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Administration: A Historical Analysis Of Matilda Hamilton Fee And  
Berea College**

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REIMAGINING EARLY INTERRACIAL AND COEDUCATIONAL COLLEGE  
ADMINISTRATION: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MATILDA HAMILTON FEE AND  
BEREA COLLEGE

Hannah Elizabeth McCandless

August 2020

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Women's History  
Sarah Lawrence College

## **ABSTRACT**

Matilda Hamilton Fee was one of the founders and administrators at Berea College in Kentucky. Berea College opened in 1866 as one of the first interracial and coeducational colleges in the South. In the field of history, women are overlooked and treated as insignificant contributors to institutions of higher education. This research fills the gaps by exploring how Matilda and her husband, Rev. John G. Fee, built Berea College as an institution that valued educating all people regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Matilda's role varied from wife and mother, to community organizer, to school administrator. As such, she was the first to navigate the complicated relationships between race and gender, southern politics and culture, and the role of religion in education. In this thesis, I discuss how Matilda Hamilton Fee's involvement in the founding and early years of Berea College are both historically significant and grossly understudied. Additionally, this research shows how Matilda created and implemented school policies as the first president of the Ladies Board of Care. This research highlights women's early roles in higher education administration and shows how critical women, and Matilda, were to the early survival of coeducational and interracial higher education.

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outside of my scope of work. Her commitment to the program and to the individual experience and success of each student shines through in her thorough and thoughtful comments. Thank you to Tara James, the Assistant Director of the Women's History Graduate Program. Not only was she a constant support to the program through organizing the Annual Women's History Conference and speaking with incoming students, but she also worked with the program's blog (the Re/Visionist) and with the Graduate Student Association. Tara made investing my nonacademic time in thoughtful programming easy, and allowed me and so many others a space to grow with our peers from other programs.

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lot less frightening. And thank you to our basement apartment housemate, Trevor, for being a very laid-back person and for collaborating with us on grocery pick-ups during the pandemic.

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Thank you to the women in my family who exude confidence and strength, and helped me find that same strength. To my grandmother, Diana, to my nana, Patricia, and to Kendrick, thank you for loving me, sending me kind words, and always saying “bless your heart” at just the moments when I needed to hear it most. Thank you to my grandfathers Vince and Jerry for making jokes and laughing at mine, and listening to me ramble about my studies. Thank you to my aunts Minda, Ann, and Mary for encouraging me as if I were their own daughter, and to my uncles Michael and Jim for showing interest in my studies over the years. I am deeply thankful for my entire family and could go on for a long time thanking them, but I will close out the family thank yous with a shout out to my fourteen-year-old cousin Catherine. Thank you for living on the West Coast and therefore being awake for after midnight (EST) laughs when I needed a brain break. I’m glad you still think I’m cool (most of the time).

I am beyond blessed to have the support system that I have. From coast to coast and in so many time zones, I am loved and supported. I am so thankful for the folks mentioned above, and so hopeful to support each of them as they follow their dreams. But beyond those living, I am extremely thankful for Matilda Hamilton Fee and her work at Berea College. I am thankful for

my home state of Kentucky, and so many people who worked to make it a better place. This research would not have been possible without the strength that a stranger showed over one hundred and fifty years ago.



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## Introduction:

“A Mother to Us All” – William Frost

In 1858, Matilda Hamilton Fee wrote a letter for publication in the American Missionary Association's (AMA) magazine. She relayed a story about a formerly enslaved woman who attended her church in Berea, Kentucky. “The theme of her conversation is the Grace of God,” Matilda explained and “its power to sustain the soul in all conditions of life.” Their conversation was filled with the sorrow of a wife who saw her husband sold South, and the pain of a mother who saw her children scattered. The woman explained how her “soul withered away” when she felt at her lowest, but that she chose to push on in pursuit of the “peace which awaits the faithful in Christ.” Matilda asked the readers if they were willing to sustain the same level of pain in the pursuit of a “pure Gospel.” Were the readers willing to give up comforts and security in order to create a world worthy of God's praise - an equitable world: one without slavery, racial injustice, and suppressive gendered structures? “We who labor here sometimes grow sad... cannot we endure to suffer with the lowly?”<sup>1</sup> She implored her readers to push forward in the abolitionist struggle, because for all the pain and suffering white abolitionists endured, enslaved African Americans endured far worse.

Matilda's commitment to the abolitionist cause was exceptional. Beyond being an abolitionist, she showed throughout her life a devotion to equal access in education, housing, medical care, and community support for women and men, Black and white. Her religious conviction required revolutionary thought and action - actions like cofounding an interracial and

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<sup>1</sup> “Letter from Matilda Hamilton Fee to American Missionary Association, May 1858 p.114-16,” HC 3, Series 4, Box 1, Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY. The letter that Matilda sent to the AMA was published by the group, but it is unclear where it was published. The document was housed at the Berea College Archive and was filed under letters from Matilda. It was, however, indicated on the document that it was sent to the American Missionary Association and that it was printed on pages 114-116 in a publication by the AMA, but the publication is not named.

coeducational college with her husband, John G. Fee.<sup>2</sup> The early history of higher education tells the same story over and over again: colleges opened for upper class white men while women and African Americans were educated in small numbers at technical institutes or finishing schools.<sup>3</sup> Yet Berea College was the first institution in the South (and the second in the country) to open its doors to everyone— poor, rich, Black, white, female, and male— from the very beginning. Coeducation was a very new idea on its own. Interracial education and educating the poor was unheard of. Why, then, were there not more institutions like Berea? And why don't more people know about the storied history of Berea? The answer is not one of geographical location, regional upbringings, or even religious affiliation. There were people all over the country who agreed with Matilda and John on issues of abolition, race, religion, and gender. The answer lies within the people who founded Berea College. John, and other male founders, were documented extensively on their work at the college and their lives before Berea College, but the significance of Matilda's contributions to Berea College and higher education administration are largely undocumented.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this research explores the life of Matilda Hamilton Fee and her revolutionary work as an administrator at Berea College. My study reveals the roles that Matilda and the women she supervised played in shaping college administration and campus life, as well as the integral role that college administration played in the lives of students.

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<sup>2</sup> In a religious sense, conviction is the belief that God directs certain actions. Matilda's conviction led her to be fully committed to abolitionist work and working for equitable education for all.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, (The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 83-102.

<sup>4</sup> Books documenting the history and lives of other male founders include Richard Day, Roger Cleveland, June O. Hyndman, and Don C. Offutt's 2003 article titled "Berea College - Coeducationally and Racially Integrated: An Unlikely Contingency in the 1850s;" E.H. Fairchild's 1875 booklet "Berea College, Ky: An Interesting History;" John G. Fee's 1891 *Autobiography of John G. Fee, Berea, Kentucky*; William Frost's 1937 *For The Mountains: An Autobiography*; and Victor Howard's 1996 *The Evangelical War against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee*.

A brief history of Berea College's inception lays a foundation for readers to understand the revolutionary work done by Matilda and John G. Fee. My analysis of existing histories on both Berea College and the role of women in higher education administration show an astonishing lack of information regarding Matilda or any other female administrators. This introduction provides more detail on the history of Berea College, a brief review of the extant literature, an outline of the thesis chapters and a call to action for future historians of women and education. I conclude by asking the reader to consider what else is missing from their history books.

### **A Brief History of Berea College**

The Fees started the long process of building Berea College in 1853 with a land donation from Cassius M. Clay.<sup>5</sup> Clay's donation laid a literal foundation for the soon-to-be-built Fee home and Union Church.<sup>6</sup> By 1855, the Fees had succeeded in putting up a church building which was used for both church services and school lessons. Initially opened as a primary school, also called "normal" schools, Berea was packed with a small but flourishing community of eager, young learners.<sup>7</sup> The modest community formed and named itself "Berea" after a small but open-minded town in Macedonia frequented by Jesus' disciples.<sup>8</sup> At Berea, John founded the

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<sup>5</sup> "Berea College Early History," Berea College Website, Date Accessed: January 26, 2019, <https://www.berea.edu/about/history/>.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffery Brooks Allen, "Were Southern White Critics of Slavery Racist? Kentucky and the Upper South, 1791-1824," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (May, 1978), pp. 169-190, (Southern Historical Association). Though Clay was a supporter of abolition, he believed in gradual emancipation, the belief that the best way for the United States to free its slaves was over time. His beliefs were based in racist theories which assumed that if Black Americans were emancipated all at once, they would be overwhelmed and unable to function in civilized society (read white society). Eventually, John Fee and Clay's friendship dissipated as the Fees pushed more for equality in educational access. Clay's belief system was a prevailing ideology in the South.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Day, Roger Cleveland, June O. Hyndman, and Don C. Offutt, "Berea College - Coeducationally and Racially Integrated: An Unlikely Contingency in the 1850s," in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 82, No. 1, (Washington D.C.: Howard University, 2013), 35-36. Normal schools were generally one room classrooms with students of all ages. Usually they only taught primary grades. Today they might be similar to an elementary school.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 36-37. The biblical town named Berea was known to be open-minded and loving to all.

Union Church, a nondenominational church which was anti-caste, anti-racism, and anti-alcohol.<sup>9</sup> He had formed several churches between 1846 and 1853, all of which were non-denominational, but the founding of this church was the beginning of Berea College.<sup>10</sup> The first pupils entered the doors in 1858, the first year that Berea provided full instruction.<sup>11</sup>

The town was regarded as a utopia by locals. According to historian Richard Sears, the church's mission was to spread the word of God to as many people as possible. This meant supporting the abolitionist cause, as well as the new and growing school.<sup>12</sup> The church and the school's abolitionist values promoted interracial and coeducational schooling on the basis that education—like practicing the word of God—was the right of all people. Though a nascent community, it grew as the institution's success and existence became better known. However, residents within the larger Madison County area, where Berea is located did not support the abolitionist ideologies of the newly formed community.

Berea College was the second interracial and coeducational college in the country, and the first one in the South. Before it, Oberlin College opened its doors to all students regardless of race or gender in 1833. Located thirty miles southwest of Cleveland, Ohio, Oberlin was surrounded by people who predominantly came from New England and were—once the Civil War began—mainly in support of the Union. Many of its students came from the northeastern

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<sup>9</sup> Caste refers to social and economic class. Caste also seems to refer to a status that it is nearly impossible to move out of.

<sup>10</sup> Victor B. Howard, *The Evangelical War against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee*, (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 31-33. John had been working with the New School Presbyterians until 1848 when, though they were ideologically against slavery, they were still allowing slaveholders into their churches in some of the southern states. John chose to leave the church and he began only serving non-denominational churches which fully forbade slaveholders from being members.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Day, Roger Cleveland, June O. Hyndman, and Don C. Offutt, 36-38.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Duane Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, (Self-published, 1986), 85-90.

region of the United States and from families with various class backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> The school was founded with a built-in system to support low-income students through on campus work.<sup>14</sup> Similar to Berea College, Oberlin College was financially supported by the American Missionary Association.<sup>15</sup> Often compared because of each school's commitment to interracial coeducation, the two schools were very similar in ideological approaches, but vastly different in relation to outside community support. Because Berea was in the South and surrounded by several pro-slavery opponents, the school often faced violence and threats to a degree unheard of at Oberlin College.<sup>16</sup>

In 1859, John traveled to Massachusetts for an American Missionary Association fundraiser seeking support for Berea College. During the convention, John's words about abolition and John Brown's recent raid on Harpers Ferry did not settle well with many Kentuckians.<sup>17</sup> Word spread quickly in Madison County and while John was still away, at least sixty armed, pro-slavery men came to Berea and demanded that John and Berea residents leave within the next ten days.<sup>18</sup> Upon John's return from the conference the family fled to Cincinnati, Ohio for safety.

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<sup>13</sup> The Northeast in this context includes Connecticut, Delaware, most of Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

<sup>14</sup> E. H. Fairchild, *Historical Sketch of Oberlin College*, (Springfield: Printed by Republic printing company, 1868), 3-9.

<sup>15</sup> The mission of the AMA was to fund efforts to educate the freed African Americans. Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*, (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 3-9.

<sup>16</sup> James H. Fairchild, *Oberlin: its origin, progress and results. An address, prepared for the alumni of Oberlin College, assembled August 22, 1860*, (Oberlin: Shankland and Harmon, 1860), 62-63.

<sup>17</sup> John Brown was a white man who led a slave revolt which resulted in the group taking over the arsenal at Harpers Ferry in West Virginia. The raid failed but it both scared Southern slave owners and was among the precipitating events that led to the Civil War.

<sup>18</sup> John G. Fee, *Autobiography of John G. Fee, Berea, Kentucky*, (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2018; originally published in 1891), 34-37.

The Fees and Bereans lived in exile for four years and, outside of briefly returning in 1864 because they believed the Civil War might be over, they were not able to return to Kentucky permanently until 1865. When they did move back, only a few of the exiled Bereans returned to help rebuild. John and other Trustees drafted an official charter for the school.<sup>19</sup> On April 24, 1866, Berea College officially opened.<sup>20</sup> While this was definitely a cause for celebration, the school was in desperate need of funding following the Civil War. To fill the functional needs of the school, Matilda and their oldest son, Burritt, took charge of running the normal school.<sup>21</sup> Then, the same year the normal school opened, Matilda was named the first President of the Ladies Board of Care.<sup>22</sup> Her administrative role and responsibilities at the school changed drastically. For the next twenty years as President of the Board, and ten years as a member following that, Matilda led Berea through numerous policy changes as the school navigated Reconstruction and the Antebellum time period.<sup>23</sup> (put in a footnote, this will be discussed in further detail in X chapter).

As an educator and administrator, Matilda navigated the complicated and delicate race and gender norms in her community. Her impact on the community and college are indisputable: initially working with the small children of the normal school (which was integrated) and later working as the President of the Ladies Board of Care, which monitored and made rulings on how the college female students lived and behaved beyond the classroom. Matilda's work as an educator and administrator are vital to understanding both how Berea College built its policies

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the Bereans who returned after the Civil War and were vital in the raising of the school included J.A.R. Rogers and his wife, Elizabeth Rogers, as well as John Fee's cousin John Hanson.

<sup>20</sup> The normal school opened in 1855 and although John Fee worked to build a board of trustees, they were driven out of the state before Berea had enough trustees to qualify for a charter from the state to become a college.

<sup>21</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 521-522.

<sup>22</sup> The Ladies Board of Care was a Board made of the wives of college faculty and administrators. They came together regularly to discuss rules, disciplinary actions, and ways to support the female students.

<sup>23</sup> This will be discussed in chapter three in greater detail.

and how women's roles in higher education administration were largely shaped by women like herself. Because these women were often unpaid and served at colleges because a male relative worked there, the record of their activities is smaller. This is one of the many reasons why a study of Matilda Hamilton Fee's life and her influence on higher education is important.

Intertwined with all of these facets of public and professional life was her role as a mother and woman during the 19th century. In these roles, she navigated an equally complicated set of norms.<sup>24</sup> With the opening of Berea and her position on Ladies Board of Care, she shaped campus culture and policy, taking on the role of "mother to us all."<sup>25</sup> Matilda was a ferociously moral woman, and this morality allowed her to tackle the roles of administrator, abolitionist, mother, wife, and Christian with courage, hospitality, and kindness.

### **Two Overlapping Histories, One Missing Component**

This research connects two histories in order to examine first, where they overlap and second, where they miss the mark. First history is that of Berea College. Despite Matilda's heavy involvement in the founding and administration of the school, she is scarcely recognized beyond her role as a mother and partner of John. Even so, primary sources show that her work on the Ladies Board of Care was integral to Berea's survival because it supported the female students. Women administrators in early higher education were often the people in charge of controlling students socially. Matilda's role as a policy developer helped alleviate community concerns

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<sup>24</sup> More of these norms are explored in chapter one where the socialization of women is further explained, as well as the socialized nature of racial norms.

<sup>25</sup> "Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895," Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY). The concept of Matilda being a mother to all is significant because much of her work as an administrator, which is explored in later chapters, was much like the role of a mother. She and the board advocated for more resources for students, worked with female students to form organizations, and worked with the women who were hired as live-in caregivers for the female students. The field of Student Affairs at colleges today can largely be traced back to the work that women administrators did in the nineteenth century. This quote comes from William Frost.



about interracial coeducation. The rules Matilda created aligned with her social and administrative role of social control.<sup>26</sup>

The second intersecting history is the history of higher education. According to Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, women's roles in higher education administration were largely undervalued until the beginning of the twentieth century. Schools that were coeducational often had Ladies Boards or Women's Boards which consisted of faculty or administration wives. Generally, these positions were unpaid. Ladies Boards eventually morphed into Deans of Women. By the 1970s, they were almost completely replaced with Student Affairs professionals. Even though there is ample evidence to analyze the role women have played in higher education, histories about higher education largely leave women administrators out of the discussion.<sup>27</sup> Both the history of Berea College and the history of higher education are relevant to this research. This combined historiography indicates that there is a lack of studies focused on women's voices in the early years of higher education. This research attempts to fill some of the gaps within the larger historiography of higher education in the U.S.

