the planning for the residence was without Addison's ideas that she had developed during her exploration of women's residences on her 1900 trip to Europe. In April 1902, following an impressive procession to the site, Hart's oldest surviving son, Chester D. Massey, his mother being absent, laid the cornerstone of the first residence built just for women on U of T's campus. Indeed, it was the first purpose-built women's residence in Canada. There was a financial over-run, but the Massey estate would pay for the extra costs of construction.

Committee of Management: Formed in late 1902 and called the executive arm of the VWA, this Committee numbered eighteen, six retiring each year, although most remained much longer. Nominated by the VWA and approved by the Board of Regents, these volunteers, took over the immense responsibility for Annesley's furnishings, equipment, and grounds; its administration and finances; and later, responsibility for the subsequent annexes. The lines between the VWA and the Committee of Management were often blurred because many of the women belonged to both groups. Margaret Addison became an ex-officio member of this Committee only in 1906, and it should be noted that she sometimes had to rely on her diplomatic skills with some opinionated members.

Annesley Hall: In another letter to Methodist women in Ontario, Mrs. Burwash requested not only money to furnish the residence but also items such as linens, quilts, and feathers, in pillows or in bags. Addison moved to Toronto to become Dean of Residence, having insisted on an appropriate salary. While not completely finished or fully furnished, the residence opened in the fall of 1903 and by

October boasted a full complement with fifty-five female students, forty of them Vic undergraduates and fifteen from University College and the Conservatory of Music. Eventually, women from different churches furnished bedrooms, while Eliza Ann Phelps Massey (widow of Hart Massey) furnished the lower hall; Anna Vincent Massey (Mrs. Chester D. Massey, daughter-in-law of Hart Massey, and mother of Vincent and Raymond) the reception room; Margaret Wilson Eaton (Mrs. Timothy) the dining room; Margaret Cox the gym; Vic alumnae the library; and the VWA the remaining rooms.

The VWA and Dean Addison, envisioned Annesley Hall as more than a place to eat and sleep: they wanted it to be the best possible substitute home for their out-of-town residents. With this in mind, the older women assumed a semi-maternal role in support of the students and their all-round development, not just intellectual but also social, physical, moral and spiritual. To enhance the students' co-operation in this goal, the Dean began introducing student government to Annesley in 1904-5. It was an innovation in Canada that would eventually prove successful. In short, life in residence was designed to "broaden [the students'] views and mature their character." Thus, these young women could serve as the best Christian example for contemporary society.

VWA Activities: With more housing needed for out-of-town women students, in 1906 the Association undertook the renovation and furnishing of the Drynan house, now the site of Emmanuel College. This second residence, which housed twenty-three women, was called South Hall. When there was no longer space in the two residences, the VWA formed a boarding house committee to inspect and recommend rooms off campus. Few made this list. With growing numbers of women students, the VWA would prepare other houses on Bloor and Charles Streets. Requiring money to operate these residences, the Association continued to fundraise by organizing more lectures, readings, bake sales, bazaars, auctions, musicales, luncheons, and dinners. Having been advertised in the Toronto newspapers, one fundraiser occurred in November 1907 when Charles Trick Currelly, Vic 1898, later instrumental in the founding of the ROM and its first Director of the Department of Archeology, gave an illustrated lecture in the College chapel, 50 cents a ticket. After expenses that included \$6.00 for a lantern and \$1.50 for a carriage, the VWA cleared \$95.75 which was used for repairs and a furnace extension.

Money was also needed to assist students in need. This financial assistance had been done informally since the Association's beginning, particularly for missionaries' daughters. In 1909, a scholarship was set up to help them with residence fees, but this would become a bursary fund a couple of years later. (See also the Addendum.)

In 1908, the members decided that the men needed a residence, but their assistance proved unnecessary when the next year the Board of Regents received an offer from Chester D. Massey to build one. Aware that commuter female students lacked their own study, in 1912 the VWA furnished a comfortable parlour featuring a rosewood Heintzman piano in the Victoria College building (as they would for women lecturers on staff in 1930). Burwash Hall for the men would open in 1913.

That was also the year that the Burwashes retired from their lengthy service to Vic. This came after they took a year's leave of absence, occasioned by some unfortunate internal disputes centering on student government and rules of conduct for residence students. Margaret Burwash, having resigned as VWA president in 1912, was pleased to become an honorary president of the VWA in 1914. Her husband died four years later and she passed away in 1923 engendering great praise for her foresight and dedication to the cause of women's higher education. In recognition of the Burwashes' inestimable contributions to Vic, the VWA asked one of their descendents, Donald Adam Burwash, Vic 1954, to serve as an honorary president, a role he embraced until his sudden death in 2018.

