

From *The Radnor*, 1915.

PRESENTED MARCH 16, 2011 FOR RADFORD UNIVERSITY'S WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

BY Jennifer Juul

With contributions from the members of THEA 376, Theatre History 2

Welcome to an exploration of the earliest chapter of theatre history here on the Radford campus. In one sense, this is a continuation of previous research conducted several years ago on drama in late 19th-century American education. While the research was more general, it led to the conclusion that the study of drama and acting was a frequent, but hidden, component of higher learning in both men's and women's education. It also provided background study of approaches to actor training before Realism, Stanislavski, and 'method' acting became so dominant in the twentieth century.

In previous semesters of theatre history class, students had begun to investigate the earliest possible record of theatre in Radford. It has proved a beneficial exercise to help the

students get engaged in historiography, the study of how history itself is written down and documented in their chosen field. This semester, they offer their input today as a small portion of their semester grade, to apply some of the research methods used in the individual papers they write on topics of their choice. Today the theatre history students will speak periodically throughout the presentation. The class has commendably jumped right in to spend some time on this project.

The group first studied pages from the Radnor, the yearbook published annually from 1914 to 1917. These first yearbooks proved to be an excellent jumping off point, not only because of the number of references to theatrical activities, but also because it brought an understanding of what was considered memorable and valued by the students who were there and put the yearbook together. This study also draws heavily from the RU archives, including the two known histories of Radford's early years. One is by M'ledge Moffett, one of Radford's most well-known matrons and the first Dean of Women, and the other is by Lenora Lewis-Smith. These sources show that many early students were involved in some type of dramatic performances. Those students experienced theatre's empowerment beyond the opportunity for an advanced degree and teacher certification. I also selected evidence of one performance piece, Tennyson's The Princess, for more in-depth interrogation. Performed in 1916 and directed by Ms. Moffett herself, the evidence shows that theatrical performance was used frequently as a teaching tool and confidence-builder. Radford's first students were empowered by engaging in theatrical performance, even though their performances still reinforced and augmented their status as marriageable, productive ideal women.

Dr. John Preston McConnell



<http://lib.radford.edu/archives/ruhistory/presidents.htm>

In the beginning, Dr. John P. McConnell came from his position as a Dean at Emory and Henry College to serve as the first President of the Radford Normal and Industrial School. In her Sentimental Chronicle, Lenora Lewis-Smith observes that “The education of women was so unpopular at that time that a man who identified himself with the cause of "Female Education" was regarded as a lost soul in the education world. One influential educator of the state approached him on this "delicate" subject, saying he regretted 'seeing so scholarly a mind being thrown away in the education of women, especially in a Normal School where methods courses would stifle real learning.'” (Lewis-Smith 10)

It is useful to notice the devaluing of women’s education mentioned in the former passage as part of the still Victorian environment that Radford University was born into. However, one should also observe in that statement the devaluing of the teaching field in general, and the devaluing of professional training as well (professional training as opposed to scholarship and research). That is to say that the prevailing view of Radford as second-tier was only partly due to gender, but also due to other prevailing biases both in society and in higher

education. Regardless of the perception of Radford as inferior, the first students did have many educational opportunities on campus.

Radford State Normal School



Founder's Hall, dressed up for its dedication ceremony, 1913

It is known that Radford was initially created to fill the need for trained schoolteachers in Virginia. It was founded in 1910, right after the normal or teaching schools at Harrisonburg and Fredericksburg (now JMU and Mary Washington). The first students mostly studied teacher training and/or household or manual arts, as women had done in the Victorian era. Our first graduates were expected to fulfill their duties as schoolteachers, wives and mothers, and heads of their household's domestic life. It is also generally observed by feminist historians that the young women of this era would use their education to cultivate the ideal woman within themselves. Grace, poise, good speech, and creativity were desired traits in both duty and in femininity. The study of drama, particularly of acting, was ideally suited for cultivating these traits. Yet women needed to acquire these qualities without staining their reputation. Given the questionable position of theatre and of actresses at the time, its suitability as a field

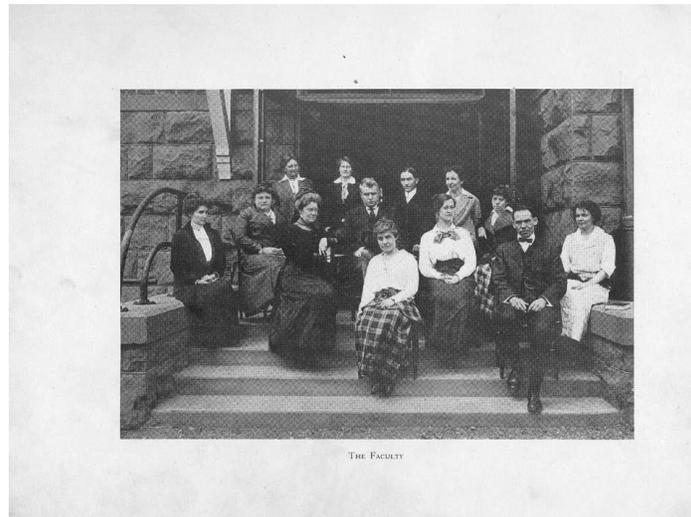
of study for women was suspicious. One may therefore expect little evidence of theatrical performance at Radford. The record of theatrical performances could have easily been hidden or obscured to prevent the appearance of impropriety.

In actuality, if one looks closely enough it becomes apparent that theatre, drama, and performance permeated the lives of the “first ladies” educated at Radford, as well as the lives of the gentlemen and ladies who taught them. It was not as though dramatic performances were a luxury or some sort of delayed addition to life on campus. From coursework to extracurricular activities to the social life of the institution, Radford was immersed in the performing arts during its first ten years.

Acting training was often referred to as “Expression” in the Victorian era and immediately afterward, but could also occur intermingled with coursework called “vocal culture” or “physical culture,” so the differing labels tend to obscure the presence of actor training in the lives of these young women. In higher education, the fields of Oral English and Oral Interpretation housed within an English department were the typical early 20th century forerunners of today’s theatre and communications departments. As a side note, it is interesting that RU’s Core 101 and 102 classes do once again combine public speaking with written English curriculum, echoing the combination of English and Oral Interpretation during the early twentieth century.