This will not be a traditional historiography because there are three sources critical to understanding the history of Berea College that serve as both primary and secondary sources. The highest-ranking male administrators of the school published the first histories of the college. The major primary source worth noting here is actually John G. Fee's autobiography. Matilda's life is mainly understood through the writing of others. Her husband, John G. Fee, speaks of her

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<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, *Women Administrators in Higher Education: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 183. Further explained in chapter three, "social control" referred to female administrators having literal control over the female students in how they dressed, their meals, their exercise, their socialization with male students, and their socialization with off campus people. The perceived need for social control came from a concern that women who were educated would not follow the strict gender roles society had laid out for them, such as mother and wife.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 1-13.

several times in his autobiography, but this only covers her life after their marriage. His words are thoughtful and caring, and his reverence for his wife is fully evident throughout.<sup>28</sup> However, it is significant that after all of the work she did, the person who spoke about her most was her husband, and not the historians of the college. Historians glean the majority of information about her is through John's autobiography. His recollections of her mainly detail their marriage and do little to explain her work as an educator and administrator. Another significant source, titled *Birth of Berea College: A Story of Providence*, was published in 1901 by J.A.R. Rogers, an administrator and cofounder of Berea College. This history, published after John and Matilda's deaths, frames John as a divisive character in Berea's history, and does not acknowledge Matilda's role as an administrator at all. His focus throughout the work indicates that he looked down on Southerners and the people from the Mountains.<sup>29</sup> Last was William G. Frost's *For the Mountains* published in 1937. His version of Berea's history is written in a way to support his decision to segregate the college during his presidency.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest history of Berea College by a non-administrator was published by Charles Morgan in 1946 *The Fruit of This Tree: The Story of a Great American College and Its Contribution to the Education of a Changing World*. It reads like an emotional yearning for the past.<sup>31</sup> An alumnus of Berea College, Morgan wrote more about his personal experiences at the school than about the history of the institution. The book also included memories of the writer and talks about people he was fond of.

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<sup>28</sup> Fee.

<sup>29</sup> John A. R. Rogers, *Birth of Berea College: A Story of Providence*, (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Company, 1902).

<sup>30</sup> William Goodell Frost, *For The Mountains: An Autobiography*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937).

<sup>31</sup> Charles T. Morgan, *The Fruit of This Tree: The Story of a Great American College and Its Contribution to the Education of a Changing World*, (Berea: Berea College, 1946).

In 1955, Elisabeth S. Peck wrote *Berea's First Century: 1855-1955*.<sup>32</sup> Peck's goal was to provide a more complete history of Berea, this book provided a foundational understanding of how historians viewed the institution. Peck was the first professional historian to write a history about Berea College and she wrote the least skewed history of them all. Published right after the school reintegrated, this book highlighted the best and worst of Berea's early years with little hesitation in calling out Frost. In the parlance of her time, Peck only referred to Matilda as "Mrs. John G. Fee" throughout the book and primarily analyzed Matilda's role as a wife and mother.<sup>33</sup> This history is, however, very detailed and sheds light on Matilda's bravery, her commitment to John, and shows how Matilda's religious convictions were so intertwined in every role she played. Today, it is easier to see how it was more than a commitment to her husband that pushed Matilda, but a commitment to a mission of equitable access to education. In 1986, Richard Sears self-published two works: "*A Practical Recognition of The Brotherhood of Man*": *John G. Fee and the Camp Nelson Experience*<sup>34</sup> and *The Day of Small Things*.<sup>35</sup> Both were products of his ongoing research into Berea College as a professor there. The first study offered an in-depth analysis of John G. Fee's time at Camp Nelson, a place that had similar goals to Berea College but was less successful in the long term.<sup>36</sup> The second book followed the lives of the Fees, Hamiltons, and Greggs, and the years leading up to the official opening of Berea College in 1866. In this book, Sears dedicated a short five-page chapter to Matilda, scarcely detailing her life. He primarily used John's autobiography to source Matilda's life and some of Frost's life

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<sup>32</sup> Elisabeth S. Peck, *Berea's First Century: 1855-1955*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955).

<sup>33</sup> Peck referring to Matilda as Mrs. John G. Fee was a sign of respect in the 1950s. To not refer to Matilda as Mrs. John G. Fee would have been very disrespectful.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Duane Sears, "*A Practical Recognition of The Brotherhood of Man*": *John G. Fee and the Camp Nelson Experience*, (Self-published, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*.

<sup>36</sup> Camp Nelson was a depot for the Union Army during the Civil War that largely was inhabited by escaped slaves and their families. Black soldiers went there for training and it was used as a hospital. John worked there as a pastor and teacher, and was among those advocating for housing and education for the Black soldiers' families.

sketch of Matilda. Though he included Matilda's voice throughout, it was often as a small part of John's story, and less about the story of Berea College. In this, Matilda is a side character, an important one, of course, but not a primary actor in the workings of Berea.

In 1996, two books focused on the subject of Berea's institutional history. First, Sears' *A Utopian Experiment in Kentucky: Integration and Social Equality at Berea, 1866-1904*, explored Berea College from the official opening in 1866 until 1904 when the Kentucky Day Law was passed. This law effectively ended the school's ability to be interracial institution in 1904.<sup>37</sup> Matilda's name is only mentioned five times.<sup>38</sup> Each time he mentioned her, it was in relation to her existence as the wife of John, Sears seems to either be unaware of or unimpressed by her work as the first president of the Ladies Board of Care. In his 1996 publication, *The Day of Small Things*, Sears mentions Matilda much more often, but not as an administrator. The way Sears only speaks about Matilda as a mother in the first book and scarcely at all in the second book, indicates that her value to him as a historian was only in the feminine roles of mother and wife. Sears seems unable to take Matilde's contributions seriously in her roles as not as administrator.

Also, in 1996, Victor B. Howard published *The Evangelical War against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee*.<sup>39</sup> Howard's book was only the second written by an academic historian. His work provided a much more critical analysis of John G. Fee, especially in the epilogue of the book. Similar to other authors, he scarcely mentioned Matilda however, his analysis of John at the end of the book highlighted the isolation that the Fees experienced near

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Duane Sears, *A Utopian Experiment in Kentucky: Integration and Social Equality at Berea, 1866-1904*, (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1996). The Kentucky Day Law was brought to the Kentucky legislature with the intention of segregating private institutions. Kentucky has already segregated public institutions in their constitution long before this. Berea College was the only private interracial school in the state by 1904 and so the law was directly targeted at them.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Howard.

the ends of their lives. Ultimately, Howard is most critical of John in his separation from the Union Church over ideologies on baptism and his separation from the school over the appointment of Frost as the president of the college. Though both books are helpful and bring new analysis to Berea's institutional history, neither acknowledge the groundbreaking role Matilda played in that work.

More recently, in 2008 and 2009 public historian Caroline R. Miller of Bracken County (where Matilda was from) published two historical works about the Fees and Berea College. In 2008, the *Juliet Miles and Matilda Fee's Anti-Slavery Crusade* pamphlet she published focused on the experience Matilda had with a conductor on the Underground Railroad who was attempting to free her own children from slavery. This pamphlet highlights Matilda's commitment to abolition work, but still significantly focuses on John.<sup>40</sup> In 2009, Miller published *Grape Vine Dispatch: The Voice of Antislavery Messages*, a history of the Bracken County - where Matilda was raised.<sup>41</sup> Miller's book covers people and events from all over the county. A small portion of it is dedicated to the work of Matilda and John G. Fee as abolitionists and co-founders of Berea College, but it does not go into any great detail about their lives once at Berea College. Because so much of the story about Matilda is related to the founding of Berea, several of the books used and analyzed in this thesis are more directly related to the school. This book gives a background to Matilda's own foundation: her family and home town.

In the history of higher education as it relates to Berea College, the selection of historical works is broader. Therefore, the history books examined below are more specific to coeducation

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<sup>40</sup> Caroline R. Miller, *Juliet Miles and Matilda Fee's Anti-Slavery Crusade*, (Maysville: Bracken County Historical Society, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Caroline R. Miller, *Grape Vine Dispatch: The Voice of Antislavery Messages*, (Milford: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2009).

and the education of Black students or the education of African Americans. First published in 1987 was *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World*, a collection edited by Carol Lasser.<sup>42</sup> This book primarily examined the circumstances of gender and interracial education at Oberlin College, and some similar to the experience of students at Berea College. Additionally, the book examines the fears surrounding interracial coeducation. One prominent fear was that of “race suicide,” a term coined by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt to explain how women getting an education would lead to increased celibacy and a fear that the white race would die out. In 1988, James Anderson’s *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* gave a precise and helpful overview of educational norms for Black students in the South.<sup>43</sup> Only the last chapter examines higher education, but it highlights the national debate about what type of education Black students should receive: practical and skilled training, or a liberal arts education. Because Reconstruction was so unsuccessful, the backlash against Black communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from Southern whites pushed Berea College away from its original mission.<sup>44</sup> This book explains how Matilda and John’s legacy at Berea were dismissed after their deaths because they were viewed as the work of nonsensical revolutionaries.

*In Women Administrators in Higher Education: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, editors Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer in 2001 highlighted historical contexts of women administrators and their earliest roles in colleges.<sup>45</sup> Explaining how women

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<sup>42</sup> Carol Lasser, *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World*, (Urbana: Published by the University of Illinois Press in conjunction with Oberlin College, 1987).

<sup>43</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Explained at length in the Conclusion, the national backlash against racially integrated life came from Northern and Southern forces. But it was white Southerners who pushed back against Reconstruction the hardest and who pushed Jim Crow laws.

<sup>45</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer.

administrators across the country formed their own profession, and the invention of the Dean of Women followed by Offices of Student Affairs / Student Services, this book possibly does the best in showing the profession as one created by women. John Thelin's 2004 publication, *A History of American Higher Education*, and then in 2011,<sup>46</sup> and Philip G. Altbach's 2011 publication, an edited collection entitled *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*, helped reshape and give greater context to the origins of higher education.<sup>47</sup> Thelin's work concentrates primarily on texts explaining the structures of higher education: how they formed, who had control, and how they were funded. These structures were uniquely American because when institutions of higher education first were inaugurated in the US in the eighteenth century, founders and religious groups did not have the same resources as their peers in England. Schools had to shift how they functioned, which led them to create more rigid structures than in England. While Thelin's work provides useful context, unfortunately his books add little to the conversation about female administrators nor do they explore interracial and coeducational schools. Because both works are general histories on higher education, his failure to include Terry Bashaw and Nidiffer's arguments are a striking oversight. Despite the lack of analysis in the two newer books on women's roles, each does a deeper analysis on the Second Great Awakening's effect on denominational colleges in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Two major contributions to the history of higher education were both published in 2016. Andrea L. Turpin's *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of*

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<sup>46</sup> Thelin.

<sup>47</sup> Philip G. Altbach, *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2011).

*American Higher Education, 1837-1917*<sup>48</sup>, and Christi M. Smith's *Reparations and Reconciliation: The Rise and Fall of Integrated Higher Education*.<sup>49</sup> Both analyzed the impact that religion had on small, denominational schools, and how Berea College was among a short list of high quality schools open to Black students after the Civil War. Turpin's research adds significantly to the body of work on religious institutions. From Catholic schools to the small denominational schools that rapidly popped up in the early nineteenth century, the author shows just how deeply religion is tied into the foundation of American higher education (and K-12 education, for that matter). Smith's book specifically studied the colleges that served Black students and provided liberal arts education. So much of the available schooling for Black students was in trades and skills, but the author's case studies on Berea College, Oberlin College, and Howard University highlight the significance and rare combination of circumstances that allowed for those liberal arts institutions to thrive. Additionally, Smith challenges the narrative that William Frost (the second president of Berea College) was a good president, and highlights the racist ideologies that he held. Frost single handedly was responsible for which eventually led to the elimination of opportunities for Black students to study on campus.

### **Methodology and Chapter Outlines**

By now, it should be clear that most of the histories of Berea College do not acknowledge Matilda's role as an administrator. Among the histories of higher education, women's roles as administrators were only acknowledged in two books. (Andrea L. Turpin and Christi M. Smith) Even then, much of the information available is about education in the North— not the South.

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<sup>48</sup> Andrea L. Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837-1917*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>49</sup> Christi M. Smith, *Reparations and Reconciliation: The Rise and Fall of Integrated Higher Education*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).



The fact that Berea was located in the southern state of Kentucky geographic location of Berea College is significant because both regions had differed from each other culturally and politically. It is important to recognize the unique significance of Berea's history, as well as that of other institutions of higher education. My research intends to fill some of the gaps identified in this historiography by examining the secondary sources for context, and the primary sources for examples that help illuminate the full revolutionary significance of Berea College and its history.<sup>50</sup>

The histories of Matilda and Berea College are largely tied to their location in the South and the time period. Because of this, the first chapter is a condensed history of Kentucky that includes the social, cultural, and political forces that made the state unique. By the time of the Civil War (1861-1865), Kentucky was half Union and half Confederate, and the ideological divide led to bloody family divisions. An analysis of the role religion played in Matilda's life, as well as her gendered upbringing, help explain Matilda's commitment to Berea College's mission. I close the chapter with Matilda's family genealogy and the beginning of her life with John as her husband.

In the second chapter, I explore Matilda's life from the moment she was married in 1844 until her death in 1895. From an analysis of motherhood to domestic expectations, this chapter highlights moments of bravery, fear, and vulnerability. Due to the sheer volume of information

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<sup>50</sup> The primary sources about Berea are more relevant to understanding Matilda's impact more than anything else. The meeting minutes from the Ladies Board of Care meetings highlight the array of work that Matilda and other members were responsible for. From curfews to designated study times to strict rules on dancing, the meeting minutes illuminate just how many moving pieces there were for the female students on campus. The documents also show the level of influence and power that the Board had, which varied depending on the situation. The college's Rules and Regulations publications also point to the social control that Matilda and other female administrators had to enforce. Explored later in this research is the significance of social control at an interracial and coeducational institution. Because the sources are scarce, it was necessary to weave together several histories and primary sources to more holistically understand the role of Matilda at Berea and women in higher education administration.

about Berea College history, the second chapter only touches the surface of Matilda's work as an administrator and instead focuses on her as a person. This allows the reader to understand Matilda's experiences with motherhood, marriage, religion, violence, the Civil War, and her community. The chapter also foregrounds the partnership between Matilda and John, one which was more equitable than most marriages in the nineteenth century.

Chapter three shifts the focus from Matilda as an individual to Matilda as an administrator. Beginning the chapter with historical context to higher education helps the reader understand Matilda's significance as an administrator. This chapter is also where the majority of primary sources come into play, and where explanations of Matilda's work become clearer. From the founding years of Berea College to the struggles to keep it open, Matilda's role as a community builder and student supporter are apparent here. In the primary sources, faculty recall her warm kindness as she regularly invited students and faculty over to her home. This section also explores some of the difficult and complicated policies that Matilda and the Ladies Board of Care either created or advocated for, and why they believed these policies were necessary.

The conclusion explains how Berea College changed for the worse after Matilda died and John left the school. Caste (or class) and segregation at Berea became common dividers among students. The second president of the college, William Frost, was the primary force in instituting segregation at Berea College. Because the mission of the institution shifted, the histories written by administrators after John left portrayed him as a divisive figure. This was a political shift and the fact that women's roles as administrators were undervalued led to a lack of historical information and primary sources that highlighted the work of both Matilda and her husband.

As a resident of Kentucky, myself, this research challenged me to reconcile the horrors of the past with Kentucky being a slave state while also having a sense of pride in knowing that this

woman, among many others, was working toward a mission that I would also agree with today. I take care to be critical of the past but understand that my own positionality in this story is significant and needs to be acknowledged. Being a historian from Kentucky, I often find myself either arguing with people from my state to remind them of our collective history and harm, or defending it to people outside of the state from cruel and unwarranted stereotypes. It is the hope of this work to tell a fuller and more honest picture of the founding of Berea College and Matilda's significant role in it, as well as women's undervalued roles in higher education as a whole.

