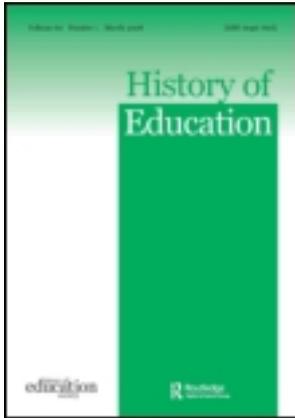


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Publisher: Routledge

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## History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thed20>

### University coeducation in the Victorian era: inclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom

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Published online: 10 Jan 2013.

To cite this article: Pieter Dhondt (2013) University coeducation in the Victorian era: inclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom, *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society*, 42:2, 283-285, DOI: [10.1080/0046760X.2012.754503](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2012.754503)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2012.754503>

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description of how one of the world's most significant and much cited higher education systems has grown and developed over the last half-century.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2012.754502>

**University coeducation in the Victorian era: inclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom**, by Christine D. Myers, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 283 pp., £60 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-230-62237-1

The general purpose of this book is to look at the process of integrating women into male universities during the nineteenth century and the responses of society to this decision, as Myers, Professor at Monmouth College, states in her introduction. Many pros and cons could be found for the admission of women to universities in the very diverse source material that has been thoroughly analysed in this revised and extended version of Myers's PhD dissertation. The most decisive arguments of the supporters of coeducation were, first, the economic need of more higher education for women in consequence of the female 'surplus' on the marriage and labour market and, second, the concept of republican motherhood, according to which women should be provided with education in order to become teachers, both in the home and outside it. The main concern on the other hand that was uttered against their admission, especially from within the larger society, had a medical background, namely the idea that women were intellectually inferior and far too physically delicate to handle the rigors of a university course.

An argument that is not mentioned in this respect, although it often appears in similar kind of publications (e.g. P. Mazón's *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865–1914*, Stanford, 2003), regards the doubts as to whether women were capable of getting involved in scientific research. Most probably this omission can be explained by the choice to focus on state-supported institutions, where the introduction of research in general happened a bit more hesitantly in comparison with most of the privately funded universities. Altogether 24 institutions are covered in the book, scattered across the United States and the United Kingdom. By taking such a large sample of institutions the author proves convincingly to what extent the decisions to admit women to male universities were driven largely by regional and local needs and demands.

At the University of Wisconsin, for instance, the attitude of the individual president altered the course of events dramatically. While Paul Chadbourne in the 1860s was a great obstacle to women's equality on campus, one of his followers in the 1870s, John Bascom, became one of coeducation's most ardent supporters. It is probable that Bascom's fervent belief in the intellectual abilities of women was fuelled by his own erudite and extremely successful daughter, according to the author. This example also nicely illustrates how she manages to combine two historiographical approaches to women's admission to higher education: studying the

institutions in a top-down direction with the administrators and legislators as the main agents of change, as well as using a bottom-up approach, from a feminist perspective, focusing on the efforts of successful women in striving for their own education. In particular, special student publications were increasingly used as instruments to get the discussion on coeducation going. However, the chapter on this specific topic does not add a lot to the book as a whole. It mainly offers an overview of different kind of publications, indeed with some nice and well-integrated quotations but many of these return elsewhere in the book.

Also the preceding chapter, on extracurricular student life, is sometimes a bit enumerative and in that the comparison between the several institutions does not always show up well. On the other hand, the main differences between institutions are sufficiently repeated throughout the different chapters to make them clear; between the United States and the United Kingdom (in general a bit more reluctant due to their longer tradition), but also between Northern and Southern States (where the move toward coeducation lagged behind), as well as between England (generally a bit more hesitant), Ireland (where the debate was dominated by religious issues), Wales and Scotland (in both regions women met little resistance, due to, among other reasons, the non-residential nature of the colleges) and even on a local level, as mentioned earlier. Unfortunately the exclusive focus on the Anglo-Saxon world hides somewhat the international character of the discussion on the admission of women to higher education. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century it became a highly debated topic among academics all over the world and references were made continuously to experiences abroad, as Thomas Neville Bonner has pointed out (*To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, Harvard, 1992; surprisingly this book is lacking in the bibliography). For instance, the significance of the Northern European example in this respect, particularly for Scottish universities, therefore does not receive sufficient attention.

Yet it is a bit unfair to blame the author for not having used enough primary and secondary literature. The bibliography is really impressive and especially in the introduction she discusses explicitly her position regarding the existing literature. In contrast to Barbara Miller Solomon (*In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*, Yale, 1985), Myers proposes that Victorian concepts of separate spheres continued into coeducational universities. Therefore, as she stated in the abstract of her dissertation, the polarisation of the curricular and extracurricular lives of students on the basis of gender did not evolve in conflict with the prevailing society, as has been asserted by previous educational historians. Instead coeducational institutions in both countries actually reinforced the gender expectations of the community at large, while inadvertently reshaping them at the same time. Despite the new opportunities given to women, the structure of the institutions continued to guide them into traditionally female roles – particularly those as wives and mothers.

One of the best illustrations, which also shows the attention throughout the book to revealing details, consists of the introduction at several institutions of new courses that were particularly thought to appeal to feminine interests, such as domestic science. And the Pennsylvania State College even went a step further when a new hall of residence was built on campus for women students around 1890. This building could also be used for courses in domestic economy, with the kitchen 'as a laboratory'. Moreover, often the position of the women's hall of

residence could reinforce the institutional hierarchy, the college itself on top of the hill and the ladies' hall on the outskirts of the campus, at a safe distance from the men's residence. It is somewhat of a pity that in this context the author does not connect her findings to some general concepts within the history of education, particularly the pedagogical paradox between emancipation and patronisation.

This paradox is equally relevant with regard to the chapter on life after graduation. The first students to attend and graduate from coeducational universities found work in a wide array of fields, yet at the same time they held on to their specific gender role. This desire to broaden but not change a woman's place in society was fundamental to the experience women had at coeducational universities in the Victorian era. As the author admits herself, unfortunately statistical source material is missing to indicate how many of the female graduates actually started a career after their studies. But apart from that, the interim conclusion (that excellently summarizes the main points of the chapter) helps to characterize this smoothly written book not as a simple progress story. Correctly, the author indicates that it would take another few decades before the universities of Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard would open their doors to women.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2012.754503>

**The life and thought of Marjorie Reeves (1905–2003), advocate for humanist scholarship and opponent of utilitarian university education: an edition of her unpublished memoirs with an introduction**, edited by Anthony Shepherd, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2011, 312 pp., £99.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-7734-1551-5

The life of Marjorie Reeves spanned almost the whole of the twentieth century and beyond. From an early age she hardly ever stopped writing – about her early childhood in a Wiltshire village, her county scholarship to Oxford and her student life there, her teaching of history in schools and a training college in London, her return to Oxford and her life as a Tutor of History and a Fellow and eventually Vice Principal of St Anne's College, but above all about her discovery of the medieval prophet Joachim of Fiore.

Therefore, these writings (so skilfully brought together and edited by her nephew, Anthony Sheppard, and now deposited in the archives of St Anne's College) give splendid insight into the mind of a major historian – the growing interest in the roots of her family and community, the growth of the imagination at the heart of historical scholarship, the inspiration received from teachers and tutors on the way, the discovery of a 'thesis' that would give aim and inspiration for the rest of her life, and the desire to communicate her love of history to others whether in the schools of London's East End or in the tutorial rooms of Oxford. Her life was driven not only by historical scholarship per se, but by its contribution to our understanding of community and to the betterment of society. Therefore, as recorded in these papers,