Perhaps the most unexpected discovery of this research project is this: there were a couple of years in which “Expression” became required coursework. The assumption upon beginning this research was that the required subjects would consist only of education courses and study in the public school curriculum—math, science, and literature, for example. The

acting coursework in the late 1910s also came as a surprise because theatre did not really proliferate as an area of college study in America until after World War Two. If theatre was happening on campus, the logical guess would place it in the realm of the extracurricular, not hard-wired into the curriculum.



Radford Faculty, from *The Radnor*, 1914

At the start of the first semester in 1913, physical education and music were the required courses bearing the closest resemblance to dramatic performance training. (Lewis-Smith 15) Then in 1918, Miss Elizabeth Sheffield Allen joined the faculty to teach Oral Interpretation.

In her history, M'Ledge Moffett states that the courses in "Expression" in 1918 were "designed to meet the needs of students for training in oral reading, Oral English, [and] Public Speaking with less emphasis upon the usual elocution, recitation and dramatic expression. The courses were required for all sophomores." However, "Miss Allen proved to be a teacher of Expression, she placed emphasis upon dramatic reading, extemporaneous speeches and training for dramatic performances" (186). From Moffett's phrasing here, it appears that Allen took the oral interpretation coursework in a different direction than what she and Dr.

McConnell had initially intended. The students also seemed to be studying physical gesturing as well as vocal placement (187), two common aspects of today's voice and movement curriculum for theatre majors. Although Moffett's first reference to Allen's pedagogy seems a bit critical, she does praise Allen's theatrical endeavors, calling her "most gifted" as a performer and "especially effective" in her direction of plays (187). Moffett later adds more information on the coursework in expression: "these courses were designed to train students in reading and to help them to arrange recital programs, plays, festivals and to develop a naturalness of expression through the presentation of readings, essays, and orations" (346). Allen also continued to practice her craft, just as today's theatre faculty still direct, design, and act as part of their professional activity. "Besides coaching student plays, Miss Allen gave annual recitals of her own. "Esmeralda," one of her favorites, was given so many times that students and staff compared people and situations to parts in the play." (Lewis-Smith 25) Allen herself says that she "gave readings and entertainments in nearly every town between Roanoke and Knoxville and thus advertised Radford College and the Department of Oratory in particular. Gave readings at Kiwanis (or Rotary) luncheons." (qtd. in Moffett 132-A)

At the time, most professional actors were neither college-educated nor college-bound. They came up as actors in the manner of craftsmen, apprenticing and learning the trade by imitating one's superiors. However, outside the college sphere, many people professional and amateur alike studied acting by studying the Delsarte method of vocal and physical expression. Before Stanislavski and "method acting," the Delsarte System was the desired approach to performance. People from many walks of life (not just actors but lawyers, preachers, and community leaders) studied Delsarte to become more effective public speakers, but also to

become more culturally sophisticated. This would have applied to the young women seeking an education at Radford. As wives-to-be, responsible for entertaining and going about in public, Delsarte helped them cultivate the voice and movement of the ideal woman, graceful, well-spoken, and vivacious.

STUDENT CONTRIBUTION: A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF AND REFLECTION ON THE DELSARTE

SYSTEM

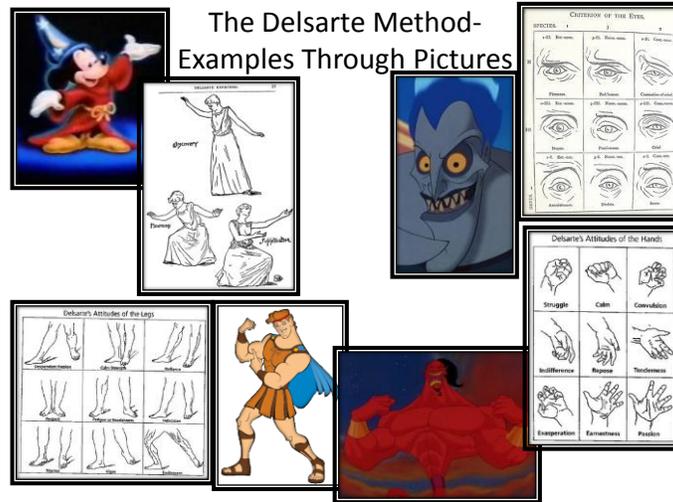
==THEIR 1st SLIDE: COMMENTS FROM DELSARTE/PHYSICAL CULTURE GROUP==

- The Delsarte Method of acting was a system of vocal and physical actions that were meant to exemplify recognizable patterns in over exaggerated ways.
- The acting method was brought to the U.S. by Steele Mackaye, a student of Delsarte.
- Mackaye also contributed the concept of "Harmonic Gymnastics" to the method.

It was the primary actor training method from 1870 until 1895 and was the primary speech training tool (The Delsarte System of Oratory) from 1870 until 1920.

- The students noticed a resemblance between Delsarte's expressive physical positions and the captivating movements of today's favorite animated Disney characters.

==THEIR 2ND SLIDE: DELSARTE MOVEMENTS==



With its style of systematic gesturing and vocalizing, Delsarte or something very similar would most likely have been Miss Allen's approach. Delsarte is a much more scientific, concrete approach to acting than today's dominant American methods, which pursue a truthful inner realism. In Delsarte, one notices both the Victorian scientific approach to humanity and its tendency toward 19th century Romanticism and melodrama. Lewis-Smith says, "Virtually all students were required to take courses in expression sometime during their college careers, and students entertained their friends by giving demonstrations of a "leading hand" or some other stage business they were being taught in class." (25) The 'leading hand' was a key characteristic in Delsarte expression.

Beginning around 1920, the faculty overhauled Radford's curriculum, resulting in an increase of degree requirements. Ms. Lewis-Smith reported that "by the time the curriculum was crowded with standard degree requirements, Miss Elizabeth Allen resigned as teacher of dramatics. To fill this void, courses in oral English were incorporated with English and taught by advanced students who had studied under Miss Allen. Students who taught dramatics at one

time or another during those early years included Elizabeth Brown, Annie Sue Anderson, Ina Addington, Helen Smith, Helen "Bill" Brown, Genevieve Dickenson, Catherine Hensley, and Kathleen Henessey." (32) M'Ledge Moffett's explanation of the curricular overhaul was more concrete: "with the crowding of the curriculum to meet the standard requirements of the state it became necessary to discontinue this department. Miss Allen resigned in 1922. Courses in Oral English were incorporated in the offerings of the English Department" (347). On this subject, Moffett curiously did not call it "expression" here, but chooses the safer label of "Oral English." There is a strong sense in her writing that Moffett had reservations about the appropriateness of Allen's teaching style, and perhaps about the appropriateness of theatre in the curriculum. These reservations would have had a significant impact because Moffett herself was such a driving force in Radford's beginning.