## Chapter 1:

### Seeds of Kentucky and An Educational Legacy

Matilda Hamilton Fee was born on May 24, 1824 in Bracken County, Kentucky. Between her birth and her marriage, nothing exists to document what her life may have been like. How was she raised? What was her community like? What was going on nationally and regionally? What expectations did society have of her? Historians are currently unable to answer these questions with details specific to Matilda, but there are several clues that point to what her life may have been like before marriage. The history of Kentucky, changing social expectations, a religious awakening, and a shifting economy all shaped the woman Matilda became. Additionally, these factors played a role in the founding of Berea College and Matilda's ability to make significant and meaningful change as an administrator and abolitionist. For example, the way Matilda's gender socialization surely had an effect on the policies she made on students dating and courting during her time as the President of the Ladies Board of Care. This chapter weaves together several histories to create a picture of what her life may have been like before her work began, and how cultural and social factors influenced her work as an administrator.

Before Matilda Fee's family moved to the Bracken County area in the late eighteenth century, this land was home to several Indigenous groups, including the Hopewell, Adena, Shawnee, Osage, Miami, and Cherokee, East Tribes.<sup>1</sup> As early as the 1740s, British colonists and European traders settled in the Kentucky region. Much like colonization in other parts of the new nation, settlers rationalized that Indigenous people were "uncivilized." In 1870, Kentucky historian Frederick Turner wrote on the shared narrative of "Manifest Destiny," the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> "NativeLand.ca," Native, accessed April 2, 2020, (<https://native-land.ca/>).

pushing west and into new territories.<sup>2</sup> During colonial times, Kentucky was as west as it could get, and people who settled there were living like pioneers. People who moved to Kentucky were not fleeing persecution, like those who came from Europe to the Americas. They were instead taking land that they felt was justifiably their own. This drastically shaped Kentucky's history and culture.

European colonizers and traders manipulated the culture of many Indigenous groups by enforcing Western gender roles. European traders predominantly traded with other men which made the men of the tribes the primary negotiators. The role of trader was formerly held by women in many tribal cultures, which shifted the power dynamics and weakened the strength of tribes such as the Nonhelema tribe. Furthermore, close relations with Indigenous people led to some interracial relationships. By the mid-1760s, most of the white settlers and Indigenous people of Kentucky were able to coexist.<sup>3</sup> This relative peace was short-lived.

In 1950, a local Bracken County man found a Native American burial site. Archeologists determined that the Indigenous people had once been farmers there, cultivating corn, squash, and pumpkins, and used the Ohio River on the northern edge of the county for other food sources. Some of the tribes that settled in Bracken County originally came from other more eastern or southern areas in the state and were pushed to the area by early Anglo-Saxon colonizers. There, at the edge of the river, several tribes stayed and refused to be pushed further. As colonists

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<sup>2</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, *A New History of Kentucky*, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> George M. Chinn, *Kentucky Settlement and Statehood, 1750-1800*, (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1975), 30-35.

continued to steal land from Indigenous people, this “border along the Ohio River became a bloody one.”<sup>4</sup>

During the American Revolution, Indigenous people were being pushed off their land en masse by people who came to Kentucky in search of new opportunities and land. Because the settlers had no regard for Native Americans’ relationship with the land, the competition for resources was fierce.<sup>5</sup> One could claim land simply by building a cabin and planting corn. When surveyors came to examine plots of land, this type of claim was seen as justified and valid, even if another person had verbal or written land claims preceding it. Land companies also bought up large portions of land and sold them to absentee investors, making it more difficult to know where one could settle and claim land.<sup>6</sup> Several disputes over land due to unorganized settling created tension in the state for many years. Disputes over land occurred regularly and caused great uncertainty for those interested in coming to Kentucky, especially near Transylvania in Lexington, KY. In 1775, Transylvania attempted to create a provincial government for the new territory. The attempts failed, and after threats of violence from Indigenous peoples became too much, Kentucky was claimed by Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

Surveys of Matilda’s birthplace, Bracken County, were among the first in the state to be documented in 1771. “Surveyors contributed critically to the western spread of white colonizer settlement as they were responsible for creating maps of trails and available land.” That same year, two officers of the Virginia line Revolutionary Army built a small “improver’s” cabin near Chalfant Creek, and one of them lived there permanently as early as 1775. William Bracken

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<sup>4</sup> Harold and Judith Foster, *HISTORY OF BRACKEN COUNTY: BICENTENNIAL EDITION*, (Brooksville: Bracken County Extension Homemakers, 1996), 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Chinn, 81-98.

<sup>6</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Chinn, 85-89.

came with a team of surveyors in 1773 after hearing rumors of fertile land, and he claimed the Bracken Settlement between two rivers.<sup>8</sup>

Before 1775, men were the dominant settlers. But when Daniel Boone (one of Kentucky's earliest and most well-known settlers) left Kentucky to retrieve his wife and family, several others followed suit.<sup>9</sup> Having white women and children present in the territory changed how the people there functioned. Specifically, they required more protection. As the men who worked as traders found out, they needed to commit to colonizing the region in order to ensure greater protection for their families. White women were complicit in the colonization of Kentucky as they fought alongside their husbands against Indigenous people and worked to develop homes in the region. Even though women found themselves in a new territory (literally and figuratively) fighting alongside their husbands, their societal roles still had not changed.<sup>10</sup> Women were only expected to participate if they absolutely had to, and men were expected to protect women and children at all costs. A narrative in which women were meant to be spectators of men's heroism permeated the region. Being brave or being a disgraced coward became the motivation for male colonizers. During one attack on settlers by Indigenous people, a man named John Merrill was shot by a one of the Indigenous people and his wife picked up an axe and killed two of the four attackers. She then lit the fire as others attempted to come down the chimney. As settler Nathaniel Hart remembered, "The women could read the character of a man with invariable certainty. If he lacked courage, they seemed to be able to discover it, at a glance." Historian James Klotter described it best explaining that because white women were "supposedly dependent on men for protection, the bolstering of manly heroism and the ridicule of cowardice

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<sup>8</sup> Harold and Judith Foster, 8.

<sup>9</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 29-34.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Deiss Irvin, *Women in Kentucky*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 9-10.

figured in such narratives as their best weapons against Native Americans.”<sup>11</sup> The culture of hypermasculinity among men became common, even though women were able to fend for themselves if they needed to. Women were thus socialized to be internally strong but outwardly fragile, traits that Matilda perfected throughout her adulthood.

As women continued to enter the region, they worked hard to build their homes. Male settlers wanted women in their small towns and homes, so they drew them in with promises of new homes, gardens, and greater freedom.<sup>12</sup> They were instead met with extreme conditions and constant danger from the Native Americans from whom they were stealing land. Women were expected to remain in their gendered roles by doing house work, cooking, cleaning, and making cloth, while balancing a new aspect of womanhood by working in the fields with their husbands to harvest crops, milk cows, and help with the livestock. Additionally, they were expected to raise the children and educate them to some degree, which was difficult given most women’s lack of formal education. More commonly, mothers taught their children morality by using religion. If they could read the Bible, they read to their children and taught them to read as well. Women’s presence in Kentucky took the region from an “extractive colony to a settler colony,” meaning the space transformed from a place for trade and resource consumption to a place where families settled and communities formed.<sup>13</sup>

Kentucky was seen in many ways as the first western frontier. It was the first time since the creation of the thirteen colonies that a new region was being colonized and developed. Before the Revolutionary War, colonizers took land through several means including stealing, battling Indigenous people, and setting up a fence. After the American Revolutionary War, officers were

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<sup>11</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 29-34.

<sup>12</sup> Chinn, 98-99.

<sup>13</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 29-34.



given Colonial Government Land Warrants in Kentucky as payments for serving in the war because the newly founded government did not have the funds to pay their soldiers. These warrants were given without consideration of Indigenous people who were already living there.<sup>14</sup> Though Kentucky became a vital resource to the new country as a place for trade and agriculture, it is vital to acknowledge that this land and the people who lived on it, long before Matilda, took it with brutal force.

### **A New State Is Born**

Kentucky experienced rapid population growth between 1777 and 1810 when the region grew from 300 colonizers to some 400,000. Kentucky was idealized as a promised land due to the nearly untouched environment and the rumors of fertile soils. A majority of the new settlers came from a handful of states, including Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and New Jersey. The most prevalent reason people settled in Kentucky was that people believed there were new (and easy) opportunities to secure land and make money. Unfortunately for those seeking better incomes, a majority of new Kentucky settlers were very poor both before and after they settled. In some parts of the state, such as the southern Appalachian Mountains, regional poverty existed due to physical isolation and the overuse of natural resources which could not sustain the rapid influx of settlers. In other parts of the state, such as central Kentucky, there were no major rivers for trading with New Orleans. Whatever the case, Kentucky was being filled with a new generation of common men who were predominantly lower class. Thus, began the “Great Migration” of the 1780s through early 1800s.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Harold and Judith Foster, 8.

<sup>15</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 51-56. It should be noted that this “Great Migration” during the late eighteenth century was different from the Great Migration that took place after the Civil War and into the twentieth century. The “Great Migration” referred to by Klotter and Friend was one which occurred following the end of the American Revolution.

By the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, around 30,000 people came to the new territory. A majority of them were white, though some were enslaved African Americans. As more people moved there, the leadership of the state began to shift. Poor settlers in the 1780s came to Kentucky for the land and monetary opportunities they thought they would find. The already wealthy who arrived between the 1780s and 1790s made the biggest difference. Instead of men who labeled themselves as explorers or expansionists, men who were judges, lawyers, clerks, and legislators began filling the state.<sup>16</sup> The powers shifted from the common man, who formerly commanded his own land, extended family, and those very close by, to a more ‘white collar’ group of people. Though discussions of becoming a state had been part of the conversation before the Great Migration, they had only been minor discussions. But when Virginia (of which Kentucky was a territory) began taxing and creating laws for the new area with little representation in 1780, Kentuckians seriously considered demanding statehood. Some compared this arrangement to what the colonies experienced with Great Britain.<sup>17</sup>

Statehood was a long and difficult process for Kentucky due to the way that Virginia’s constitution was set up. When Virginia created their Constitution in 1776, they made an orderly process for a territory to separate, but it was filled with cumbersome processes where a large majority of those in attendance at a statehood convention had to agree to the terms of the territory splitting away. It took ten conventions for the Kentuckians to finally separate from Virginia because there were three factions of opinions on how and why people wanted to separate. First there were the partisans, or the common men who had not secured land early on, who wanted the new state to split land more equitably. Second was the country faction, which

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<sup>16</sup> Irvin, 31-42.

<sup>17</sup> Niels H. Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky, 1780-1828*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1939), 1-17.

consisted of men with large landholdings, who wanted social structures to continue supporting landowners. Lastly there was the court faction, dominated by lawyers and judges, who wanted to expand agricultural opportunities and acquire more land themselves. Debates lasted for a decade before Virginia passed the Virginia Compact, a new law which set limits on how much longer the territory could debate before having to come to a decision. Kentuckians met the deadline, and on June 1, 1792, Kentucky became a state.<sup>18</sup>

The first generation of Kentuckians was largely influenced by the American Revolution and was eager to create their state constitution in a way that supported all white men. Unfortunately, a large majority of those who showed up to help draft the constitution were well above poverty, making the poor man's needs virtually unheard. Some of the most significant pieces of the new constitution included a shift in voting practices (which went from vocal votes to paper ballots) and the lowering of the age to hold public office. The issue of slavery sparked the most volatile debates. A large number of people who came to Kentucky were from Virginia and supported slavery. That belief system was so strong that even when people in the courts acknowledged slavery as wrong, most of them could not rationalize impeding on individuals' property rights. The debate about the constitution with a focus on slavery took over the state. A writer visiting the area noted that a constitution seemed to be being written in every county by the way they were all debating. In the end, the institution of slavery was kept. The constitution was then ratified in 1792.<sup>19</sup>

In 1797, Kentucky legislators found new ways to improve the Constitution. The main debate was, once again, over slavery. The debate centered around individuals' property rights

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<sup>18</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 63-67.

<sup>19</sup> Sonne, 8-26.

versus the right thing to do. Religious ministers were very involved in the discussion. Some who wanted to support the property rights while also supporting the end of slavery debated gradual emancipation, arguing the state could buy slaves' freedom. This argument, in the newly developed and cash-poor state, did not stand a chance. Instead, slave laws were tightened. When the new Constitution passed in 1799, it was so restrictive that it regulated the lives of slaves in everything but education. Additionally, new laws about marriage were added to the Constitution, which took more power away from women by restricting their rights to own property, sign legal documents, and even be employed outside of the home.<sup>20</sup>

### **The First Generation of Kentuckians**

The new century began with a new constitution and the beginning of the first generation of Kentuckians. Many people who had settled in Kentucky prior to statehood, and even prior to the year 1800, “did not see themselves or others as Kentuckians.”<sup>21</sup> The place was never home for them. For those who were born in Kentucky, their ideas about home and a sense of place were much stronger. The members of this generation were predominantly born in Kentucky, but some, like Henry Clay<sup>22</sup>, were born in Virginia and came to Kentucky as a young adult. For these young Kentuckians, nostalgic ideas about Kentucky's frontier were “central to the way Kentuckians imagined themselves.”<sup>23</sup> Proud of their past, the new generation valued the hard

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<sup>20</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 81-83.

<sup>21</sup> James A. Ramage and Andrea S. Watkins, *Kentucky Rising: Democracy, Slavery, and Culture from the Early Republic to the Civil War*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 17-31. Henry Clay is noteworthy because he was known as the Great Compromiser, contributing to the major political debate in both the state and federal governments. Clay was well known for his views on slavery as he pushed for gradual emancipation and the relocation of freed slaves to Liberia. His efforts were relatively unsuccessful with under 700 freed slaves ever relocating to Liberia. Clay was also an early member of the Whig party and was someone Abraham Lincoln looked up to. Clay had four unsuccessful bids for the Presidency and was liked more nationally than in his own state. He retired somewhat disgraced near the end of his career, dying in 1852. He was a distant cousin of Cassius M. Clay, a prominent emancipationist in the mid nineteenth century that supported the early work at Berea College.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 18-30.

<sup>23</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 90.

work their parents had done and wanted to push it further with economic innovations and educational developments. First, however, the new generation had to come of age in the same way as their forefathers: through war.<sup>24</sup>

The War of 1812 secured Kentucky's position in the United States as a stronghold of militiamen and sharp shooters. Fighters showed their patriotism through participation in the war efforts. The war occurred when the United States pushed Indigenous peoples further and further out leading to trade wars with Britain and France. Kentucky was a significant part of this push as they were considered the furthest frontier at the time (along with the state of Tennessee).<sup>25</sup> Some 65% of eligible white men from Kentucky joined in the war effort as nationalism swept the young state. People in Kentucky were so pro-war that they believed the United States should take the opportunity presented by war and invade Canada, but the federal government had no such plans. Some of the conflicts during the war led to slowed trade down the Mississippi River to Louisiana, and Kentucky sent several troops to help in the effort. As Kentuckians fought on, Henry Clay was a part of the national team of diplomats who worked to end the war. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent which Clay played a significant role in securing. The war also calmed concerns of attacks by Native Americans. This newfound sense of security emboldened settlers in Kentucky to push further west. Additionally, the War of 1812 secured young Kentuckians' place in the United States. The commonwealth swelled with state and national pride after an observer commented "Kentuckians have the best character of being the best warriors of the United States."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 81-83.

<sup>25</sup> James A. Ramage and Andrea S. Watkins, 97-111.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 97-128.

### Women and Children in Early Kentucky

In 1770, almost all of the settlers in Kentucky were white men. But with the Great Migration of the next twenty years, white women became 39% of the settler population in Kentucky.<sup>27</sup> Culturally, men in America were expected to be virtuous and to put the needs of the community before personal profits. This concept was based on the early founders' ideas of the Republic, being similar to that of ancient Rome, where the democratic process was valued above all else. This social ideology gave men a moral obligation over women, children, and slaves, supporting a republican patriarchal society in Kentucky.<sup>28</sup>

The ideology also permeated women's legal rights, requiring all women to be classified in certain ways legally based on the person (presumably a man) who was in charge of her. If a white woman was *feme covert*, it meant that she was under the protection and control of a husband, father, or another male relative. When women who were classified as *feme covert* earned money, it had to be given to their husband or caretaker. When a woman did not have the protection of a male family member, she was called *feme sole*. Her wages and property were her own. Most women who were *feme sole* remained low-income like most Kentuckians. Occasionally, a woman's husband might die and she would inherit his money, making her wealthy. Sometimes, women were entrepreneurs and found ways of making money.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 60-63.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 12-16.

<sup>29</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 60-63.

For example, working with their husbands on the land became more common as there were so few people around to do the work.<sup>30</sup> Women also threw themselves into the work of caring for their family by spending significant time sewing, weaving, cleaning, cooking, and childrearing. This gave women a sense of place in the newly-forming republic as the “custodian[s] of civic morality.”<sup>31</sup> Women were also expected to be socially outgoing. Their community building skills brought people together, whether in a rural community or within a township. Women’s most important role came down to the rearing of their children, which included teaching girls about domestic skills and boys about farming and business. The work of building a family was constant, but doing so was the role of a good citizen in supporting republicanism within the family.<sup>32</sup> Kentucky women were not much different from their peers in the Northeast, except for that fact that they were so far from their families. This lack of support put more pressure on women as they became responsible for familial and community success. These responsibilities were no longer just those of the mother and wife, but those of the patriot working to support the new nation as it expanded West.