Wymilwood: Vic students received a very generous gift in 1925 thanks to VWA member Agnes Euphemia (Pheme) Smart Wood. She convinced her husband Edward Rogers Wood to donate their home to Victoria for another women's residence and a student union. Located at 84 Queen's Park and

worth then about \$150,000, it was named Wymilwood after their children William and Mildred. Lady Clara Flavelle, who lived next door at Holwood, 78 Queen's Park, now the Faculty of Law, undertook its remodeling and furnishing for some \$60,000. The elegant results were much admired at its high-profile opening in January 1926 which received enthusiastic coverage in the newspapers. (It is interesting that York University started out on the U of T campus in this very Wymilwood that had been renamed Falconer Hall; the Woods built their new home Glendon Hall on Bayview Avenue which later became the first location off the U of T campus of York University.)

Church Union: The VWA decided to raise funds for its projects and at the same time to help Church Union: in 1925 Methodists, Congregationalists, and most Presbyterians, formed the United Church of Canada and this Union underwent some difficulties. Therefore, in 1929 the VWA invited the women of the three Toronto presbyteries to Vic for a fundraising tea at Annesley Hall and for tours, led by students, through "their" college buildings. For three days, the VWA entertained more than 1,000 guests. The members may have helped consolidate church union, but they did not benefit financially making only \$8.96 after expenses. (Gradually over the years, the traditional church connection became less important, and now Victoria College is non-denominational. However, the United Church theological college, Emmanuel, founded in 1928, is still part of Victoria University.)

Changes: The energetic members of the Committee of Management were devoted to their responsibilities until 1920 when there occurred a significant upset. This lasted about a year during which time the Committee lost most of its power, Annesley was re-organized, and Margaret Addison was moved out; no longer Dean of Residence, she became Dean of Women, instead. Women rebelled; some resigned or threatened to resign, for it was felt that men were meddling in the affairs of the women. Finally, the turmoil subsided when the status quo was restored for a few more years. However, Vic, having taken over the finances, retained that responsibility. Dean Addison retired in the summer of 1931 to numerous accolades, gifts, teas and banquets. The VWA feted her with a garden party and announced that a \$5,000 fund had been established from which she would receive life-long income. With over 200 women students in residence, more changes came. By 1932, the Board of Regents had hired a warden to take over from the Committee of Management.

This Committee had functioned from December 1902 to June 1932 when it merged into the Women's Council which was eventually disbanded in 1952. During those years, the Committee had only three presidents, Margaret Burwash (1902-13), Mrs. R. N. (Mary Jane Crossen) Burns (1913-30), and Mrs. A. E. (Florence Warner) Lang (1930-32); they gave monthly reports to the VWA. Among its members had been Lillian Massey Treble, daughter of Hart Massey, his daughters-in-law Susan Denton Massey (Mrs. Walter Massey), Anna Vincent Massey, and then after her death, Margaret Phelps Massey, Chester's wives. There is a very moving tribute to this Committee and its outstanding work in the VWA records of April 26, 1933.

A New Purpose: The VWA and its Committee of Management were no longer involved with the administration of the residences and the student union, except as advisors. Its members decided to follow the suggestion of their retiring president Margaret Addison, who had served in that capacity since 1921, and their new president Maud Brown. Their recommendation was to find a new role as a link between Victoria and United Church members and between Victoria and the parents of all students. Therefore, in 1933, the VWA decided to invite the mothers of first-year students to join the organization; it hosted a reception for them in October which they had advertised in the newspapers. This was the beginning of their annual October Open House for Vic parents and friends to meet the professors and take student tours of the College. These Open Houses continued for many years, but changes would come when, in the fall of 1994, Victoria began to hold "Open Vic." In October of the following year, the VWA took part in U of T Day, in the Clubs Tent, King's College Circle. Feeling that its presence was not useful, it ended its participation in any open house.

A New Wymilwood: Vic decided to exchange Wymilwood on Queen's Park, where crossing the road

safely had always been a challenge, with U of T for land on Charles Street West for a new student centre and food facility for Annesley; it, too, was named Wymilwood. Another jewel of architect Eric Arthur's, it opened in 1952, its design being praised even in Europe, partly because there was always access to natural light. The VWA raised almost \$2,000 through teas and private subscription in order to furnish its Copper Room. The Association's programmes, the ones in January then featuring music, which had always been important to its members, and the ones in February showcasing reports from students, continued in this new Wymilwood. VWA programmes are still offered today, but usually in Alumni Hall in "Old Vic."

Roles of the VWA: The VWA has assumed several roles over the course of its 125 years. The major one is that of fundraiser: first for Annesley Hall and then other residences for women students as well as for bursaries for students in need. The Association has also contributed to scholarships for Vic students. (See the Addendum below.) The Endowed Bursary Fund for Vic students, women and men, is central to its present-day fundraising role.

In another role, the VWA has always promoted Vic and its activities. Its programmes usually showcase Victoria academic and staff members who donate their time and expertise. These lectures are open to everyone with an interest in higher education. Students, whose president participates in the January "Vic Now" meetings, are always welcome to attend any meeting and to enjoy the refreshments. Their outgoing and incoming presidents are guests at the VWA April lunches.