Archival photo of Professor M'Ledge Moffett

Moffett's point of view may have revealed itself most clearly when she chronicles Radford's history of dance in her book. "Physical education was introduced as a requirement in the curriculum at the opening of the college in 1913. Dancing on the other hand was a forbidden activity and at no time has dancing with men been allowed on the campus...the first

dancing 'shock' in the institution fell on the night of December 4, 1916 when Miss Ninde, Director of Physical Education attired in a beautiful black silk ballet costume, black silk scarf, black silk hose, and a red rose in her hair gave a solo dance as a feature of the Christmas party. This dance by Miss Ninde was literally a sensation...this episode however broke the ice and started aesthetic dancing in the institution. Miss Ninde was gifted in this art and developed and trained a number of girls to be good dancers. Under her direction many beautiful pantomimes were worked out with the stunt programs and in the annual demonstrations by the physical education class." (Moffett 353) It seems that before Miss Allen legitimized acting at Radford, Miss Ninde brought the art form of dance into the program of physical education and helped make it feel socially acceptable.

Miss Ninde also conducted the first May Day festival in 1919 (Moffett 354). The May Day festivals included folk dances, drills, and gymnastics. The May queen was elected as the most "queenly, beautiful, and gracious" by the students. The festival seems to have been quite a celebration of feminine grace and beauty. Her successor, Miss Ellis, later expanded the festival by including added group and individual dances on themes such as "Pan, the Japanese Sun God, Spring, Health, Robin Hood, The Circus, Grecian Games," et cetera. (Moffett 354) The themes of the dance programs hint at choreographic skill and purpose on the teacher's part, but some of her May Day themes also serve as a reminder of the reinforcement of the feminine ideals Radford's first students strove for at school. Further research would expand the role of dance during Radford's years and enhance understanding of early performance education given the parallels between dance and acting studies. Moffett provides additional stimulating details regarding debate over early dance activities, saying "Since the beginning of dancing the

problem of costuming has been one of acute interest. The Grecian costume has been used more than any other..." (Moffett 354). In general, privately run schools of Delsarte and Physical Culture also preferred Grecian attire at this time. Moffett also points out that the early operettas presented by music professor Florence Baird included dance choreography and requisite costuming: "Miss Baird was quite adaptable in the use of dance steps and costuming to add to the effectiveness of these programs." (335) This seems only one of many ways in which Miss Baird influenced the arts at Radford.



Professor Florence C. Baird

http://www.radford.edu/rumag/backissues/2001_s/pages/baird.html

While Florence Baird may already be known for composing Radford's alma mater, she was also a significant contributor to the dramatic arts. Miss Baird began by organizing the Glee Club as soon as the school opened in 1913. Moffett relates that "under her leadership it was one of the most active student organizations on the campus. Miss Baird was exacting in her standards for membership, attention to practice, loyalty and quality of program" (335). Moffett also praises the dramaturgy of Baird's operetta compositions, saying "her originality, ability to write words, and compose music was shown in all of her programs...each program worked up to a dramatic or spectacular climax. The Gypsy was a favorite theme" (335). Moffett claims

that Baird was “one of the most active dramatic coaches especially of musical comedies and operettas. In 1915 she presented a Gypsy Operetta. This was an original production written by herself. This operetta was based on a visit of some American girls to Japan which gave an opportunity for an effective stage setting.” She reports that the same Gypsy Operetta was also given at Blacksburg (347).

STUDENTS GAVE SOME CONTEXT ON OPERETTA AND ITS PLACE IN RU'S EARLY THEATRICAL ACTIVITIES:

“My name is Jason Krage, and these are my partners Bussy Gower and Olivia Robinette. For our part of the research we had the task of researching Operettas. In our research we found that operettas are usually light, romantic comedies that include song and dance. One example we found that was related to Radford Theatre’s past history was the Gilbert and Sullivan classic operetta, Princess Ida. The operetta is roughly based on Lord Alfred Tennyson’s The Princess, which depicts the story of a prince and princess engaged at birth, and come their wedding day years later they are starting to question one another. And thus a full scale of craziness ensues. This was Gilbert and Sullivan’s 8th of 14 operettas that they collaborated on. The poem, rather than the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, was performed at Radford in its early years.”

Moffett describes pageants held at Radford as part of Baird’s artistic contributions. Theatre historians typically use the term ‘pageant’ to describe any performance or exhibition of a theatrical nature that is fairly grand in scope, even if it does not take place in a theatre. Lewis-Smith reports that “In the spring of 1915, Miss Baird wrote an elaborate pageant based

on the theme of education. On the campus near the tennis court, each department of the college gave dramatic demonstrations, set with appropriate music written by Miss Baird. The Queen of Education, Miss Georgia Morris, sat enthroned throughout the performance.” (26) Moffett says “it was well attended by the public and gave a splendid summary of the opportunities of education” (348). The concept of the *educated* ideal woman may seem progressive within the context of the time period.

Pageants could be considered para-theatricals, as opposed to the published plays produced by the School of Dance & Theatre today. Yet para-theatrical performances or events still contain the essential elements of theatre: performers, spectators, a setting, costumes, spectacle, entertainment, characters, to name a few. By defining theatre broadly to include para-theatrical events, we can see more connections understand theatre’s impact more holistically. It also helps to remember that theatre was even more of a pastime than it is now. Radford girls would have grown up entertaining themselves with music and performance, whether original or in print, as an essential element of childhood play and family interaction. Numerous theatrical performances took place in Radford’s first decade that fall outside of today’s narrow conception of legitimate theatre, yet are nonetheless appropriate for this research.

Some such performances documented in the archival sources were still called plays—class plays, specifically. The first senior class play was coached by Education professor Mr. Avent, who was the senior class sponsor (Lewis-Smith 19) in the first year. A class play was perceived as a productive and acceptable use of theatre for the students. Producing by class standing no doubt bonded a class together socially.