Republicanism was an economic and social ideology which was meant to support the newly founded US government.<sup>33</sup> It started when women helped in the Revolutionary War effort by boycotting goods, creating replacements for those goods, and running businesses and farms while their husbands were away fighting. Once the war was over, the idea of going back to the way things were was daunting. Therefore, women's role in supporting the growth of the new

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<sup>30</sup> Irvin, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret A. Nash, “Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia,” (*Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (1997): 171–191), 172. The women who moved to the new region came from predominantly middle to low income families who were looking for new opportunities.

<sup>32</sup> Irvin, 1-17.

<sup>33</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 61.

nation was to maintain republican motherhood.<sup>34</sup> Because women were charged with the early education of their children, the idea that women should be educated became more popular on the national stage.<sup>35</sup> For the common woman, this ideal was less realistic, so women taught what they could and acted as the moral guides of their families.<sup>36</sup> Women were made to be the arbiters of social control, further confining them in the role of mother as their most important role.

Even with this newfound autonomy following the war, when the Kentucky Constitution was rewritten in 1798, a new wave of laws curtailed women's freedoms. First, the constitution implemented new laws about the legality of marriages and divorce. Marriages formerly were more casual, but were made a legal proceeding by the new constitution. Additionally, marriages now had to be performed by a certified pastor. The new laws also dictated what a man could do with his wife's property or dowries. In theory, it was meant to protect women but had the opposite effect. In the case of divorce, the money or property was required to be returned to them or their fathers. In practice, the 1798 Kentucky Constitution gave men the legal ability to take anything that belonged to their wives. Additionally, the new constitution required a more organized and consistent process for resolving disputes within the courts. Before the constitution, women could go to local courts to resolve different disputes. After the new constitution was passed, women were unable to do this. They had no legal rights as an individual because women were always legally under the guardianship of a man (either her father, husband or brother).<sup>37</sup>

### **Slavery and A Changing Economy**

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<sup>34</sup> "Republican Motherhood" referred to the belief that women were responsible for upholding family values and raising socially and culturally responsible children in order to support the healthy growth of the new nation.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret A. Nash, 172-174.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, 9-16.

<sup>37</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 60-63.



When white settlers first arrived in Kentucky, very few of those settlers brought enslaved people with them. More than anything, slaves were a symbol of wealth more than they were there to work. Those who came from Virginia were expected to swear an oath that they would not sell their slaves once in Kentucky as a way to maintain the territory as a slave state under strict control of the Virginia government. In the 1760s and 1770s, there were so few slaves because so few people needed them. Small groups of men settled in Kentucky and they only cultivated what they needed to survive. Enslaved people were often hired out to assist other settlers. In these early days enslaved people were used to clear new land for agriculture. By the 1790s, the total number of slaves had increased in Kentucky, but only one fifth of Kentuckians owned slaves because most could not afford them, making the practice a class divide.<sup>38</sup>

When Kentucky considered statehood, slavery was a significant part of the debate. As mentioned earlier, land rights were constantly debated due to unorganized and informal settlement. This made wealthier people nervous about the loss of their property (as in their slaves), making Kentuckians especially suspicious of emancipation through any means. The first person to denounce slavery during the constitutional convention was a Presbyterian Minister, David Rice. He, along with two other Presbyterians, three Baptists, and one Methodist, proposed gradual emancipation be embedded in the constitution. Following a contentious debate, the motion failed to pass.<sup>39</sup> As a result of this vote, Kentucky became a “slave state.”

By 1800, Kentucky had grown to a total of 42 counties. A debate about the split of representation in the states brought up the question of slavery again. As the white population

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<sup>38</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 56-60.

<sup>39</sup> John B. Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky*, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 9-10.

increased steadily, the enslaved African American population also increased quickly.<sup>40</sup> A new constitutional debate (ten years after the original one) led to stricter laws regarding the enslaved population of Kentucky. The new legislature required all slaves to carry around a pass if they were off their owner's property, or if they were visiting another farm for any amount of time. Slaves could not buy or sell anything without permission, and they were not allowed to be armed. The new laws also restricted their access to the courts. African Americans could not testify against a white person in court. Previously, Kentucky was an unofficial slave state because of its close connection to Virginian politics.<sup>41</sup> By 1800 these new laws made Kentucky legally a slave state and distinctly separate from northern states.<sup>42</sup>

Following the end of the War of 1812 came to an end, Kentucky experienced a period of great economic wealth and growth. Great Britain's economy was failing while recovering from the war, and the United States started exporting more goods to the UK. Kentucky was doing so well economically that Henry Clay was able to advance his idea of "the American System" which created the first National Bank. Many states, including Kentucky, created their own banks as well. Private banks began popping up across Kentucky as the state bank could not keep up with increased demand for loans. Loans were given out readily to new investors and several in Kentucky took advantage of this time of economic growth. The increase in farming production, made possible by bank loans, led to a significant increase in slave labor in the South. Agriculture was the basis of the economy, therefore, access to land and other peoples' labor helped owners to

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<sup>40</sup> Robert M. Ireland, *The County Courts in Antebellum Kentucky*, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 18-34.

<sup>41</sup> This is to say that Kentucky tolerated slavery but a majority of people did not own slaves or use their labor. Socially, the racial hierarchy was entrenched in the state because so many settlers came from Virginia. But it wasn't until the new slave laws were passed that Kentucky became legally a slave state, which is to say they allowed and regulated slavery at a state level. Formerly, slaves were regulated by their owners.

<sup>42</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 81-83.

accumulate significant wealth. By farming cash crops, some people were able to go beyond subsistence farming and amass significant amounts of capital. Though many people in Kentucky were skeptical of these loans due to how easy it was to get them, many still took advantage of the opportunity to use them.

This prosperity, however, came to an end with the Panic of 1819.<sup>43</sup> By 1819, Great Britain's economy had recovered and the need for US imports dropped by half. All of the new wealth producers across the country, who gained wealth through loans and selling exports to the UK, now lost half of their business. People defaulted on their loans and lost land. Kentuckians felt the Panic of 1819 early on as the money printed by the state government became worthless. The federal government started calling in their loans, which forced state and private banks to call them in as well. Land values in Kentucky fell and people began declaring bankruptcy. The cash crops of Kentucky included hemp and tobacco, and once the economic recession came, Kentucky's crop prices went lower than they ever had before.<sup>44</sup> In order to keep their farms alive, several farmers started producing bourbon. They hired master distillers and had the whole family work on bourbon production together.<sup>45</sup>

Nothing seemed to help the recession, which led to the election of a pro-aid gubernatorial candidate in 1824. Joseph Desha was elected as a response to the economic hardships Kentuckians were facing because he promised financial aid to those in need. While the economy failed, a debate over the state's court system took center stage as some wanted a new court system and some wanted the old one.<sup>46</sup> Several Kentuckians believed that the economy could be

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<sup>43</sup> James A. Ramage and Andrea S. Watkins, 242.

<sup>44</sup> Sonne, 242.

<sup>45</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 116-122.

<sup>46</sup> Ireland, 18-34.

salvaged if only new people were in power. After the election of 1825, those who wanted a new court won the majority in the state's House of Representatives. Hastily, they passed a law which proposed that "All judges on both courts, all legislators, the governor, and the lieutenant governor resign," so that the state could start over. The hope was that by 'starting over,' Kentucky would be able to pull itself out of the recession. Luckily the state Senate did not allow the bill to pass and elected officials came to a consensus through compromise to leave the court system alone.<sup>47</sup> Due to the economic crisis and political upheaval in the courts, Kentucky was experiencing absolute chaos. It was during this tumultuous time, in 1824, that Matilda was born.

### **Religion and the Rise of Abolition**

During the Great Migration to Kentucky and other southwestern territories in the 1770s through early 1800s, people saw Kentucky as an ideal place to settle for religious freedom because it was "far from the prejudices of more settled eastern populations, Kentucky offered an ideal location to protect religious freedoms."<sup>48</sup> People felt like the social and religious restrictions that had developed in the northeast were not present in Kentucky, allowing for greater religious exploration and expansion. As early as the 1780s, members of several religions believed that slavery was an inhumane practice. Even so, those same people still chose to hire out slaves to work, in addition to buying slaves themselves.<sup>49</sup> The contradiction showed just how much the institution of slavery was entrenched amongst Kentuckians and the nation at large.<sup>50</sup> Amongst various Christian denominations, slavery once again proved to be the most divisive

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<sup>47</sup> Ireland, 18-34.

<sup>48</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 54.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 54-60.

<sup>50</sup> Boles, 9-10.

topic in the state as debates over slavery and the right to own people ultimately ripped religious denominations apart.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in 1798 when Kentuckians or Kentucky legislators rewrote the state constitution, religious leaders again tried to remove legal sanction for the institution of slavery, or to at least have it abolished over time. Again, religious leaders failed. The only major changes in the constitution directly related to religion were new laws which required that marriage was a “formal institution,” one overseen or performed by a Christian minister.<sup>51</sup> Although it was not the change anti-slavery ministers hoped for, it did make the institution of marriage culturally more significant (which was mostly a good thing for women). Though unsuccessful, Rice’s early work in anti-slavery set the stage for abolition in Kentucky moving forward.

Before the Panic of 1819, most emancipationists advocated that the state pay slave owners to free their slaves. After the recession, few were able to rationalize that cost and began advocating for gradual emancipation. Abolitionists called for the immediate freedom of slaves with no compensation for slave owners.<sup>52</sup> In 1811, of the 300 Baptist churches in Kentucky, only eleven openly opposed slavery. Baptist minister David Barrow arrived in Kentucky from Virginia in 1798 and was soon kicked out of the Baptist church for his anti-slavery beliefs. Similarly, Matilda and John left the Presbyterian denomination early in their marriage because of their strong anti-slavery convictions. In 1808, Barrow formed the Kentucky Abolition Society. The society grew to 200 members by 1821, although not all of the members agreed on the best

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<sup>51</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 81-83.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 104-106.

way to end slavery. Similar to the political debates during the first two constitutional conventions, it came down to emancipationists and abolitionists.

The Great Revival was a religious awakening among Protestant Christians which lasted from the beginning of the nineteenth century through the 1840s. It came in conjunction with an increase in abolitionist sentiment among some religious groups (such as Presbyterians and nondenominational groups). In August of 1801, a group of ministers, who called themselves the “New Lights,” from different churches and denominations came together to have a large religious meeting. Several thousand people attended the gathering and during the sermons, people began having physical responses, such as falling to the ground or appearing to be dead. Spiritually, revivals were believed to signal renewed life in the church or congregation.<sup>53</sup> Churches began holding revivals regularly and it changed the way in which some religions functioned. Many Presbyterians, for example, were not in favor of the practice of revivals and several people left the church over the difference. The split increased membership at Methodist and Baptist churches, which—because of revivals—were believed to be more democratic in the ways they worked. Revivalist churches' beliefs were that salvation was for everyone, and this egalitarian view of God drew several people to the churches. Revivals were extremely popular in the state between 1801 and 1805 took over the state until around 1805 when they temporarily declined. faded away. In 1811, however, the New Madrid earthquakes were so massive that they literally changed the path of the Mississippi River.<sup>54</sup> People took this as a sign from God to continue revivals and they spiked again. Following this was the Second Great Awakening from the 1820s through 1840s, which led to people connecting religious revivalism with social

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<sup>53</sup> James A. Ramage and Andrea S. Watkins, 148-152.

<sup>54</sup> These earthquakes, which occurred in December of 1811 and January and February of 1812, were the largest in recorded history in the continental US east of the Rocky Mountains.

improvements. During this time people adopted ideals regarding self-improvement which became the base for several new movements including “temperance, public education, women’s rights, medical reform, humane treatment of the insane and criminal, and the abolition of slavery.”<sup>55</sup> The religious movements during the Second Great Awakening made the work at Berea College possible (though not without struggle).

Some churches that had predominantly New Light members were so open to reform and ideas of equality that they had integrated churches. Unfortunately for the abolitionist cause, this period of integration was short-lived and changed as the Civil War drew closer in the 1850s. The new emphasis on ending slavery was the most important topic in several churches. New Lights existed in most denominations (like Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians) and were considerably more interested in this wave of reform than their Old Lights counterparts. This led to an official split within the Baptist church into the Northern and Southern denominations. This divide was sparked by northern Baptists who argued that they could not serve as missionaries in slave states. The religious atmosphere of Kentucky by the end of the Great Awakening was one of variety, as more denominations split over the issue of slavery.<sup>56</sup>

The Great Awakening, also coincided with the idea of romanticism. Inspired by self-improvement and reform, the arts (written and visual) began to show Kentuckians an idealistic vision of what the world could look like. Starting in the 1820s, the writers who embraced romanticism allowed writers to reimagine men as passionate and individualistic, while women were unruly and naive. Young people pushed the idea of the self-made man and the abandonment of old ideas about societal structure, moving toward the individualistic ideals of

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<sup>55</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 130-134.

<sup>56</sup> James A. Ramage and Andrea S. Watkins, 148-152.

republicanism. As individualism was on the rise, so was the demand for education as individuals sought to transform their personal lives. The desire for personal improvement translated for many into a desire for education. Despite these pressures, it took until 1850 for legislation about state-run education to be added to the constitution. Long before this date however, activists across the state were calling for more educational opportunities. Responding to the need, the Presbyterian church secured a charter for a college in 1819 in Danville, Kentucky. Centre College's creation marked the beginning of a trend. Several religious institutions opened up over the following years, including Augusta College in Bracken County— Matilda's home. By 1842, Kentucky had more colleges than any other state.<sup>57</sup>

During the period of religious and cultural enlightenment of the 1820s and 1830s, attitudes in favor of abolition peaked in Kentucky. The belief that slavery was a “necessary evil” influenced Kentuckians' understanding of the institution, while several other southern states began referring to slavery as a “positive good.” The “positive good” terminology supposed that slavery civilized African Americans by putting them in contact with white culture and religion.<sup>58</sup> Most Kentuckians adhered to the “necessary evil” ideology, believing that slavery was wrong but they still wished to refrain from disrupting the social order. If slavery was abolished immediately they reasoned, “property rights would be abridged, labor would be unsettled, and racial tensions would increase.”<sup>59</sup> Though slavery had increased significantly in Kentucky

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<sup>57</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 146-157.

<sup>58</sup> The belief that African Americans needed to be civilized remained a part of American culture throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. When Black students began receiving college educations, a prominent debate was whether those students should receive practical and skill based training or liberal arts education. The dominant belief was that physical labor taught good moral character in the recently freed slaves. This is explored more in chapter three and the conclusion, but it is worthy of note here because it shows that racist ideologies don't go away, they just shapeshift. This debate also existed between Black leaders including debates between WEB DuBois and Booker T Washington.

<sup>59</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 152.



between 1800 and 1840 the first forty years of the nineteenth century, it was still not central to the economy like it was in other southern states. A quote by Matilda's husband, John G. Fee, said it best: "Prejudice, unholy prejudice is at the bottom of the whole of it." Kentuckians believed slavery was wrong, but they could not imagine a world where white and black people could live in freedom together.<sup>60</sup> This was the challenge that Matilda directly faced as an administrator at Berea. More than social control and maintaining gendered structures, Matilda had to work with the other female administrators and the female students in order to maintain racial and gendered peace on campus.

The debates about slavery that saturated Kentucky culture took on new meanings during another recession - the Panic of 1837. Kentucky was not recovering from the economic hit of the recession, and many within the state blamed slavery. Newspapers in Louisville argued that Cincinnati's economy— one similar to Louisville's— was recovering quickly and pointed out that the city did not depend on slave labor.<sup>61</sup> The debates about slavery swept the state and abolitionists were able to secure a referendum on the issue. The state voted in favor of the referendum to address slavery in the constitution and a date was set for 1850. Unfortunately, anti-slavery advocates could not agree on the best way to end slavery as there was still a division between the emancipationists and the abolitionists. Their divided front— along with a minority of anti-slavery legislators— led to a failed attempt at ending slavery. After this loss, abolitionists did not try to abolish slavery through legislative means again.<sup>62</sup>

### **Hamilton Family Genealogy**

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 151-154.

<sup>61</sup> James A. Ramage and Andrea S. Watkins, 257-276.

<sup>62</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 151-154.