As social orchestrator, its third role, the Association has organized hundreds of events over its long history, some on its own initiative, others at the request of Vic. On the Association's guest lists could have been, for example, any combination of its own members, missionaries on furlough, ministers' wives, other church women, parents, and those connected to Vic, including members of the Senate and Board of Regents. Locations of these events could have been in Vic venues, restaurants, Methodist/United churches, or even in a member's home for a smaller gathering. Among these many teas, receptions, lunches, and dinners, one notable event occurred in October 1934, when the VWA organized a lunch for 325 at Coles restaurant on Yonge Street to welcome Jessie Macpherson as the new Dean of Women and to welcome back Chancellor Edward Wilson Wallace after a period of ill health. The VWA lunches with a featured speaker, revived in 2002 by VWA President Anne Sinclair who was also a dynamic member of the Council of Women, take place in April and once again welcome members and Vic faculty, staff and alumni and contribute to a sense of community.

Current Times: The VWA, recipient of U of T's Arbor Award in 2013 in recognition of "the generosity and dedication of its members" and a life member of U of T's Presidents' Circle recognition society, realizes that there is still a need in the community for informative and engaging lectures that do not involve a significant time or financial commitment. It feels confident in continuing to offer several lectures during the academic year. Through these afternoon programmes, April luncheons, annual newsletters, its websites, phone calls and invitations to parents, the VWA maintains its role as a liaison between Victoria and the alumni, friends and relatives of past and present students, and members of the public. It also continues its fundraising for bursaries for Vic students, women as well as men, in financial need.

For some 125 years, through many transformations, the VWA has remained flexible and has been able to adapt to Vic's changing needs. No matter what the required transition, the Association has remained committed to Victoria and Vic students. We look forward to continuing our service with dedication and enthusiasm for many more years.

Addendum

Anniversaries: Celebrations for the VWA anniversaries have been held over the years, but the most important one occurred in 1997 for the 100th when a dinner, special lectures, and a fundraising evening with Mary Lou Fallis starring in *Primadonna on a Moose* took place.

Financial Assistance: From its inception, the VWA has assisted Vic students, foreign and domestic, informally and formally, in several ways, first through its Endowed Bursary Fund which made its appearance as a scholarship fund for needy students in 1909 and then had its name changed to a bursary fund in 1911. In 1927, the VWA began its annual letter of appeal. Its Bursary Fund became part of the Victoria College Bursary Fund in 1950. The VWA also assisted students through the Ethel Bennett (now joined with the Harold Bennett Scholarship) and Margaret Addison Scholarships. In addition, in the past few years, the VWA has made financial contributions to Emmanuel College in recognition of its anniversaries, to the Judy LaMarsh annual lecture and to the new Goldring Student Centre. It has also been able to contribute to bursaries and scholarships in the name of retired administrators, such as Alumni Affairs Executive Director Larry Davies, Vic Presidents Emeriti Paul Gooch and Eva Kushner, Registrar Susan McDonald, and Chancellor Wendy Cecil and in the name of our own beloved Executive member, Prof. Sheila Cook, who died in 2019.

Membership: It is interesting to note that in the VWA 1903 Constitution, all women students who were registered at Victoria were considered members of the Association. The VWA would expand its membership from time to time, by advertising in the newspapers or by holding receptions for the College, students' parents, or the public. In 1965, under the presidency of Marguerite Fidler, the first VWA president who was not a Vic employee or wife of one, the Association expanded its membership base by inviting men to join. Meetings were held at least once a year in the evenings so that working members could attend. However, evening meetings were discontinued as they had been in the past when attendance declined. Now a one-year complimentary membership is offered to Vic spring graduates. Current VWA members, some of whom joined the VWA in the 1970s, have been very faithful and generous with their time and money.

Some Other VWA Interests: Important as Victoria and its students were, the VWA was not insular. For example, in 1907, it became a federate of the local Council of Women, formed in 1893 and still active in its goal of improving society. In June 1908, the VWA along with the University Women's Club hosted a meeting advocating clean drinking water for Toronto. Another early interest of the VWA was in University Settlement, founded in 1910 by U of T faculty and students, considered the first community-based social service agency in Toronto. The VWA was invited to join in its centenary celebrations in 2010. Along with university women, it was involved in the war effort through its work with the University Hospital Supply Committee. It helped a woman, Doris Ding, return to China to teach in a new Chinese university for women. It donated to the Russian children's relief fund and to Armenian relief in 1922 after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. It also joined the League of Nations in 1925.

(The history of the VWA is much richer and more complex than the overview above. The Vic archives; Ethel Granger Bennett's 1970 history of the VWA; Anne Ford's *A Path Not Strewn with Roses: One Hundred Years of Women at the University of Toronto, 1884-1984*; Dr. Chaviva Hošek's "Women at Victoria" in *From Cobourg to Toronto*; Prof. C. B. Sissons' *A History of Victoria University* and most of all Dr. Jean O'Grady's 2001 biography of *Margaret Addison* and her 1996 "A History of the Victoria Women's Association" have all been valuable.)