Class plays would also have reinforced the social hierarchy that put seniors at the top and lower classes at the bottom. The lines of social hierarchy among students are blurrier now, but still exist. It is also worth noting at this time that a junior was not necessarily the same class standing or age as a junior in college today. Radford was a two-year institution for a while. Some of the first freshmen had only completed a couple of years of high school, a fact which seems even weightier when considering that at the time, students were thought of as girls needing protection and guidance. The Victorian ideal of femininity rewarded girlish behavior and capitalized on the contrast between the protector (husband, father, teacher) and the protected (wife, daughter, student). A student could enter a girl, and emerge on the cusp of womanhood, but would not usually emerge as a woman on her own in the world. And all girls would have been encouraged toward the group identity, for example the senior class, rather than toward the identity of the individual.

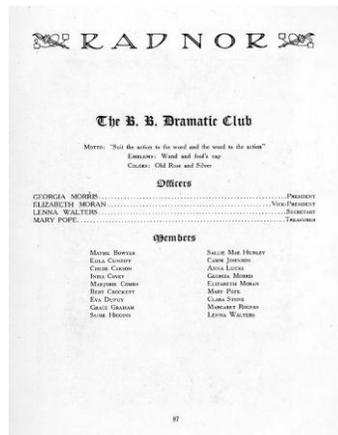
Group morale and identity seems especially vibrant during annual 'stunt nights' that took place on campus. A stunt was a dramatic sketch or skit performed to provoke laughter or make a patriotic statement. Lewis-Smith describes stunts in detail:

"In 1916, the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) started the custom of having an annual stunt night, with a banner (later money) going to the class having the best stunt. As the war became more intense, original stunts were devoted less toward comic situations and more toward patriotic programs. One stunt during the war showed a scene from the trenches on one side of the stage and one from college life on the other, to show contrast. After the war, stunts were humorous again, until the late 20's when they became more artistic. One of the most artistic stunts ever given was "I dreamed I dwelt in marble halls," by the degree class of 1923.

For a number of years, the faculty gave a stunt while the judges were making their decision about class stunts. Among these were a scene in a one room school, with faculty playing students-Dr. McConnell as a dull boy; Mr. Avent, who was small, and Miss Moffett, who was large, as twins; and the staff taking

various parts. Variations of this stunt amused the students for many years. Stunt night activities generally were fund-raising activities, but sometimes they were carried out just for entertainment. Once during the summer, on a July 4, county groups gave stunts, but this took so much time that afterward summer stunts were confined to the 4 classes.” (Lewis-Smith 26)

Moffett also notes that “stunt night has been one of the best money making schemes of the students.” (352)



From The *Radnor*, 1914

The presence of a theatre club or drama club was assumed from the outset of this study, and once again the Radnor provided the first account. According to Lewis-Smith, “the B. B. Dramatic Club was organized by students who had been coached for several plays by Miss Blanche Bulifant” (16). The Drama club ‘faded away’ the 2nd year, but the literary societies and glee club continued to perform (Lewis-Smith 22). Moffett more pointedly reports that the B.B. Dramatic Club was “abolished” in 1915 and dramatic club activities transferred to the literary societies (346). One can only wonder what led to such an abolition.



From *The Radnor*, 1914

The club did make a lasting and tangible contribution during its brief tenure by spearheading the construction of the first scenic elements in the form of flats made by Mr. Roop, the school's carpenter. The flats remained in use for years afterward. (Lewis-Smith 16) The scenery Lewis-Smith is referring to would have been very similar to basic canvas flats still used today. Moffett tells us that Roop's flats were used any time an interior setting was called for, and that the flats took about a half-day to erect (346). This is very typical of theatre practice at the time, which relied heavily on stock scenery that would be used over and over again in a wide variety of plays.

It would be a mistake to neglect the two students in blackface in the 1914 yearbook photo. Evidence of blackface minstrelsy is to be expected during Radford's first decade. It may not be flattering to Radford University to highlight an art form so rife with racism, but to neglect its mention is to avoid one of the most attended theatrical entertainment styles in American history. It would also ignore issues of race in Virginia during the early twentieth century.

A BRIEF STUDENT OVERVIEW OF BLACKFACE MINSTRELSY:

“Blackface minstrelsy probably occurred in 1843 in New York City, and within a year it became the most popular form of live entertainment in America. It is known that Mark Twain was a big fan of this brand of theatre, calling it a “genuine extravagant show.” Just as his use of the “N-word” in *Huck Finn* is controversial, so did blackface minstrelsy provoke controversy in America. In the minstrel show, white entertainers put on blackface and caricatured slaves in the south and ex-slaves in the north. They would use grease paint or shoe polish to blacken their skin, often wear woolly wigs, gloves, tailcoats, or ragged clothes. Later in history, black artists would also perform in blackface. Blackface was an important tradition in American theatre for roughly 100 years. It became popular overseas, in Britain, where it lasted longer than in the U.S. It was commonly used for minstrel performances and it survived long past the heyday of the minstrel show. It cemented racist images, attitudes, and perceptions worldwide, but also popularized black culture. By the middle of the 20th century changes in attitude about racism had ended the use of blackface in the U.S. It is now most commonly used outside of the states as a form of satire.”

The founding of Radford itself sets the tone regarding race in women’s education because it was born out of what the state of Virginia deemed a need to license female teachers, yet as would be expected it was specifically proposed as a school for “white women” as would be expected (Lewis-Smith 8). Interestingly enough, years earlier President McConnell had written his dissertation on the treatment of African Americans in reconstruction Virginia (Lewis-

Smith 10). It would be illuminating to research Dr. McConnell's views on the subject further. For this study, one finds unsurprisingly that blackface minstrel shows were performed at Radford.

Virginia Tech Minstrels
image from

http://imagebase.lib.vt.edu/browse.php?folio_ID=/va/stu&num_rows=70&start_row=21

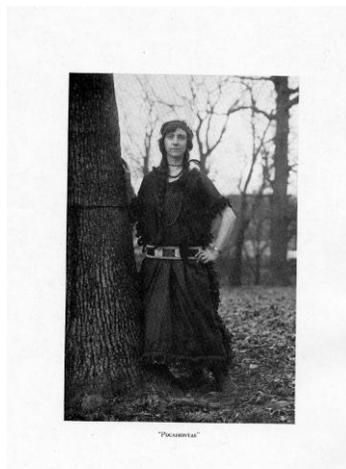


The Virginia Tech Minstrels, who performed at Radford during the first decade, evoked the traditional setup and costumes of an American minstrel show. As late as 1930, and probably even later, minstrel shows were performed on campus. Moffett refers to one given by the Ingles Literary Society in the auditorium, saying “it was one of the best programs of the entire season, very clever, well acted, and very entertaining.” The program included songs, jokes and dialogue, and a section called “Negro love scenes” (294). In content, it was clearly modeled after the standard professional American blackface minstrel show of the 19th and 20th century.