Long before Matilda was born, her parents, grandparents, and other relatives experienced much of what I have written above. Matilda was socialized and influenced by these ongoing debates in her community. Her parents and others in her community were socialized. This is important to understand because children are products of their environment and their families.

Matilda was born May 24, 1824 to Vincent Hamilton and Elizabeth “Betsy” Gregg Hamilton in Bracken County, Kentucky.<sup>63</sup> Beginning with her father’s family line, the Hamiltons were an old Scottish family that can be traced as far back as the year 1,000 C.E. Throughout European history, the family spread far and wide among the rich and poor, the gentry and the peasants. In the early eighteenth century, child brothers William and John Hamilton were playing in a garden and plucked a rose from The King’s Garden. When caught, the two were banished from England. The brothers left England as teens or young adults and initially settled in Baltimore. John Hamilton married a woman named Elizabeth and served as a sergeant during the Revolutionary War, securing his and his family’s stance on American settlement and colonization. At some point, the Hamilton family settled in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and lived there for an unknown amount of time.<sup>64</sup>

Coinciding with the Great Migration, in 1795, John’s four sons, including John Jr, Edward, Samuel, and David, left Pennsylvania for Ohio and Kentucky. They traveled down the Ohio River on a flatboat and briefly settled at Fort Washington— later called Cincinnati, Ohio. Within a few years, some of those brothers moved to modern day Bracken County in northern Kentucky. Augusta was the river port town and Brooksville, later the county seat, was closer to

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<sup>63</sup> “Matilda Hamilton Fee (1824-1895) - Find A Grave...,” Find a Grave, accessed April 25, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/8317127/matilda-fee>).

<sup>64</sup> Frances Frazee Hamilton, *Ancestral Lines of the Doniphan, Frazee, and Hamilton Families*, (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 1998), 540-565. This book, and many of the resources highlighting family genealogy, were found in the Bracken County Historical Society’s archive in Bracken County, Kentucky.

the interior of the county. Edward Hamilton settled in Bracken County with his wife, Dilly Donovan of Maryland. On March 12, 1799, Vincent Hamilton was born. He was the third child out of ten. Vincent used the names of two of his sisters as names for some of his children later in his life. This is where Matilda, and her older sister Minerva, received their names. The family was believed to be Presbyterian, though no Presbyterian churches existed in the areas they settled.<sup>65</sup>

Matilda's maternal family line followed the Greggs, a family with Gaelic lines going back as far as 130 A.D.<sup>66</sup> Their early settlement was in Ireland and Scotland, with some of the Gregg clans residing in each region. The family's primary religious identification was as Ulster Presbyterians. Presbyterians were persecuted in many parts of Europe because they were a breakaway group from the Holy Catholic Church. In 1678, William Penn came to where several Greggs were settled in Ireland to teach Quaker ideologies. Several Scottish settlers converted to Quakerism, or "Society of Friends." Following their conversion, many of the Greggs moved to the Americas in the mid and late seventeenth century.<sup>67</sup>

The Greggs settled in Pennsylvania and Delaware and played a role in the growth of the Quaker religion in the eighteenth century both by contributing to rapid population growth and by their staunch commitment to the religious denomination. The most prominent Gregg was John Gregg and his wife Elizabeth Cooke Gregg. The two had seven children and their descendants grew into the thousands. Matilda's great-grandmother, Sarah Gregg, was among one of them. Sarah was a devout Quaker and supported the abolitionist cause in the mid-eighteenth century,

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<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, 540-565.

<sup>66</sup> Hazel May Middleton Kendall, *The Descendants of William Gregg, the Friend Immigrant to Delaware, 1682: from Which Nucleus Disseminated Nests of Greggs to Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina*, (Anderson, IN: Self Published, 1944), 5-7.

<sup>67</sup> Kendall, 15-19.

long before the establishment of the United States as a country separate from England. From Sarah came Aaron Gregg, who married Mary Gregg. From Mary came Elizabeth Gregg, who married Vincent Hamilton, and had Matilda.<sup>68</sup> The exact time that the Greggs arrived in Bracken County is unknown, but tax records show that Aaron Gregg was in Bracken county as early as 1799.<sup>69</sup> Because Matilda's family lines can be traced back by several hundred years in the American colonies and in Europe before that, this is probably an indication of long term familial stability.<sup>70</sup> This stability allowed Matilda's family to accumulate wealth and prominence in their new land of settlement and gave Matilda access to the tools of the upper class which would eventually support her in her work as an administrator.

### **When Matilda Came of Age: 1824 - 1844**

Historians only know brief details about Matilda's parents, her income, her life as a married woman, and some of her work at Berea College. Because there are no documents that detail Matilda's life before she married John in 1844, it is difficult to say what her upbringing may have been like. This section is also meant to give some context to what Matilda's coming of age might have been like. By examining how women were raised during the 1820s through 1840s, religious trends, economic change, the Second Great Awakening and Romanticism periods, researchers can better understand the historical influences that would have occurred during Matilda's life.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 20-23.

<sup>69</sup> Tax Records from 1790s through 1850s, (Brooksville: Bracken County Historical Society).

<sup>70</sup> It can sometimes be difficult to trace family lines among Anglo-Saxon individuals who came from Europe further back than the sixteenth century. Matilda's family lines can be traced back a few hundred years before that, which indicates her family had the wealth and means to keep track of their family over the years. Thus, generational wealth from hundreds of years of stability allowed Matilda to live a relatively comfortable life before marriage. This was also an indication of class, education, or literacy.

<sup>71</sup> Both of these periods took place between 1790 and 1840, and drastically shifted social and cultural understandings of self and one's place in the world.

During the 1820s and 1830s, young people (who were coming of age) were given a level of autonomy they previously had not experienced. For example, arranged marriages were significantly less common among this generation compared to their parents and grandparents.<sup>72</sup> The Second Great Awakening's focus on self-improvement started a new scientific movement. Many people believed that women matured as a result of marriage and the ability to assert dominance over children. During the religious movement, experts at the time shifted to a more holistic view of a person's development, emphasizing the importance of female relationships and women's capacity for compassion.<sup>73</sup> Health reformer Elizabeth Blackwell for example, asserted that women were men's moral superior and that this allowed them to be more compassionate and understanding.<sup>74</sup> Compassion was now common, and Matilda came of age during this period. These gendered views influenced her growth into adulthood.

Because white women saw themselves as the "morally superior sex," they were often the first to join the social causes of the 1820s through 1840s. Nationwide, those causes included temperance, the abolition of slaves, women's rights, and religious revivals. Young women were the majority of religious converts during between 1820 and 1840, and continued to comprise the majority of church congregations following that.<sup>75</sup> Young women's ideas about marriage and relationships had therefore changed. Many young white women searched for men who were interested in working for a cause. Martyrdom was romanticized to the point that, for some children, hearing about how their parents died fighting for a cause became a yearly celebration. It

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<sup>72</sup> Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830-1930 (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History)*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>73</sup> DeLuzio, 9-30.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 33-44. Blackwell was a British physician who got her degree in the US and was the first woman on the Medical Register of the General Medical Council.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 15-20.

also reinforced ideologies of settler colonialism.<sup>76</sup> Once activist women married however, they preferred to keep their activism close to home in order to fulfil their expected feminine duties within the household.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to these dominant ideologies, Matilda's public activism increased after her marriage to John, which demonstrates a marked difference in Matilda compared to other women activities alive at the same time.

The new scientific thought supported allowing children to grow naturally—from a morality standpoint—once they reached the age of reasoning (which experts believed was between twelve and thirteen). Parents were expected to give their children greater freedoms and autonomy at this age in order for young people to freely develop. This, however, clashed with the simultaneous ideology that once women started puberty, their sexuality inherently needed to be watched and policed. Though young men were also expected to remain polite and keep their sexuality in check, it was expected for a man to have yearnings and this was more widely accepted.<sup>78</sup> Young women, however, were supposed to be passionless.<sup>79</sup> The idea that young women were meant to be raised to be as wholly good and chaste was the result of a shift in motherhood. As republican motherhood ideologies faded, the new wave of thought dictated that the job of the mother was not to produce a republican family, but to produce a daughter worthy of marriage.<sup>80</sup>

As childrearing changed, so did the economy and slavery. Though Matilda was born into a poor economic situation in Kentucky in 1824 (as a long-lasting result of the Panic of 1819), the

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<sup>76</sup> Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Growing Up Abolitionist: The Story of the Garrison Children*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 47.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 70-79.

<sup>78</sup> DeLuzio, 40-49.

<sup>79</sup> Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 133-134.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 19-22.

country became more stable in the 1830s as transportation expanded the economy throughout Kentucky. New roads and railways were built, opening up access to central parts of the state. Steamboats allowed people to more easily trade up-river. This new accessibility exponentially developed trade opportunities for white merchants and Southern farmers. The demand for goods expanded the demand for slaves, leading to a surge in slavery across the state. In 1838, the coal industry exploded (figuratively and literally) as people began using coal instead of wood to fuel steamboats and trains. Outside of the Panic of 1837, there was significant prosperity and economic growth in Kentucky between the 1830s and 1850s.<sup>81</sup> As the economy flourished, so did Vincent's income. In 1821, Vincent Hamilton owned no land, no slaves, and the total value of everything he owned came out to only \$80. By 1841, he had owned at least two slaves, had 489 acres of land, and the total value of everything he owned came out to \$7,260.<sup>82</sup> During this time period, that was a more than healthy income. Matilda was born into relative poverty, but her family made its way into the middle and upper-middle class as she aged.

Beyond her gendered upbringing and her economic status, what most significantly impacted Matilda was her religious upbringing. Her family members were practicing Quakers, who were also referred to as "Friends," which was a religion characterized by the idea that anyone could access an internal light. This made Quakerism an uncharacteristically equitable religion in the nineteenth century. Several Quakers settled in Pennsylvania, as a result it is no coincidence that in 1780, the state legislature (predominantly Quakers) approved the first law supporting the abolition of slavery in the United States. Additionally, among the Friends of Pennsylvania, slavery became virtually extinct. Abolition among late eighteenth century

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<sup>81</sup> James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, 111-112.

<sup>82</sup> Tax Records from 1790s through 1850s, (Brooksville: Bracken County Historical Society).

Pennsylvania Quakers was extreme. Abolition for Quakers meant more than freeing slaves, which they often did by purchasing a slave's freedom. It also meant helping them find work, educational opportunities, and giving them references for jobs. Early Quaker abolition was characterized not only by the desire for freedom of enslaved peoples, but the preservation of that freedom once attained.<sup>83</sup>

Matilda's mother was a Quaker and came from a long line of them. The way children were raised was markedly different for Quakers than it was for other Christians. Presbyterians, for example, baptized children at birth due to the belief that children were inherently sinful in the womb. Quakers, however, did not baptize members until they were adults, believing that children could not truly do wrong until they were old enough to have conscious thought. There are no historical texts that indicate exactly what "conscious" thought meant. Some said it was as early as children could recognize what was happening around them and what people were saying to them (sometime within the first three years of life). Others said it was when children became acutely aware of right and wrong as dictated by laws and social constructs. This happened closer to the age of ten or twelve. Once children were aware of good and bad, their decisions after that period defined their religious commitment. As adults, Quakers were then able to choose to be a part of the church.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, Matilda's upbringing with this religious overtone allowed Matilda to grow into her faith, making it a conscious decision.

Matilda's ideas about gender were also affected by Quaker theology. For example, social and religious expectations among most Christians dictated that women should remain quiet

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<sup>83</sup> Edward Raymond Turner, "The First Abolitionist Society in the United States" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 36, No.1 (1912), 92-109, (University of Pennsylvania Press), 92-96.

<sup>84</sup> Jerry W. Frost and Friends Historical Association, "As The Twig Bent: Quaker Ideas of Childhood," *Quaker History*, (Haverford, PA: 1962), 67-87.



within the church. Quakers, however, believed that anyone could be called to preach. Women spoke in churches and in public gatherings about religion, and even led their own congregations to preach to. Quaker women were therefore a large part of the abolitionist movement because they felt comfortable speaking to large groups about slavery's immorality. Quaker's views about women were the one deviation in Matilda's upbringing compared to other non-Quaker women. Matilda was likely taught by her mother to use her voice as a tool for abolition, a tool she was able to translate into strong leadership as an administrator in adulthood.<sup>85</sup>

From the historical foundations of Kentucky to shifting social norms and religious ideologies, there were several influences on Matilda's early growth. Who she was during her early marriage, as a mother, and as an educator lie in these influences. The next chapter highlights these influences as Matilda's life, from her marriage through the official opening of Berea College, is analyzed and examined.

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<sup>85</sup> Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, 8-10.

## Chapter 2:

### Foundations of Matilda Hamilton Fee and Berea College

Matilda Hamilton Fee and John G. Fee had been married a few years when she first saved John's life. John was often threatened with physical violence due to his revolutionary views on abolition, which he preached about across the state. During the couple's years in Lewis County, John was asked to preach at a gathering 15 miles away. There were rumors that violence might ensue during his journey or once he arrived. Some of John's friends volunteered to accompany him with weapons to serve as his protection. Being a pacifist, he refused the offer and Matilda decided to attend the gathering with him. The two experienced a safe journey to the event, but Matilda's horse was untied and beaten overnight. The abuse that her horse experienced clearly troubled Matilda; John explained in his autobiography that she was "sweet in the eyes" until they found her horse.<sup>1</sup> With a heightened sense of concern, the pair was accompanied by a local farmer on their way home. During the journey, a mob approached the group with intent to harm. One unnamed man (referred to as "H") raced toward John wielding a club. Before he could strike, Matilda "interposed herself between [John] and H," preventing injury and possible death to her husband. Some two or three times, Matilda blocked the man by inserting herself and her horse in front of her husband.<sup>2</sup> At each turn, she was protecting more than her husband—the father of her recently born first child. Matilda was protecting a mission.

Matilda's bravery in blocking the mobs' blows with her horse is one example of how she protected both John and the abolitionist mission. John and several others who knew her praised her bravery in their writings, noting how her actions were courageous in times of danger, more

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<sup>1</sup> Fee, 44. "Sweet in the eyes" meant that Matilda was emotional and teared up.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 45.

so than her peers. Elizabeth Rogers, an early co-founder and close friend of Matilda, wrote that Matilda was “as brave a woman as ever walked Berea’s streets.”<sup>3</sup> Matilda’s courage was, for her, a natural outgrowth of her strong faith. Matilda’s religious journey, and thus her journey as an abolitionist and school administrator, began just before her marriage to John, and grew as their marriage matured.<sup>4</sup>

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Matilda’s life before marriage was sparsely documented. After Matilda’s marriage to John on September 16, 1844, however, her life and her work started being documented. Due to the meticulous documentation of John G. Fee’s life, Matilda’s presence increased in historical records after marriage.<sup>5</sup> During the twenty years between her marriage and the opening of Berea College, Matilda had six children. She also lived in several homes in Kentucky and Ohio, saved her husband from physical danger, preached among men and women in public, and stood up to Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. Through all of this, her faith played a significant role in her choices. Exploring her life before, during, and after Berea are crucial to analyzing Matilda’s role as an administrator at Berea College. As noted above, Matilda’s life only started being documented after she married John, which complicates the use of his autobiography as a

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<sup>3</sup> RG 103, Box 3, Folder 8, “Personal History of Berea College” by Elizabeth Rogers, (Berea, KY: College Archives: Berea College Special Collections & Archives, 1910), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Fee, 44-47. The seriousness of an injured horse could have put Matilda and John in a great deal of danger. If the horse had been injured and unable to walk, Matilda and John may have had to walk several miles to safety, putting them even further in harm’s way and open to attacks. That Matilda and her horse were able to walk away from this unscathed is very lucky. Additionally, knowing how much Matilda cared about her horse, it shows a commitment to the cause that she was willing to use her horse to block those blows.

<sup>5</sup> John wrote his own autobiography, and this provided a great deal of information about his life, in addition to shedding light on Matilda’s life. Historians have written extensively about Berea College and its founding due to the unusually progressive institution. Four historians have written the most about Berea College and therefore about John G. Fee, including Elizabeth Peck, Caroline Miller, Victor B. Howard, and Richard Sears. Together there are seven books about the school and the life of John G. Fee. In each, Matilda makes only minor appearances.

primary source. It is predominantly through his lens, that Matilda's story is told because she wrote almost nothing about herself to leave behind.

This chapter highlights Matilda's life predominantly outside of Berea College. Her work as an administrator is documented in chapter three. But before she became an administrator, she was a mother, wife, and advocate. What made her a good administrator lies in the details of her personal life. Though it was a common practice for both middle class men and women in the nineteenth century to write their life stories, Matilda did not do this. Matilda was not written about by anyone to the degree that John wrote about her, with her name coming up in John's autobiography nearly one out of every four pages. Historians are forced to see Matilda almost exclusively through John's eyes. With a critical historical lens, this is how her life is documented. With so many books about Berea College and John G. Fee, it is only appropriate to finally have some pages dedicated to Matilda herself.

