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Making Barnard History

Spring 2015

Barnard Deans & Presidents:

**Millicent McIntosh, 4th Dean and 1st President of Barnard, 1947-1964**

Millicent C. McIntosh was the fourth Dean of Barnard College and its first President. She was born in 1898 in Baltimore, Maryland. She had four brothers and a younger sister. Her mother was in the first graduating class of Bryn Mawr, and Millicent’s aunt was M. Carey Thomas, the President of Bryn Mawr College from 1894 to 1920s. Millicent McIntosh attended Bryn Mawr from 1915 to 1919 and graduated third in her class (supposedly her aunt was disappointed with this!). She received her B.A. in English and Greek. She got a PhD in English from Johns Hopkins in 1923-1936, and became an Assistant Professor at Bryn Mawr from 1926-1930. She got married at age 34 in 1932. Mrs. Mac saw herself in her aunt and was very interested in the education of women for professional pursuits.

She was chosen to be Barnard’s dean in October 1947 from 60 other candidates. Her title was changed to President in 1952 after it was decided that Barnard would get better funding if it looked more separated from Columbia with its own President. The change was the idea of the Ford Foundation and board—interestingly, Virginia Gildersleeve opposed it. During the selection process, the Barnard search committee in 1946 was looking for a married woman who knew New York City well and wouldn’t travel. Some key trustees in the selection of McIntosh were Helen Roger Reid and Eugene Meyer.

Millicent McIntosh was known for her role in advancing the education of women, and she also encouraged the idea that scholarly training led to the fulfillment of one’s role as a person. She was a beloved figure at Barnard because of her approachability and friendliness, and was known as “Mrs. Mac;” the dining room in the Diana Center is named after her, and there are photos on the wall outside of the space showing her time at Barnard. Millicent McIntosh married Dr. Rustin McIntosh, who was a pediatrician, and was a mother to four sons and a daughter—a very important biographical fact about her is that she was the first dean of a Seven Sisters college to be both a wife and a mother. This was very important because it added to her encouragement of the educational advancement of women, and it encouraged Barnard women at the time to see that it was possible to have a career and be a wife and mother.

During her time at Barnard she focused on getting more funding for the college so that Barnard could renovate and increase space and salaries. McIntosh also started Operation Bootstrap, which was a development funding campaign which raised $1.7 million with donations from people such as John D. Rockefeller and Barnard alumnae. The money was used to renovate Milbank Hall and add the Minor Latham Playhouse in 1953, as well as the construction of Lehman Hall/library in 1959 and Reid Hall in 1961. Millicent McIntosh also played a big role in centralizing gifts to Barnard through the Barnard Fund, which was part of her plan in making long-range development plans for the College. As for the Barnard/Columbia relationship, McIntosh believed that Barnard and Columbia should have more cooperation between them, but she still wanted Barnard to maintain its integrity and independence. She was also interested in maintaining the diversity of Barnard, and on her inauguration she said “We are blessed with a student body as varied and as interesting as New York itself.” She was also interested in maintaining economic diversity at Barnard with lower economic groups.

I believe that Millicent McIntosh’s most important biographical fact was that she was married and a mother because it made her a role model in her performance as Barnard’s head. It made her position surprising, that a mother and wife at the time could have such a big job, it paved the way for other women, and she was the first dean of a Seven Sister’s college to be a wife and mother. I believe that this fact was very important in how she interacted with her students and pushed for more education of women in a way that didn’t just stop once they got married and had children, but pushed them to keep learning and have a career if they chose to. McIntosh believed that happiness and fulfillment didn’t necessarily have to come from a career, but her model to her students as successfully balancing marriage, children, and a career made her very significant, especially with her view that education was a way to prepare young women for the “complicated balancing act of life.”

I find this really interesting because in my interview with Carol Berkin, BC ’64, she provided a similar anecdote of Mrs. Mac and the way that she encouraged students to have both a career and a family if they wanted. In the interview Carol said that rather than dominating class reunions with pictures of their children, her classmates mostly discussed their careers. Carol provided another great anecdote regarding this, which occurred at a regular tea event held with President McIntosh. At the tea, students were able to ask the President questions; Carol recalls that a student asked the President if it was possible for her to be both a doctor and a mother. President McIntosh’s response was “I don’t understand the question,” presumably because to her there was no question, women could be both doctors and mothers.

Millicent McIntosh retired in 1962; her husband had retired in 1960 and she wanted to at the time as well, but the trustees kept her on until 1962 when a replacement had been chosen (Rosemary Park). It is interesting to note that her obituary in the New York Times in 2001 even noted her importance in advocating for careers and families: “Millicent McIntosh, 102, Dies; Taught Barnard Women to Balance Career and Family.” The article also identifies her as “an outspoken feminist in the 1940’s and 50’s before feminism became popular” (Arenson). She was also described as a “national icon,” a “campus legend”,” and a “pioneer in exploring ‘the struggle of both women and men to find their roles in a changing world’” (Arenson).

Sources

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