If we consider the more contemporary definition of “redface,” meaning a white person putting on makeup to impersonate an American Indian, then the Pocahontas Literary Society gave an equally memorable performance in 1925 where “under the beautiful moon, by the wigwam and campfire the maidens realized what was truly their heritage. As soft music was

played and the winds gently rippled the water of the fountain the...program was rendered before an audience of more than two hundred” (Moffett 294). The performance included a variety of dramatic readings, sketches, songs, and dances. The description of the performers discovering “what was truly their heritage” recalls the common depiction of American Indians onstage up until then: performed by a white person wearing red makeup, co-opting Indian qualities of nobility or naturalistic authenticity.

The Pocahontas Literary Society and the Ingles Literary Society probably had the biggest club presence on campus during the early years. The two groups developed a rivalry as they developed their wide variety of endeavors. Early on in Radford’s first decade, the public was invited to all the literary society performances. The previously mentioned performance underscores that the theatrical performances of Radford’s early years were not only for the educational benefit of the students, but also an important part of the public face of the school.



Pocahontas, From the 1914 *Radnor*



The Ingles Society Rehearsing (from the RU archives)

In her history, Moffett notes that “by 1920 the societies were placing much emphasis on dramatic presentations. This form of program had become so popular it was destroying interest in all other types. In order to better balance the society the faculty committee decided to allow each literary society to hold one play during the year” (296). Moffett’s choice of words seems odd, particularly in characterizing dramatic presentations as destructive. Once they were limited to one per year, Moffett does single out the literary society performances as “the outstanding dramatic productions of the year.” (296) In fact Miss Moffett helped co-write the 1922 Ingles Society dramatization of the story of local heroine Mary Draper Ingles, which she praises as “presented with unusual skill” (297). Again, here is an example of theatre being a useful tool for teaching and socializing, as long as appropriate boundaries maintained the integrity of the students as ideal women-in-training.

Stage Actor Clifford Devereux, 1913-1914



http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/savyrepublic&CISOPTR=8628&CISOBX=1&REC=7
University of Washington special collections

The actor in this image may resemble John Barrymore, but it is actually Clifford Devereux, another popular stage actor who was touring the country at the time. The school hosted numerous entertainments presented by visitors during its first decade. The visiting companies, comparable to the current University Performance Series which brought in the Opole Philharmonic Orchestra of Poland this year, bear such titles as the Orpheus Four; the Harp Trio; Seven Engagements, by the Clifford Devereux Actors; Swiss Bell Ringers; David Honey; the Jitney Players; and the Hinshaw Opera.” (Lewis-Smith 32)

Clifford Devereux’s touring company was a particular Lyceum favorite from Miss Moffett’s point of view:

“The Devereux Players have been at the college so many times that they are almost a part of the institution. Mr. Clifford Devereux with Miss Zeda Graft have appeared in many different plays. One of their favorite presentations was (sic) “Ibsen’s Rommersholm,” “Romeo and Juliet,” “The Rivals,” “Twelfth Night,” and many other of Shakespeare’s plays. Mr. Devereux was responsible for the designing and sale to the institution of the present stage curtains. Miss Graft became an honorary member of the Pocahontas Society. Whenever the Devereux Company performs in Radford the Pocahontas Literary Society gives a reception in honor of Miss Graft.” (Moffett 350)

Devereux's company was clearly seen as a legitimate and worthy addition to campus community life. Miss Graft seems somehow to have been a role model for Radford Normal's students, whether or not the faculty wanted them to study acting courses.

So who were Radford's earliest student actors? Perhaps a reading of the acting honor roll is in order: Miss Elizabeth Brown, who was playwright, actress, teacher...Miss Genevieve Giesen, also multitalented; Miss Ruth Bricker...Among the gifted actresses, it was said that Ruth Bricker "could die more gracefully than any student in the college." She starred as the heroine in "Smiling Through." Besides those who taught dramatics to other students, other memorable student actresses included Louise Steele, Vera Harmon, Louise Hartsell, Virginia Porter, and Dorrence Smith. (Lewis-Smith 32)

To sum up this discovery of the depth and variety of theatrical performances during Radford's first decade, here is M'Ledge Moffet's list of "Some Outstanding Plays Given at College" between 1913 and 1923. Many appear to be original work or work of an unknown origin:

- June 1914: Bibi, by the Senior Class
- December 1914: Japanese Operetta
- May 1915: Gypsy operetta
- 1915: America's Aboard, Operetta written by Miss Baird, also presented at Virginia Polytechnic Institute
- June 1915: Education, a pageant
- November, 1915: The Minstrel
- December, 1915: Mother Goose Story
- Spring 1916: The Princess—coached by Miss M'Ledge Moffett
- June 1916: The Rivals, Sheridan, by the seniors
- March 1917: The Great Catastrophe, by the seniors
- June 1917: Milton's Comus, by the Seniors
- December 1920: A Christmas Carol, Dickens, by the Pocahontas society.
- 1920: Womanless Wedding (Dr. McConnell, the Bride)
- December 1921: When the star shone
- December 1921: Sun Up, by the Pocahontas Literary Society

1921: The Prince Chap

March 1922: The Life of Mary Draper Ingles, by the Ingles Literary Society

June 1922: Crickett on the Hearth, by the Senior Class

December 1922: Christmas light, by the Pocahontas Literary Society

October 1922: a program with the Roanoke Times, Ingles Literary Society

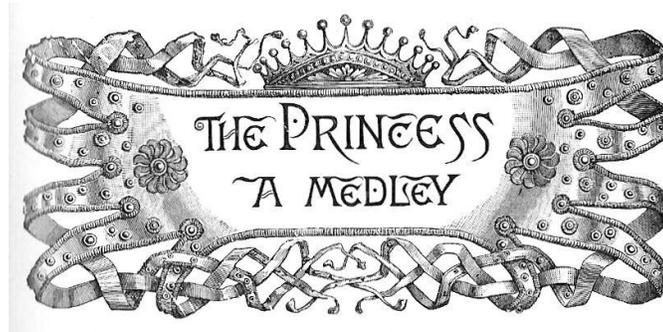
January 1923: Virginia Tech Minstrels.