### **Matilda's Faith Journey**

Matilda's religious journey was largely shaped by her family's own religious history. As discussed in chapter one, Matilda's family on her mother's side came from Pennsylvania and were Quakers. In most religious practices in the nineteenth century, women were discouraged from praying or preaching, as it was seen to be a masculine role. Quakers, however, believed that women could not only pray and preach publicly, but that they could even travel for their preaching duties.<sup>6</sup> In Quaker doctrine, all people were believed to have a soul, and all souls were

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Gillan Muir, "Petticoats in the Pulpit: Early Nineteenth Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada," (Dissertation, McGill University Libraries, 1989), 118-122. By 1830, some estimates said 350 Quaker women traveled around America preaching, with another 500 Methodists. Women preachers in Canada were less common, as this source speaks more to women in Canada. Women seemed to be pushed out of preaching by the end of the nineteenth century in Canada while some women were being ordained in the United States by the end of the century. Despite ideological leniency in the United States, the author states that even in the U.S., women were generally discouraged from preaching.

believed to be able to possess a light inside that allowed them to preach the Word. In the Quaker tradition, women could choose to be both involved in the church and to be a wife and mother. This balance was seen as normal and healthy if that woman felt the call to preach.<sup>7</sup>

Quakers were also unique in that they were broadly against slavery.<sup>8</sup> Pennsylvania was a hub for Quaker settlements and in many ways had the first strongly abolitionist society.<sup>9</sup> Though unclear whether her family actively practiced Quakerism before Matilda converted to Presbyterianism, her ancestors possessed strong Quaker qualities. Her grandfather had an “opposition to slavery” that “passed to his children and children's children, almost without exception.”<sup>10</sup> Those qualities become apparent in her religious conversion as she actively chose a denomination working toward full abolition.<sup>11</sup>

Before Matilda married John, she attended a church service where John was preaching. During the service, she decided to convert to be a member of the New School Presbyterian Church, which had just recently declared itself anti-slavery. Her testimony about her “experience and consecration” convinced John she was the person he would marry.<sup>12</sup> Though other historians and people who knew Matilda described this as her conversion to Christianity, it is very possible that she could have been practicing religion before this.<sup>13</sup> What Matilda did convert to, however,

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<sup>7</sup> Janis Calvo and Friends' Historical Association, “Quaker Women Ministers in Nineteenth Century America,” (*Quaker History*, Haverford, PA, 1962): 75-78.

<sup>8</sup> The Quaker's belief that all people have souls also contributed to their antislavery sentiments and beliefs.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, 92-93.

<sup>10</sup> Fee, 10. John G. Fee mentions in his autobiography how Matilda's great grandmother would have been proud of her, as she was a practicing Quaker and Matilda was a pious woman.

<sup>11</sup> It is unclear why Matilda converted to the Presbyterian Church because Quakers also held strong abolitionist views. Most likely, the Quaker community was not very prevalent or active in Kentucky and Matilda wanted to be more actively involved in abolition work tied to a religious group.

<sup>12</sup> Fee, 19.

<sup>13</sup> “Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895,” Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY). Quakerism falls under the umbrella of “Christianity,” but those who spoke about her conversion, one person being William G. Frost, spoke about it as though they were completely different and unrelated.

was abolitionism. The New School Presbyterians, specifically those John was affiliated with at the time, directly connected themselves to abolitionist beliefs and practices.<sup>14</sup> John said he had not considered Matilda as a life partner until she had converted. When John declared, “Conversion is committal to Christ, soul, body and spirit,”<sup>15</sup> he was also saying that it was not enough to be committed to Christ, but one had to be committed to the abolitionist cause. Her conversion also signaled a level of commitment to the abolitionist cause that was culturally significant, as leaving one denomination for another would have been somewhat isolating and seen as a drastic shift by family and friends.<sup>16</sup> Matilda’s conversion created a strong foundation of faith which allowed their marriage and work together to be strong enough to weather the storms that lay ahead of them.

Matilda’s faith propelled her forward in all of her work. She spoke and prayed publicly, leading prayer meetings in the churches in which John served. Her faith also made her brave and courageous. In one instance, she rode in a carriage in mixed company. During the ride, Matilda spoke with an enslaved woman and others in the carriage, and said, “I could hold no human being in bondage.” Others in the carriage were taken aback by her comments, and the remainder of the ride was predominantly silent.<sup>17</sup> Speaking about anti-slavery sentiments among strangers

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<sup>14</sup> Fee, 13-14. John affiliated with many of the people he met at Lane Theological Seminary, including abolitionists John Milton Campbell and James C. White. Of note is Reverend Lyman Beecher who served as the President of Lane Theological Seminary and who John seemed to look up to during his time in school.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Boles, 123-129. Because so many Kentuckians were severely isolated where they lived, church was their one community outside of the home. Culturally, church members relied on one another and felt that their own church was a part of their own identity, affiliating themselves proudly with a specific denomination or sect. To leave a church community would mean, to some extent, to also be leaving family and friends behind. For Matilda to make this choice to convert indicates her serious commitment to the abolitionist movement.

<sup>17</sup> “Letter from Matilda Hamilton Fee to American Missionary Association, Feb. 1858 p.43,” HC 3, Series 4, Box 1, Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY.

could be very dangerous, but Matilda's commitment to abolition allowed her to speak on taboo issues.

Matilda and John's faith grew as they attended the Christian Anti-Slavery Convention of 1850, both as participants. When asked why John brought Matilda to the convention, he replied "If I thought bringing her would hinder me in Christ's work I would not bring her." John went on to explain that her presence there helped and supported him in his pastoral work.<sup>18</sup> As an abolitionist, Matilda joined a group of religious people across the country who were working for similar goals. There were other women during this time period who had similar partnerships with their husbands, such as Lucretia Mott and Angelina Grimke,<sup>19</sup> but few lived and worked in a southern, slaveholding state— Matilda and John did. Their marriage was a partnership that extended beyond the home and into their abolition mission centered lives.

### **God Builds Matilda a Life Partner**

Because so much of what historians know about Matilda's life comes from John's autobiography, it's important to take a moment to explain who he was before the two were married. The couple enjoyed a strong bond. Understanding who he was and how he was raised helps underline his character and ultimately provide clues to the type of relationship the couple had. John G. Fee was born on September 9, 1816 in Bracken County, Kentucky to John Fee and Sarah Gregg Fee. On his father's side, the family line had been living in Kentucky since 1791 (before statehood). They were originally from Maryland. Both his father and grandfather, John Fee Sr., owned slaves. John's mother came from non-slaveholding Quakers in Pennsylvania. As

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<sup>18</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> Lynda DeAne Lagerquist, "Abolitionism, Feminism, and Religion: A Study of Lucretia Mott, Sarah Grimke, Angelina Grimke, and Catherine Beecher," PhD diss., (Luther Theological Seminary, 1980).

previously mentioned, it was through his mother's lineage that John and Matilda were second cousins. John's father was a wealthy man in the community and was elected to serve as a state Congressman for one term.<sup>20</sup> Later he became an important member of the Whig party in Kentucky.<sup>21</sup>

Though his specific early education is unknown, John had received some form of education as a child. In 1830, when John was 14 years old, Joseph Corliss, a Methodist, befriended him and became his tutor. This friendship was the beginning of John's theological journey toward abolition. Though John expressed a dislike for slavery at an early age, his interactions with Corliss helped to give him a sense of conviction. That same year, he asked his father for permission to join the Methodist Episcopal Church, which angered his father. John's father refused the request, arguing that he was too young to make that kind of decision. The formative relationship with Corliss allowed John to question his own religion. He critically examined how slavery functioned around him, and how society operated within the confines of slavery. In 1832, at the age of 16, John and his family joined Sharon Church, a local Presbyterian affiliated church. John then decided he wanted to become a preacher and work to change the church to make it more abolitionist focused. His father permitted him to attend Augusta College.<sup>22</sup>

The school was located in Augusta, Kentucky, just a few miles from the Fee family farm and served as a place where John could learn while being closely supervised by his father. John

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<sup>20</sup> Howard, *The Evangelical War against Slavery and Caste*, 19-21.

<sup>21</sup> History.com Editors, "Whig Party," History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 6, 2009), <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/whig-party>). The Whig Party was spearheaded by Henry Clay, a prominent Kentucky politician. The party came out as opposition to the election of Andrew Jackson as President. Generally, the party supported abolitionist ideologies, though John's father clearly did not live his beliefs for that specific policy idea as he owned several slaves.

<sup>22</sup> Howard, 20-21.



began a two-and-a-half-year pre-college education at Augusta College.<sup>23</sup> While there, he found several outlets for debate among his pro-slavery and abolitionist peers. Fee then spent some time at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio before he graduated from Augusta College and went to Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. As much as John's father wanted to exert control over him, John's education at each of these institutions pushed him closer and closer to being an abolitionist. As a state, Ohio was a large part of the Underground Railroad, and many escaped slaves traveled between Augusta and Cincinnati. In 1837, the Presbyterian Church split over the issue of slavery into the Old School Presbyterian Church and the New School Presbyterian Church. The New School Presbyterians were stationed at Lane Theological Seminary and were fervent abolitionists. John attended Lane during these debates, further influencing his religious and abolitionist viewpoints.<sup>24</sup>

Lane Theological Seminary was a center for abolitionist ideologies. John convinced his father to help him attend Lane where he spent several years praying and debating about slavery. During John G. Fee's time at Lane Seminary, he spent every day between the hours of 11 and 12 praying in a forest for God to make him an abolitionist, understanding it would cause him to break away from some of his family members. It was here that John felt called to serve as an abolitionist, and it was an antislavery conference in 1842 that led him to believe his work needed to be in Kentucky over any other place— both because it was a slave state and because it was his

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<sup>23</sup> Miller, *Grape Vine Dispatch*, 12-15. Augusta College was the first Methodist College in the world, created by the Ohio and Kentucky Methodist Conferences. It is believed that the issue of slavery was debated as early as the 1820s. Of its more notable graduates (including John G. Fee), many ended up going to Lane Theological Seminary for further education.

<sup>24</sup> Luke E. Harlow, *Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky, 1830-1880*, (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 144-147.

home. John's father stopped funding him when he found out John intended to come back to Kentucky as an abolitionist preacher. He never graduated.<sup>25</sup>

In 1842, John was forced to return home, but he had made connections with at least twelve preachers who supported abolition in Kentucky. Shortly after John returned to Kentucky, he began giving lectures and preaching at various churches.<sup>26</sup> Over his lifetime, he founded several churches and traveled often to preach at them and other locations.<sup>27</sup> In 1844, he was at a revival at Sharon Church, his childhood church, where he witnessed Matilda's conversion to The New School Presbyterians.<sup>28</sup> John may have loved her long before her conversion to Christianity, but had not considered her as a possible partner until after this. After her conversion, the two were betrothed.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Fees' Early Marriage**

When Matilda and John got married, she was twenty and he was twenty-eight.<sup>30</sup> The two were actually second cousins. Marriage between cousins was relatively common in the nineteenth century, with the practice fading away over the years. In extremely rural and isolated parts of the country, especially parts of the South and Appalachia, the practice continued longer.<sup>31</sup> Their early marriage built a strong foundation for the work Matilda took on at Berea.

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<sup>25</sup> Howard, 21-23.

<sup>26</sup> Howard, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 158-165. John founded several churches during his life, most of which were created as Union Churches, or nondenominational churches which mainly held the belief that all were welcome. The total number of churches he founded is unknown, John spent a great deal of his time at Camp Nelson. This will be expanded upon in the third chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Fee, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Howard, 23-24. According to Victor Howard, marriage among first and second cousins was relatively common in the eighteenth century and slowly declined in the nineteenth century, but remained prevalent in more isolated areas. He cites one study from the nineteenth century which indicated that, of 77 marriages in one community, 22% were between second cousins and 6% were among first cousins.

Matilda honed in on skills such as building community, supporting the abolition (and later education) mission, and leading women in worship.

In John's autobiography, he described his desires to be with Matilda. With a clear understanding of where he felt God leading him, John knew that whoever his life partner was, she would need to be just that: a partner. He goes so far as to call her a partner, explaining that marriage "was not a mere impulse nor a mere business transaction... there must be that purpose of soul and habit of life that fit for future harmony and usefulness."<sup>32</sup> In a letter he wrote to the people of Lexington in 1869, he shared more on his thoughts about gender and access to education. The role of true Christianity, he explained, "is to elevate [women], to make her man's intellectual, social, and moral equal - as God designed her a 'helpmeet' and a true partner."<sup>33</sup> This letter was meant to explain the need for educating women fully and not only in what southern society deemed as feminine roles. It also shows John's views on women's education as they were related to equitable relationships, which helps demonstrate John's belief that men and women needed to be equal in everything, especially marriage.

John approached the subject of female equality in a way that demands that women and men be able to approach the word of God together, explaining that "wives and daughters ought to have equal mental advantages."<sup>34</sup> This letter is an advertisement for Berea College, and sheds light on Matilda's and John's shared ideas about coeducation. Their partnership is peculiar in that both commit fully to a cause, support one another in their roles, and rely on one another for emotional support equally.

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<sup>32</sup> Fee, 19.

<sup>33</sup> "A Letter From John G. Fee To The People Of Lexington," RG 1307, Box 1, Folder 1, Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>34</sup> "A Letter From John G. Fee To The People Of Lexington," RG 1307, Box 1, Folder 1, Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY.

Historian Gerda Lerner argues that marriages between people who were both involved in radical movements during the nineteenth century were more equitable and egalitarian. She, too, uses the examples of Lucretia Mott and Angelina Grimke as people who married into partnerships with specific goals to support a cause.<sup>35</sup> Again, the difference is location. Matilda and John were from, lived, and worked in the South. To know that the two began the marriage with this level of intentionality shows a level of trust in their partnership that amplifies Matilda's life story. Like several women who married men who would eventually become well known, Matilda is described almost as a sidekick by most historians. John's clear designation of Matilda as a partner early on describes a marriage more involved than most.

Matilda's marriage to John was more than a commitment to anti-slavery work and, eventually, equal access to education. As noted by William Frost, who gave her eulogy, Matilda came from a "thrifty 'good family,' full of vivacity" and she was not a "rustic child... but one who was keenly alive to the charms of fashion and society."<sup>36</sup> The choice to join John in marriage was a commitment to living a low-income life with a lot of hard work and few breaks. Though she left many comforts behind in order to enter the partnership with John, she did bring with her a few reminders of home, such as good silver, which she brought out for special guests of the college. One faculty member recalled Matilda as "prudent" and explained that she "never faltered in her readiness to share with her life companion poverty."<sup>37</sup> Matilda grew up in a home that allowed her the luxury to dance and attend theatre with family, but when she chose a life with John, she knew she was giving that up in order to pursue a mission-driven life. Her decision

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<sup>35</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1977), 43-46.

<sup>36</sup> "Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895," Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

<sup>37</sup> "Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895," Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

further illustrates that Matilda was not a doting wife who suffered through poverty reluctantly, but a wife who was equally committed to the mission driven lifestyle the John led.

When the two were married, John did not have a permanent place to preach. He was offered preaching positions in Bracken County, Cynthiana, and Louisville, but each church requested that he “let the subject of slavery alone.”<sup>38</sup> Fee continued on alone searching for places to preach, then chose to return to Bracken County so the two could search for a pastorate together. Several locations in Kentucky offered John a position, but each were complacent toward slavery and had membership of slaveholders to varying degrees. Lewis County then offered John a position at an extremely small church, and the couple moved there in 1845.<sup>39</sup>

The pair lived with another couple in the community. In 1845, Matilda became pregnant with their first child. John was often away preaching at other churches as a guest, leaving Matilda alone. She knew when they were married that John acted as an itinerant preacher in addition to his other work. His absence was a trend. Often, he was gone and Matilda was left alone in their home and put in danger when John’s enemies came looking for him. This danger was not because Matilda was a lone woman, but was more because of John’s very public work as a radical abolitionist. Sears argues that much of Matilda’s life was plagued by suffering that came from John’s work and the danger it put Matilda and her children in.<sup>40</sup>

Though their marriage was strained by danger and absence, it remained strong through their religious convictions and commitment to abolition. In their early years as a married couple,

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<sup>38</sup> Howard, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Fee, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 86.

the two grew in their religious theology.<sup>41</sup> Because churches were so small and consisted of both men and women, decisions about doctrine and scripture were often democratic. These decisions made by the body of the church deepened a sense of community and conviction within a church, creating tight knit communities.<sup>42</sup> In 1846, John joined the American Missionary Association as one of their first preachers. This organizational support allowed for John's more radical ideas about religion and anti-slavery to prevail and be heard. The organization was nondenominational which Matilda and John admired, as it meant they were for unity. The AMA paid John's salary and the salaries of many Berea College faculty until the mid-1880s when there was an ideological break between John and the AMA.<sup>43</sup>

While working with the AMA, the Fees started leaning more and more toward nondenominational ideologies, which later affected their decision to open the Union Church in Berea, Kentucky.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Matilda and John developed strong beliefs about baptism when in 1847, John read a book by Moses Stuart on the topic.<sup>45</sup> Together, Matilda and John studied more about full immersion baptism, as opposed to sprinkling baptism.<sup>46</sup> They decided that full immersion baptism was the only path to Christ. Several of the Union Churches John founded accepted everyone no matter how they were baptized, but the couple became hyper-focused on

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<sup>41</sup> Religious theology and doctrine are the exact beliefs and interpretations of the Bible by different religious groups. For example, some Christian denominations believed that baptism could be done by sprinkling water on a person's face while others believed a person had to be fully submerged in order to be baptized.