April 1923: Woodcock's Little game

April 1923: The Wild Rose, by the Ingles Literary Society

June 1923: Merrily Mary Ann, by the senior class.

December 1923: The Birds Christmas Carol, by the Pocahontas Literary Society
(Moffett 101-A)



The Princess graphic from an edition featuring text from the 3rd London Edition (1850) and illustrations from the 1884 American Edition.

<http://theotherpages.org/poems/tenny07.html>

The Princess, a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, was performed in the auditorium in 1916. This production was actually devised and “coached,” in other words, directed, by M'ledge Moffett. This was a pleasing realization since she was such an influential figure on campus. From a 21st-century point of view, Tennyson's poem satirizing women's education is firmly antifeminist, reinforcing Victorian female stereotypes. However, there are a few clues in the Radnor photos and program to indicate that the performance experience had elements of female empowerment that today's feminist teachers would appreciate.

First published in 1847, The Princess would have adapted well to the stage. It is a story within a story and contains numerous passages of poetic dialogue. A teenager named Lilia is out in the sunlight with her friends and family one afternoon. Our narrator, visiting from college, describes a story he is writing about a noble woman warrior. His host, Sir Walter, pats Lilia on the head and wonders, “lives there such a woman now?”

IN THIS PART OF THE PRESENTATION, STUDENTS PERFORMED A SERIES OF READINGS FROM THE TEXT. IN THE FIRST READING, LILIA RESPONDS PASSIONATELY TO SIR WALTER’S QUESTION:

'There are thousands now
Such women, but convention beats them down:
It is but bringing up; no more than that:
You men have done it: how I hate you all!
Ah, were I something great! I wish I were
Some might poetess, I would shame you then,
That love to keep us children! O I wish
That I were some great princess, I would build
Far off from men a college like a man's,
And I would teach them all that men are taught;
We are twice as quick!'

Tennyson continues, “And here she shook aside/The hand that played the patron with her curls,” beginning his poem with the stereotype of the angsty teenaged man-hater.

The picnicking group decides to act out Lilia’s desire to build a women’s college and a fantastical story ensues. Our hero is a young prince who is promised to a foreign princess in marriage by a contract between their fathers. When the time comes, the Princess refuses to marry him. He travels with two friends, Cyril and Florian, to her kingdom to talk with her father, King Gama. Gama reveals that the Princess has eschewed the company of men and founded a

university for women only. No men may even enter the gates. The three young men decide to trek to the college, disguise themselves as women, and gain admission.

When Princess Ida meets her prospective students, she is fooled by their disguises and welcomes them in:

'O lift your natures up:
Embrace our aims: work out your freedom. Girls,
Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed:
Drink deep, until the habits of the slave,
The sins of emptiness, gossip and spite
And slander, die. Better not be at all
Than not be noble.'

Upon being admitted, the three men seek the tutelage of one of the top professors, Lady Psyche, who turns out to be the sister of Florian. She recognizes them and is about to turn them in when they talk her out of exposing them—after all, the penalty is death if a man gets caught on campus. They pass through their day and evening at the academy, keeping their hoods up to remain anonymous, and are amazed that they in fact learn a lot. This point in the story appears to engender particular pride in educators of women, perhaps inspiring both audience and performers at Radford.

Lady Blanche, another professor/matriarch, also discovers their identity. Cyril sweet-talks Lady Blanche and she (predictably) submits, buying the young men more time. Meanwhile, the princess has invited them to accompany her on a riding trip on the college grounds. This gives the prince an opportunity to woo the princess while still in female disguise. The princess disdains his love songs and poems, though, asking them if they know any other songs. The mischievous Cyril breaks out into a bawdy tavern song. The princess, terrified and revolted by his display, tries to run away and helplessly falls into the river. The prince jumps in and saves

her, but in saving her, he reveals his true identity. The prince declares his love for Ida in beautiful verse, but then she spurns him:

O would I had his sceptre for one hour!
You that have dared to break our bound, and gulled
Our servants, wronged and lied and thwarted us--
~!~ wed with thee! ~!~ bound by precontract
Your bride, our bondslave! not though all the gold
That veins the world were packed to make your crown,
And every spoken tongue should lord you. Sir,
Your falsehood and yourself are hateful to us:
I trample on your offers and on you:
Begone: we will not look upon you more.
Here, push them out at gates.'

The plot and language are comical, entertaining, and even at times heroic, yet the actions and reactions of the female characters are layered with stereotypes. The princess, especially, seems to transform from damsel-in-distress to woman-scorned within a few verses. She is also furious with Lady Psyche when she finds out that Psyche knew about the men, but betrayed her by keeping their secret.

THE STUDENT READERS (SARA, KIRSTIN, AND CHELSEA) ALSO SHARED SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE READINGS THEY EXPLORED AND THE PRINCESS'S (LILIA'S) LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT:

"In Sara's selection, she feels powerful, defiant, and strong. The resistance the young girl puts up shows she is a dreamer, yet she still sees the conventions of a woman as a major obstacle. Kirstin feels that she understands the context and the speaker's point of view about female oppression and the need for knowledge. In Chelsea's selection, she

feels betrayed, insulted, and headstrong. She is so concerned with the men betraying her, that she completely cast the reason aside. She is perhaps a little overbearing and overreacts to the situation, but she is so anti-male that it blinds her to their purpose. We really enjoyed looking into this piece and analyzing these women.”

At this point in the poem, Lilia drops character and demands that the men fight for what they want. The break in the story-within-a-story reinforces yet another prevailing notion about the unpredictability and caprice of a woman's demands, and the patience with which men accept their fickle nature. The story resumes and takes a darker, more dramatic turn. When the three gallants are banished, they find themselves on a battlefield. They discover that the prince's father and King Gama have raised forces together and plan to invade the academy. The prince somehow manages to talk them out of it. While his own father rails against the academy for women, the prince and King Gama agree that there may be something valuable in what the princess is doing with her academy.

The princess's brothers, however, are paragons of masculinity, eager to defend her honor against the prince. Her brother Arac challenges the prince and they agree to fight in a tournament to determine the princess's fate, as long as Princess Ida agrees to it. She does agree, charging her brother Arac to win the duel, thus placing her fate in his hands. They fight, and the prince falls, even though the princess had asked Arac not to kill him. After the bloodshed, Ida opens the gates and the women are transformed yet again into the caring nurturers, pouring out to nurse the wounded soldiers. Upon passing by the prince, she notices

that he is still alive. Ida finally relents, allowing the wounded men into the academy so that they can heal. Having become loving and contrite once more, she also releases her students back to their homes and families. She nurses the wounded prince back to health, and when he regains consciousness, they reconcile. He explains to her his idea of love, which is a more equal relationship between man and woman. The princess has finally come around, becoming soft and lovely, transforming into the ideal Victorian woman, or rather being transformed by the prince's love...implying the desired future of our earliest Radford graduates, that they too transform upon graduation into ideal marriage and motherhood material.

For woman is not undeveloped man,
 But diverse: could we make her as the man,
 Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
 Not like to like, but like in difference.
 Yet in the long years liker must they grow;
 The man be more of woman, she of man;
 He gain in sweetness and in moral height,
 Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world;
 She mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,
 Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind;
 Till at the last she set herself to man,
 Like perfect music unto noble words...

The resolution of The Princess resembles that of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew, when Kate is finally 'tamed' by Petruchio and seems to be a happier person because of it. It also calls to mind Moliere's comedy The Learned Ladies and his penchant for neat comedic endings full of marriages and the promise of the continuation of the family line. It even bears similarity to the plot of the Greek comedy Lysistrata, in which the women of Athens go on a sex strike and bar themselves into the Acropolis, led by the title character as their spokeswoman. In fact, The Princess is rife with classical allusions. Princess Ida at times seems more like a vengeful Hera than anyone else. The supporting characters are also reminiscent of a Greek chorus, including

the eight daughters of the plough who guard the academy gates. They seem to be part fair maiden, part Amazon, and part bouncer.

The clear protagonist in the poem is the prince and the plot tells the story of his successful conquest of the Princess. He holds a claim on her through arranged marriage, and through society's expectation that she marry him, and it is intolerable to him that he not have what he is entitled to. Anointed by the prince's love, Ida is glorified as an ideal woman, a goddess. Emboldened and impassioned in her quest for virtue and perfection, Ida is glorified as a romantic heroine. Extreme in her changes, Ida is also a comical and entertaining character for the audience.

Some scholars have argued that The Princess is a feminist or progressive comedy. James Kincaid postulates,

"...the comedy, *The Princess*, nearly turns into an irony, *The Defeat of Ida*. Overcome by the powerful forces against her, the heroic Ida sadly accepts her fate and abandons all resistance.

The obvious plan of the poem seems to make such a response perverse. Ida is not defeated but finds her way into a triumphant union. Such a union will allow her both to fulfill her distinctive femininity and to fight more effectively for her ideals. She is not sacrificing her heroic identity, it is supposed, but making it communal and thereby strengthening and guaranteeing her selfhood. Read in this way, the poem steers a course between the futuristic and abstract goals of the female university and the conservative, brutally concrete and instinctive views of the men." (Kincaid 58).

However, Donald Hall provides a feminist reading of the poem and its reactions. He states, "such attempts to recuperate Tennyson as a quasi-feminist seem strained when we examine closely the ideology of the poem. Even judged by the modest feminist ideals of his period, Tennyson's poem is clearly reactionary; its sexual politics may be covert, but The Princess dramatizes a harsh and relentless oppression of women" (49).

Hall refers to first-wave feminist Margaret Fuller's 1845 writings when he points out, "Tennyson deals with this very sort of rebellion in *The Princess*, in which women's voices are, in fact, stilled and an oppressive concept of women's sphere reiterated" (52). Hall continues to cite numerous others who have recognized the poem's inherent fear and sublimation of women's voices.

As a contemporary theatre artist, one wonders why the decision was not made to produce an already-published script. W.S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame wrote a play version of *The Princess* in 1870. It was only modestly successful, but Gilbert held onto it and reworked it with Sullivan into the operetta *Princess Ida* in the 1880s. (Trutt 4) According to David Trutt, "Gilbert was aware that he could be perceived as having borrowed too freely from Tennyson. He states in an introductory note that "The Princess is a respectful parody of Mr. Tennyson's exquisite poem. It has been generally held, I believe, that if a dramatist uses the mere outline of an existing story for dramatic purposes, he is at liberty to describe his play as 'original.'" (6) On the front page Gilbert labels his play as "a respectful per-version" of Tennyson's poem. (8) Could not Miss Baird have proposed this production? Florence Baird may have known about the Gilbert & Sullivan operetta version, *Princess Ida*. However, it is clear from the cast of characters and the program notice that Radford's presentation of *The Princess* was neither of the Gilbert versions written specifically for the stage. Rather, it was an original adaptation using the copious dialogue in the poem.

"The Princess"
by
ALFRED LORD TENNYSON
given by
RADFORD STATE NORMAL
PROGRAM

Characters

Princess Ida	Rachel Given
Lady Psyche } Instructors to the University	Evelyn Lavender
Lady Blanche }	Ellen Dailey
Melissa, Lady Blanche's daughter	Vergie Rhudy
Violet, a pupil, daughter of Ipse	Marguerite Spring
The Prince, suitor of Ida	Bonnie Albersen
Florian, friend of Prince and brother of Psyche	Sue Hart
Cyril, friend of Prince	Irene Gary
Gama, King, and father of Ida	Mary Bohn
Ipse, Nobleman of Gama's Court	India Covey
Portress	Erica Shelbourne
Pages	Lois McConnell Janie Dyer

PUPILS—Evelyn Shumate, Ethel Myers, Gertrude Shumate, Willie Preston, Effie Jackson, Margaret Webb, Florence Albert, Fay Roberts, Annie Brugh, Helena Huddle, Fanny Kate Godsey, Fairye Cox, Marie Walker, Irma Hubbard, Mary Allison, Estelle Repass, Venus Franklin.

DANCERS AND ATTENDANTS FOR GAMA—Carrie Snyder, Ruth Davis, Mary Strouth, Ransy Lewis, Florence Bayless, Vergie Rhudy, Ara Hicks, Elizabeth Ward, Willie Preston, Frances Hale, Clifford Dutton, Clara Leffel, Mary Allison, Mae Boothe, Gertrude Shumate, Dorothy Moir, Fay and Pearl Roberts, Bess Gillespie.