<sup>42</sup> Boles, 123-137.

<sup>43</sup> Howard, 36-37. The break is explained more in chapter three and the conclusion, but the condensed reason is that the AMA only wanted to fund Black schools and not interracial schools.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 36-37.

<sup>45</sup> Fee, 75-76.

<sup>46</sup> Immersion Baptism is when a person is fully submerged in water for their Baptism. Sprinkling Baptism is when a person has water sprinkled on them as a form of baptism. In the 21st century, most church denominations have taken a stance on baptism. For example, the United Pentecostal Church, Baptist Churches, and Churches of Christ practice immersion baptism, whereas the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) practice sprinkling baptisms. In their old age, the Fees became more adamant about immersion baptism and John left the pastorate in 1895 over it.

immersion baptism as they aged, eventually causing a break from the Union Church of Berea in 1895.<sup>47</sup>

Back in the Lewis County Church in 1845, Matilda built community with the women in the county, especially while she was pregnant. Some of the women seem to have come to the church without their husbands.<sup>48</sup> Matilda was also in charge of two monthly prayer meetings that were only open for female members of the church. Her leadership within the group built a strong community among the women, and allowed them a space to grow in faith among people of the same gender. Sears argues that this example of Matilda's involvement, among others, shows how she took on more than her fair share of the work at the church, which is to say that she was always there. John preaching at other churches far away was important and necessary, but it didn't mean that the church shut down when he was gone. Matilda stepped in to fill several roles that made her into a hands-on community builder and a quick problem solver.<sup>49</sup> This same pattern emerged in their lives as John only served as the President of the Board of Trustees at Berea College while Matilda was actively an administrator, working directly with students daily.

During a well-attended sermon at a different church in Lewis County, John preached about abolition and the backlash was severe enough that the couple boarding the Fees asked them to leave.<sup>50</sup> The couple was briefly homeless, but Matilda went to a neighbor and asked to stay with them for a few weeks. The neighbors let the couple board with them. Matilda built a relationship with the couple that allowed her to feel comfortable asking them for help. Her ability

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<sup>47</sup> Howard, 76-79.

<sup>48</sup> John talks in his autobiography about the members of the church being wives of non-slaveholding men.

<sup>49</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 85-86.

<sup>50</sup> John B. Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 10-17. Among their many radical ideologies, the Fees supported integrated church. Though several southern states and communities had churches where slaves attended with their masters, the Fees' churches radically called for integrated seating and equal footing in the church.

to build community was a skill she learned early and later used to help in the development of Berea College's community. They stayed in this home for only a few weeks before the two returned to Matilda's childhood home so she could prepare for the birth of her first child.<sup>51</sup>

### **Matilda and Motherhood**

After spending several weeks with their neighbors, Matilda was only a few weeks away from giving birth to her first child. Matilda and John rode on horseback from their neighbors' house in Lewis County to Matilda's childhood home in Bracken County—a long twenty-five-mile ride.<sup>52</sup> Matilda's ability to ride on horseback while so late in her pregnancy is astounding. Though often described as very good on horseback, Matilda shows a significant level of toughness riding so late in her pregnancy without any notable side effects.

Even at home and surrounded by family, childbirth was an extremely painful experience in the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Whether a doctor or midwife was present, or whether a mother or friend was there to assist, mothers went through extreme pain almost completely unmedicated. Matilda was home for her first birth, meaning that her mother was surely present. Whether there was a doctor present or not is unclear. Midwives were common for women in all economic classes. Doctors became more common as the nineteenth century went on, but were predominantly serving upper middle- and upper-class women. Due to the gender socialization of

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<sup>51</sup> Fee, 31-32.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 32. Women who are around nine months pregnant should not be riding a horse for so many miles, both because it could hurt the mother and the baby. But in nineteenth century medicine, prenatal care was not something that doctors knew was possible. Believing that the baby was like a seed growing inside the mother, like it was planted, doctors did not believe that what happened to the mother's body would affect the health of the baby. It was not until the late nineteenth century that doctors made a correlation between mothers who took certain drugs and babies with major physical impairments. Though none of Matilda's six children were known to have any major deformities, Matilda must have noticed pain when she went about her daily life. Matilda's frequent travels set her apart from most women who stayed home, making her endurance of this pain a significant trial she overcame. Barbara Katz Rothman, *Recreating Motherhood*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 57-59.

<sup>53</sup> Lerner, 77-80.



the time, male doctors assisting in births seemed almost adulterous, so doctors operated on the mother with a sheet over her abdomen - essentially operating blind.<sup>54</sup> Several women and children died in childbirth. Because Matilda grew in a middle to upper-middle class home, it is possible that there was a doctor present, though no documentation exists to say either way.

Matilda gave birth to five more children after her first born, Laura, however none of the births are documented in John's autobiography or letters to and from Matilda. Following the birth of Laura, she had Burrirt in 1849, Howard in 1851, and Tappen in 1854. A period of nine years passed before she had children again. In 1863, she gave birth to Edwin and in 1865 (at the age of 41) Matilda had Bessie. Four boys and two girls entered her life, but only three outlived her.<sup>55</sup> Matilda moved often and during the birth of most of her children, she was far from home. Other women in the community likely helped Matilda give birth. It is unclear whether or not she had access to midwives and doctors in some of the towns she lived in.

During the period of nine years where Matilda did not have children, she and John had moved to Berea, Kentucky and started their venture in interracial coeducation. By 1855, she had a significant role in running Berea's normal school and caring for those who visited the community. Between 1853 and 1859, Matilda hosted traveling preachers, local church-goers, family, and Berea College donors, all while she and John built their home, a small church, and a schoolhouse.<sup>56</sup> Her role as mother was complicated by her role as a host for John and Berea College. Her friend Elizabeth Rogers wrote about how accommodating and welcoming Matilda

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<sup>54</sup> Randi Hutter Epstein, *Get Me Out: A History of Childbirth from the Garden of Eden to the Sperm Bank*, (1st ed. New York: Norton, 2010), 17-25.

<sup>55</sup> "Matilda Hamilton Fee (1824-1895) - Find A Grave..." Find a Grave, accessed April 25, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/8317127/matilda-fee>.

<sup>56</sup> "Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895," Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

was, often carrying the heaviest burden of “entertaining strangers.”<sup>57</sup> Balancing this work, her involvement in the church, and her early work in teaching at the normal school took strength and faith in the mission they worked toward. She completed much of this work while John traveled as an itinerant preacher.

As Matilda grew older, her maternal skills and religious convictions strengthened one another. As Sears explains, Matilda was not only a mother to her own children, but fostered an unknown number of other children during her life.<sup>58</sup> Once Berea College was open and fully functioning, Matilda often hosted students at her home, giving young people who were far from their own homes a place to feel welcome.<sup>59</sup> Matilda’s work in the Ladies Board of Care indicates that her maternal skills were useful for more than just her children. Her role was to act as a parental figure to the young women under her care. For example, Matilda was either responsible for or supervised those responsible for cleaning, medical care, cooking, laundry, and the interactions between the female and male students. Explored more in chapter three, Matilda’s role with the Ladies Board of Care illustrates that the institution was only focused on education until Matilda and the other female administrators started calling for, and even demanding, better accommodations for the female students.

Her compassion for others is evident in a letter she wrote to the American Missionary Association in 1859. Writing about her friend Juliet Miles, who was caught attempting to get her children out of slavery, Matilda said, “This woman is held to a criminal charge for obeying the

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<sup>57</sup> “Personal History of Berea College” by Elizabeth Rogers, RG 103, Box 3, Folder 8, (Berea, KY: College Archives: Berea College Special Collections & Archives, 1910), 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 83.

<sup>59</sup> “Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895,” Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

natural promptings of a mother's affection."<sup>60</sup> Matilda's beliefs regarding motherhood and the evils of slavery are revealed in this quote. Her commitment to the institution of motherhood was informed by her commitment to abolishing slavery, and her commitment to abolishing of slavery was informed by her commitment to supporting children, both in her own home and beyond. Seeing Juliet's children without their mothers clearly influenced Matilda's views on motherhood and slavery.

### **Matilda and Juliet**

The Underground Railroad ran through the border state of Kentucky in several locations. One hot spot for crossing the Ohio River to freedom was through Bracken County where John and Matilda were raised. Of all the work Matilda did, her involvement in supporting the Underground Railroad and escaped slaves is often under-analyzed. When Juliet Miles was caught attempting to free her children and grandchildren from slavery in 1858, Bracken County residents suspected Matilda's involvement. The suspicion people had toward Matilda in large part stemmed from her parents and John's known (or perceived) involvement in the Underground Railroad. Matilda's parents' home was also believed to aid escaped slaves. Betsy and Vincent Hamilton, her parents, were accused of and taken to court over aiding an escaped slave in 1855. Though these accusations were never proven, the community regarded the Hamiltons' home as one of "questionable activity involving slaves."<sup>61</sup>

Matilda and John's home in Lewis County (during their early marriage) and Berea were also seen as places of refuge. Arnold Gragston, an escaped slave and later conductor of slaves,

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<sup>60</sup> "Letter from Matilda Hamilton Fee to American Missionary Association, April 1859 p.92," HC 3, Series 4, Box 1, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 9-18.

credited Fee with helping spread the idea that no human should be a slave to a master. He also stated, “For every slave who came through his place going across the river, he had a good word, something to eat, and some kind of rags, too, if it was cold... I think he kept slaves there on his place till they could be rowed across the river. [Fee] Helped us a lot.”<sup>62</sup> Because John was often out of the state, it was likely that Matilda was at least minimally involved in the attempted escape of some slaves, including that of Juliet Miles.

One specific instance where Matilda may have been involved in helping slaves escape led to a longtime friend of the Fees to be arrested. The incident occurred in Bracken County, where Matilda’s parents lived. Available letters between Matilda and her mother indicate that Matilda very rarely traveled to see her parents while she lived in Berea. Though traveling to the town, you were born in was not unheard of, the distance between Matilda’s home in Berea and her parents’ home in Bracken County were nearly one hundred miles apart. So, she did not travel home often. Therefore, her presence in the county at the time of the incident increases the likelihood that she was involved. Certainly, Matilda’s relationship with Juliet and the fact that Matilda was in Bracken county make her involvement in the failed escape attempt more likely.

Juliet and Matilda’s story are documented by historian Caroline Miller of the Bracken County Historical Society. Miller’s booklet, “Juliet Miles and Matilda Fee’s Anti-Slavery Crusade,” is the only work dedicated to exploring Matilda and Juliet’s involvement in the Underground Railroad. Miller frames Matilda and Juliet as a “willing participants” in John’s anti-slavery work.<sup>63</sup> They were surely willing participants, but they were also active and

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<sup>62</sup> James Mellon, *Bullwhip Days*, (New York: An Avon Book, 1994), 268-269.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 48-49.

courageous participants. In order to better understand how, it's necessary to understand Matilda and Juliet's relationship and the full story of Juliet's attempted rescue.

Juliet Miles was originally enslaved by John's father, John Fee. When Juliet was enslaved as a child, she took care of and was friends with John G. Fee. Though only four years older than the future abolitionist, she was one of his sole caregivers for several years.<sup>64</sup> In his adult life, John remembered Juliet and her family lovingly, and encouraged his father to free the people he enslaved. He was unsuccessful. John became aware that his brother, a slave trader, intended to sell Juliet in Louisiana for the elder father Fee. John recorded in his autobiography that when he heard this, he said to Matilda, "I cannot redeem all slaves, nor even all in my father's family, but the labors of [Juliet] and her husband contributed in part to the purchase of the land I yet own in Indiana, and to sell those lands and redeem her will be in some measure returning to her and her husband what they have toiled for."<sup>65</sup>

Though there is no record of sale for the land John talks about, there is a record of him asking family member John D. Gregg for money to purchase Juliet. Gregg mortgaged a part of his land, gave the money to John, and he was then able to purchase Juliet and her two year old son, Henry, from his father in 1847.<sup>66</sup> John told his father that he intended to free Juliet, and John Sr. refused to let Juliet continue living with her husband as a free woman. In response, John went to Juliet and gave her something called a "perpetual pass" which allowed her to travel freely. John's father agreed to allow Juliet to stay on the property until John's mother died.<sup>67</sup> For three years, Juliet was able to stay with her husband, and she gave birth to three new, free born

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<sup>64</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 2-4.

<sup>65</sup> Fee, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from John G. Fee to John D. Gregg, (Brooksville: Bracken County Court Records, June 1847).

<sup>67</sup> John Fee, Sr. allowed Juliet to stay until his wife passed so that Juliet could work for her, as she had been before. Whether she was paid for her work or if her payment was that she was allowed to live with her husband is not clear.

children. Fee's mother died in 1850, and John chose this time to legally emancipate Juliet.<sup>68</sup> He did this just after the 1850 Fugitive Slave law was passed, which would require that Juliet and Henry leave Kentucky. Just after John's mother died, Juliet's husband was able to purchase his freedom through legal means, and the couple moved to Felicity, Ohio.<sup>69</sup>

For eight years, Juliet and her husband, Add, were able to live free in Ohio with their four free children.<sup>70</sup> But in the fall of 1858, John's brother renewed a threat to sell her children and grandchildren who were still in slavery further south.<sup>71</sup> By this year, Matilda and John had moved to Madison County and were working on the foundations of Berea College. In the fall of 1858, John was attending an American Missionary Association meeting in the northeastern region of the United States.<sup>72</sup> Juliet, after hearing about the threat of her children and grandchildren being sold further south, began plotting to rescue them from slavery. She somehow relayed the information to her children and grandchildren, who were split between two farms in different counties, to be prepared to escape.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River, Matilda was visiting her parents in Bracken County. Though visiting one's parents was common, Matilda very rarely made it to Bracken County. In a letter from her mother in 1857, Betsy begs Matilda to come visit, stating how much she misses her.<sup>74</sup> There are no records indicating that she visited often. Matilda's father kept a detailed diary during the year of 1856, and in it he notes that Matilda's sister,

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<sup>68</sup> John G. Fee, *Emancipation Record for Juliet Miles*, (Brooksville: Bracken County Court Records, June 1847).

<sup>69</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 3-5.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, *Grape Vine Dispatch*, 251. It was here that the Miles family joined an integrated church that helped them settle into their new home. This church was filled with people who worked in the Underground Railroad, which is possibly where Juliet made the necessary connections to later attempt freeing her children from slavery.

<sup>71</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Fee, 66-67.

<sup>73</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Gregg Hamilton to Matilda Hamilton Fee, April 16, 1857, RG 1.02, Box 2, Folder 8 (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

Minerva, visited the family nearly every two weeks. During this year, Matilda did not travel home to visit family once, though her mother did come to Berea to visit her one time.<sup>75</sup> However, when Juliet was planning to get her children to safety, Matilda was there— just a few short miles from the Ohio River.

The group traveled at night and hoped to make it to the free side of the Ohio River by dawn. When Juliet came to the river, there was no skiff. Juliet, her three daughters, two sons, and four grandchildren were stranded.<sup>76</sup> Whoever was meant to meet them there never came. Waiting on the other side of the river, Add and their four young children waited patiently for what they thought would be a joyous reunion. Instead, Juliet and her family were caught. Patrollers and pro-slavery supporters came to the group and captured them, taking them to a dungeon-like jail cell. Before her, some twenty other unsuccessful Underground Railroad conductors had been imprisoned. Now she had to comfort her children and grandchildren in this space with no water, heat, or light, while thinking of her now motherless children just on the other side of the Ohio River.<sup>77</sup>

Matilda was in Bracken County at the time and quickly traveled to the jail, located in the county seat of Brooksville, as soon as she heard. Arriving at the jail when the jailor was gone, she bargained with the wife of the jailor to see Juliet. Crouched on the floor, Matilda pulled back a piece of carpet covering the dungeon, and saw Juliet. They exchanged a heartfelt conversation which John later recorded in his autobiography:

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<sup>75</sup> Vincent Hamilton, *1856 Diary of Vincent Hamilton*, (Brooksville: Bracken County Historical Society).