From the 1916 *Radnor*.

If an original adaptation was the aim, the program and production photo hint at artistic choices that accomplish that goal. One notable absence in the Radford cast of characters is that of the King, the Prince's father. Tennyson's King is probably the most masculine male in the poem, according to a Victorian definition of 'masculine,' and also the biggest threat to the female characters. He is fixated on the contractual obligation of Ida's father, King Gama, to come through with the marriage between Ida and the Prince. He also exerts his dominant role in his statements about how men and women should coexist in the world:

"Man is the hunter; woman is his game
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
They love us for it, and we ride them down" (V 147-50).³¹

And later:

"Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;

All else confusion.” (V 437-41)

Cutting this character from the performance would mean the removal of the biggest oppressor of women. The protagonist, the prince, is entirely different. He makes many statements supporting of, or sympathetic to, women’s education. In addition, he has curly hair (seen by Victorians as feminine) and is subject to fainting and deep romantic emotions.

It is also noteworthy that in the Radford production, Princess Ida’s charges are called “pupils,” whereas Gilbert enjoys keeping Tennyson’s depiction of the students as either “maidens” or her gang of enforcers, the previously mentioned daughters of the plough. Several of the performers in the ensemble played pupils and in addition doubled as dancers and royal attendants to King Gama. Perhaps this indicates characterizations more closely resembling the performers’ own lives at Radford, or perhaps this was an attempt to dilute the undesirable identity of “dancers” for these ensemble performers.

How the girls dressed for the production would have been tremendously important in avoiding those undesirable identities. Moffett makes her beliefs on appropriate costuming for students extremely clear in her history: “In 1915-1916 a regulation was made requiring all students taking the part of male characters in plays to wear men’s coats, shirts, and collars but black skirts. Trousers were not allowed. The students have not yet been allowed to wear knickers except on very unusual occasions and then only with special permission from the Dean.” She also decried women wearing men’s clothing, whether as part of the flapper craze of the 1920s or as play costumes as “an evil with which the students have been beset” (261).



"THE PRINCESS"

STUDENT ANALYSIS OF COSTUMES IN YEARBOOK PHOTOGRAPHS:

“Historically accurate costuming was not a priority to the ladies of Radford, as evidenced by production photos of 1916. First and foremost they had to uphold propriety by adhering to the dress code. Most noticeably, pants were forbidden in favor of skirts and dresses, even by the ladies playing men.

“Costuming in The Princess, as evidenced by this production photo, was very uniform and influenced heavily by Grecian style. The more feminine characters are wearing white and the masculine characters are dressed primarily in black. This presents a very strong visual image, contrasting between genders so that the audience would easily be able to distinguish the difference.

“Most of the ladies would wear a base performing uniform, white skirt and blouse, and accessories like different hats and overskirts would be added to help represent their character’s gender, ethnicity, and age. The ladies relied heavily upon visual stereotypes to convey characters quickly and obviously to their audience. For example in this photo of a dance

performance highlighting the folk dances of different cultures, you can easily pick out the different types of garments worn by each country represented. ”



Folk Dances

GIVEN AT TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

March 2d, 3d, and 4th

The original poem contains a great deal of dialogue that could have been adapted smoothly into the 1916 theatrical performance. Questions remain as to the nature of the adaptation. Was the intent to stay true to Tennyson's original? Was it more like Gilbert's parody/farce, or was it to engage in the art of adaptation, an art in itself? It would be most desirable to think that the last option was true. Lewis-Smith mentions "the strenuous effort of the faculty to develop a professional attitude of mind and create personal and individual independence in the students." (Lewis-Smith 15) That statement clearly promotes individualistic identity over the traditionally feminine group-mindedness mentioned earlier. Lewis-Smith's summation represents an ongoing and sincere hope similar to today's

proponents of same-sex education. That hope would have been reason enough to empower students with the most hands-on learning experience, the performance of a play.

Many of the fond memories published in Moffett's history have to do with the dramatic performances. In a broader sense, there would have been multiple opportunities for learning and individual empowerment for the students involved in the production of The Princess purely through the process of theatrical production. The students would have strengthened their language and vocal skills by being able to work on Tennyson's beautiful verse. Their work would increase their acting expertise. They would learn socially as well as emotionally. They would have had the opportunity to debate the roles of women and women's education in society. They would have played all of the roles, including the male roles. And they would have been exhilarated by the performance energy and the positive feedback of the audience.

OUR PRESENTATION CONCLUDED WITH STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE FIRST RADFORD STUDENTS AND HOW IT RELATED TO THEIR GENDER:

“For women attending normal schools in the early 20th century there were very few opportunities for them to explore. Women who wanted to experiment with their creativity could participate in theatre. The girls had to rely on their own skills to create their productions. They were taught enough skills through their manual skills instructor that they could make their own sets. While society would not allow women the freedom and independence to run their own lives, they were provided the education and freedom to be creative. Here at RU women were able to satirize the societal norms of their time. They would perform skits that played to the contemporary stereotypes.

We believe that this was a way of using their education to cope with the social sphere that they were condemned to.”

References

Clifford Devereux and His Company. Playbill. Orange, NJ: Chronicle Press, 1916. Available at: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/traveling-culture/chau1/pdf/clifford/1/brochure.pdf>

Gilbert, W.S. The Princess. Reprint of the 1870 Lacy Acting Edition. Ed. David Trutt. Los Angeles, 2004. <http://www.haddon-hall.com/GilbertBooks/ThePrincess.pdf>

Hall, Donald E. “The Anti-Feminist Ideology of Tennyson’s ‘The Princess.’” Modern Language Studies, vol. 21, No. 4 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 49-62.

Kincaid, James R. Tennyson’s Major Poems: The Comic and Ironic Patterns. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975. Available at: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/kincaid/ch4.html>

Lewis-Smith, Lanora Geissler. Radford College: A Sentimental Chronicle Through its First Half-Century. Radford, VA: Radford College Alumni Association, 1971.

Moffett, M’Ledge. History of the State Teacher’s College, Radford, Virginia, 1910-1930. Radford, VA, 1933.

The Radnor. Radford, VA: Radford State Normal and Industrial School for Women, 1914-1917. Available at: <http://library.radford.edu/archives/yearbooks.html>

Tennyson, Alfred. The Princess. London, 1847. Available at: http://www.everypoet.com/archive/poetry/Tennyson/tennyson_contents.htm