<sup>76</sup> Fee, 66-67.

<sup>77</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 11-12.

‘Oh, Mis’ Tilda; where is Master Gregg?’ (Gregg is my middle name; I was known by that name in boyhood days.) My wife said, ‘He is eastward, - in Massachusetts.’ Then she cried out, ‘Oh, Mis’ Tilda, what will they do with me?’ My wife replied, ‘They can do no more than send you to the penitentiary; don’t be distressed. You have committed no crime; for what mother would not try to get her children out of slavery?’ My wife said she could then hear the young mothers and their children crying and sobbing below. My wife again said to [Juliet], ‘They can only send you to Frankfort’ (the place of the State’s prison). ‘We will come to see you there.’<sup>78</sup>

Following their conversation, the jailor’s wife made Matilda leave because a crowd of pro-slavery men had gathered outside. Almost immediately after their capture, and before John returned home from his travels, his father sold all of Juliet’s children. Juliet’s trial date was set and she was charged, with a bail of \$500. Matilda and John scrambled to secure the bond money by reaching out to several people, including John D. Gregg who had helped in the purchase of Juliet several years earlier.<sup>79</sup> The Fees had every reason to try and help Juliet get out of jail, among them being their love for her. Just as Matilda and John were about to pay for Juliet’s bail, a man arrived and produced a new warrant from a different county. The bail was now \$1,000, and they were unable to secure that much money.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Fee, 68-69.

<sup>79</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 13-16.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 13-16.



Juliet and her family were jailed on October 18, 1858. After her family was sold, Juliet was made to wait through an unforgiving winter in the jail cell awaiting her trial. It was not until February of 1859 that Juliet's trial took place. Whoever was meant to help Juliet cross the Ohio River was never found. Juliet was sentenced to three years at the Kentucky Penitentiary in Frankfort, the state capital, where she spent just under three years predominantly working for the warden as a housekeeper. The Fee family came to visit at least once in the hopes of comforting their dear friend. Despite their great efforts to free and support her, Juliet passed away in prison.<sup>81</sup> According to John, "it was a disease of the heart. Thousands of slave-mothers have died with broken hearts."<sup>82</sup>

Although there is no way to say with absolute certainty, Matilda was very likely the person who planned to help Juliet cross the Ohio River. She was in the area, she and her family had been suspected of helping fugitive slaves before, and Matilda and Juliet had a close familial relationship. Matilda's involvement was very likely, but there is no way to know what went wrong or why no one was on the edge of the water ready to help Juliet. Either way, Matilda and Juliet were always more than 'willing participants' in John's anti-slavery crusades. Matilda was an active participant who worked both with and independently of her husband in supporting escaped slaves.

### **The Fees Move to Madison County**

When Cassius M. Clay asked John to open a church in Madison County in 1853, John was unsure of the move because he recognized that he was finally making progress at his church in Bracken County, stating it would be a shame to leave "just at the time when [the church was]

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<sup>81</sup> Miller, *Grape Vine Dispatch*, 250-254.

<sup>82</sup> Fee, 145-146.

springing up into a measure of prosperity and efficiency.”<sup>83</sup> John expressed concerns for the church being so far into the wilderness with little access to nearby towns. Then, Clay offered John land to live and farm on in exchange for running the small church. Matilda and John considered the offer and took it. The family moved to the very unpopulated wilderness of Madison County in 1853 and began work on building a home. Near the completion of the home, John decided to build a school-house on a ridge, which was completed sometime in 1855.

In Berea College’s early years, John spent most of his time traveling to preach and fundraise for the school. While he was away, Matilda played a significant role in supporting the growth of the school. When the school’s extension works at Camp Nelson needed funding, Matilda sold some land that she had inherited from her family. When potential funders and trustees were visiting the school, she boarded and entertained them. When the normal school needed more teachers, she taught. Matilda built a community around the school, inviting teachers and students to her home for fellowship. Her involvement in the church continued as it had before, and she prayed and worshiped with her fellow Christians.<sup>84</sup> In the late 1850s, Matilda began writing letters to the American Missionary Association to express her concerns about slavery and to tell her experiences in an attempt to spread word of their mission work at Berea.

### **Bereans Face Violence and are Forced to Flee**

In 1859, John traveled to Massachusetts for an American Missionary Association fundraiser for Berea College. During the convention, John’s words about abolition and education did not sit well with many Kentuckians. Specifically, John said there needed to be more people

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<sup>83</sup> Richard Day, Roger Cleveland, June O. Hyndman, and Don C. Offutt, 36-41.

<sup>84</sup> “Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895,” Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

like John Brown who had led John Brown's Raid in 1859. Though John clarified that he did not support violence, his radical beliefs about the abolition of slaves sent shockwaves through many Kentuckians.<sup>85</sup> John had been preaching for several years and was considered a radical. His preaching often led to threatened and real violence — violence that put Matilda and their children in danger. While John was still away, an around 60-armed pro-slavery men came to Berea. They knocked on Matilda's door and left notice that Berea residents were expected to leave within ten days. Because all members of the small community came together with the intention of being integrated and open to all, the entire community was asked to leave.<sup>86</sup>

It took time for the Bereans to collect all of their belongings. As quickly as they could, Bereans fled. Several went to Bracken County and stayed in John Gregg Hanson's house. Hanson was a family member of the Fees and a supporter of the mission. A group, including Matilda and John's family, hid there until a local named Joshua Bradford demanded they leave.<sup>87</sup> In December of 1859, the Fees began their journey to Cincinnati. When they arrived in 1860, the Bereans were officially exiles of the state of Kentucky. The family crossed the Ohio River during the bitter months of winter. Matilda's youngest son Tappan fell ill due to the cold weather and passed away shortly after the journey. Living as nomads for four years, the family moved between homes and John continued to work as an itinerant preacher in Ohio. They were unable to return home except for a short trip to bury their son. It was during this brief return home to lay their son to rest in Bracken County, that Matilda and John made the decision that their mission at Berea was not over.<sup>88</sup> It was a long time before her family could go home.

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<sup>85</sup> Fee, 34-37.

<sup>86</sup> Fee, 34-37.

<sup>87</sup> Miller, *Anti-Slavery Crusade*, 34-35.

<sup>88</sup> Record Group 5.23/Folder 42C/Box 1, RG 5/5.23: Administrative Divisions: Alumni and College Relations. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

### **Matilda Lives in Occupied Territory**

In 1864, the Fees believed that the Civil War had moved south and that places like Madison County were no longer occupied. The Fees split up and took two wagons, starting the trip home to Berea College. Matilda and one of her sons, Burrirt, then ten, rode along in the first wagon ahead of John and their other children in order to set up the home in advance of the family's return.<sup>89</sup> During the journey, she was stopped by the Union Army while attempting to cross the Ohio River. Though there were several stories she told the officers to support her claims, it was "the Union flag painted on her carriage [that] enabled her to pass through the lines."<sup>90</sup>

Upon her return to Berea, Matilda began taking out the belongings they had hidden in their home and in the woods so many years before.<sup>91</sup> She was working on putting together a bed, when she heard a cannon go off. The sounds of war startled those in the small, quiet community of Berea. They came from nearby town Perryville, just 40 miles west. John and the rest of their children were stuck on the other side of Lexington, north of both Perryville and Berea.<sup>92</sup> John and the other children were being pushed further north by a retreating Union army, and therefore farther away from the matriarch of the family. Gathering her belongings and Burrirt, Matilda hid in the woods inside of their wagon, hoping the fighting Confederate soldiers would not find her.<sup>93</sup> Confederate soldiers entered their family home and took some meaningful items, such as

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<sup>89</sup> Record Group 5.23/Folder 42C/Box 1, RG 5/5.23: Administrative Divisions: Alumni and College Relations. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>90</sup> Peck, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Fee, 161-163.

<sup>92</sup> Record Group 5.23/Folder 42C/Box 1, RG 5/5.23: Administrative Divisions: Alumni and College Relations. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>93</sup> "Matilda Fee and Elizabeth Rogers: Heroines of the Berea Story," Berea College Website, Date Accessed: January 26, 2019, <https://www.berea.edu/president/blog/matilda-fee-and-elizabeth-rogers-heroines-of-the-berea-story/>.

silverware, potatoes, and one of the children's hats.<sup>94</sup> However, Matilda hid some of the most valuable of her belongings, like so many other women in the South at the time.

For ten weeks, Matilda and her son endured the occupation of Confederate soldiers in their community (and often in their home) without the presence of John or the rest of the family.<sup>95</sup> During this time, she found herself in a position to stand up for her beliefs — even at the threat of her own safety. In one documented experience, Matilda was among a group of women near a Confederate camp when a soldier walked up to her and asked her about the kindness of the area. To this, she responded, “My home is nearby; and, as for politics, we are for the Union, and believe slavery is wrong, and that the rebels are fighting for a lost cause.”<sup>96</sup> Despite a few other run-ins with Confederate soldiers, including a few times where she ended up having to cook food for them, Matilda emerged relatively unscathed. This was, as a lone woman in occupied space, unusual. Once reunited, the couple found the strength to continue their mission of building a school for all people— an institution void of discrimination based on race or sex. Matilda, as she had always been, was a leading force in these efforts.

### **Berea College Officially Opens**

On April 24, 1864, Berea College reopened. Several former trustees fled during the war and were unable to return to Berea; the school was in desperate need of funding. To fill these needs, John left Matilda and their oldest son, Burritt, in charge of running the school.<sup>97</sup> Matilda's role in the school was about to change drastically. For twenty years, she had worked alongside

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<sup>94</sup> “Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895,” Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

<sup>95</sup> Record Group 5.23/Folder 42C/Box 1, RG 5/5.23: Administrative Divisions: Alumni and College Relations. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>96</sup> Fee, 169-171.

<sup>97</sup> Sears, *The Day of Small Things*, 521-522.

John as a wife and mother. Now, with the opening of Berea College and her new position as the President of the Ladies Board of Care, Matilda became “a mother to us all.”<sup>98</sup> For the remainder of her life, only a handful of sources shed light on her experiences with aging, motherhood, and her work at Berea. The following chapter is dedicated to her administrative work and policy changes, with a focus on their significance and novelty. Matilda’s life was her work, and her work is woefully unacknowledged. Chapter three highlights how Matilda dedicated herself to Berea College right up until her death in 1895.

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<sup>98</sup> “Matilda Hamilton Fee, 1824-1895,” Life Sketch by President Frost, RG 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, (Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY).

### Chapter 3:

#### Matilda Hamilton Fee's Administrative Influence at Berea College

Matilda Hamilton Fee and her husband shared several experiences and belief systems, such as equal access to education and theological viewpoints regarding baptism. The two differed, however, in their experiences and work at Berea College. Matilda's scope of work was hands-on and in person, while John's role at the college was somewhat removed from the day to day happenings at the school. John was a co-founder of the institution, served as the President of the Board of Trustees, and was a teacher of theology.<sup>1</sup> Matilda, on the other hand, worked with students every day. She served as the President of the Ladies Board of Care for twenty years, from 1864 to 1884. She stepped down on February 2, 1885 but continued working on the board as a general member until just before her death in 1895.<sup>2</sup> The policies that Matilda's Board advocated for were sent to the Board of Trustees for approval. Policies in the student handbook were enforced by the Ladies Board of Care, the Lady Principal, and matron, all of whom Matilda oversaw. Why, then, was Matilda's role as an administrator not documented like other Presidents, Trustees, and faculty?

As the first interracial and coeducational college in the South, Berea College's policies and procedures were also among the first of their kind. Matilda's roles as a lead administrator—and later as a general member of the board—are key to understanding how integral she and other female administrators were to the success of students on campus. This chapter includes a portrait of higher education in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the

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<sup>1</sup> There was not an official president of the college until Edward Henry Fairchild arrived in 1869, John never served as the president before that. But because he was heavily involved at Berea and served on the board, his role has sometimes been conflated as though he was president of the college.

<sup>2</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

structure and financing of institutions, and how gender, race, and religion interacted with one another to influence administrators' decisions. By first examining how other institutions functioned and then comparing them to how Berea College functioned, a stark contrast appears. It reveals Berea's policies and schooling model as unique and radical. The major source material for this chapter comes from the meeting minutes of the Ladies Board of Care, which are only available from 1880 through 1903. This limited access hinders some understanding of the early years of Berea. Other sources such as reports from the Lady Principal to the Board of Trustees, yearly college rules and regulations publications, and student organization constitutions allow us to understand the full breadth of Matilda's influence on student life at Berea.

### **Early Structures of Education**

In Europe, the call for more education began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a result of the Protestant Reformation. This massive religious change ushered in a desire for more literacy in order to read the Bible and among women, this was usually only available to those of the upper class. Elite Protestant women were, to varying degrees, expected to teach their children about the Bible and moral righteousness. The rise in literacy also was more available in cities than to rural areas. Even so, women of the early Republic were among the most literate in the world, showing how popular women's education had become. A comparative study of literacy in the 1750s in England and the early American colonies concluded that more women in the colonies could read than women in England. This indicated a desire to educate women in order to build society up, whereas the British only had to maintain the society already built. It



also points to the religious denominations and social class of the women who emigrated to the colonies.<sup>3</sup>

Demands for literacy grew louder as almost every religious denomination in New England wanted their members to be able to read the Bible. In fact, this was one of the primary reasons why various religious denominations opened schools. As the American Revolution approached, the pressure to develop an engaged and literate population fell largely on the shoulders of women. Women were seen as the moral compass of families and the parent most responsible for raising future members of the republic. Thus, Republican Motherhood took root as a social and cultural need (as mentioned in the previous chapter). Religion and education were inextricably tied. Quakers, for example, were among the first to create coeducational normal schools for the children in their communities in order for more women to be able to read the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

Education in the southern United States significantly lagged behind the educational progress of the northern U.S. Originally colonized by Puritans in the seventeenth century, the Northeastern part of the country showed an early commitment to education. Initially, boys and girls alike were taught how to read so that they could understand the Bible. This instruction came predominantly from the father until the mid-eighteenth century when mothers took over the education of children. Before the Revolutionary War, (1775-1783) educating children mainly served religious purposes. After the war, education became a duty of mothers as the moral

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<sup>3</sup> Lasser, 39-46.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 39-46. Quakers were somewhat ahead of other religious denominations in terms of equity for women. They believed that women could be called to do religious work and Quakers educated every child in their community, regardless of gender, equally. Their commitment to education is both a result of their religious theology and of wanting to build a strong foundation for their communities in the new colonies.

leaders of the home. The new ideology of Republican Motherhood required that mothers educate their children well in order to preserve the family unit and thus make the new nation stronger.<sup>5</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, during the Religious Revival and Second Great Awakening, the importance of education and individual improvement (such as education) soared. Schools began popping up across the country.<sup>6</sup> Though mothers were still expected to educate their children to some degree, schools took that education to another level. In the early eighteenth century, boys commonly went to school in the winter (because boys needed to be free to farm in the summer) and girls did not attend school at all. By the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, girls started attending school in the summertime as wealthier families wanted their daughters to have a basic understanding of how to read and write. By attending in the summer, girls were able to use the same school houses as the boys without having to be taught together. As the public value of education grew, schooling started taking up more time during the year. As a response to education taking more time, schools across the country did one of two things: they either split into two buildings by gender or they opted to teach boys and girls together.<sup>7</sup>

The call for higher education by women increased even more by 1820 and was highly influenced by "liberal enlightenment and romanticism."<sup>8</sup> Because society believed that women were the bedrock of the nation's moral foundation, many people believed that women would make the best teachers, missionaries, and social reformers. In 1870, John Raymond published "Demand of the Age for the Liberal Education of Women and How It Should Be Met." In this

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<sup>5</sup> David B. Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools*, (Yale University Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 13-27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 28-45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 13-27.

<sup>8</sup> Lasser, 51-54.

essay, he argued that women had the right to serve their country, and that "women, no less than men, should be provided with the kind of education that promoted independent activity and prepared them for work." Additionally, women could use their education to work in schools or as missionaries to bring additional income to the family while they waited to be married.<sup>9</sup> Though a bit archaic by today's standards, this was seen as revolutionary.

The preference of educating boys and girls separately existed primarily in urban areas and was a preference of Southerners. In cities, there was a larger pool of students, making all-girl or all-boy gendered education easier to fund. Part of the educational culture of many southern states was segregating schools by gender (and by race). But unless they were in a city, it was difficult to do, making it an impractical preference.<sup>10</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, four out of five were one-room, coeducational common schools, which primarily existed in rural areas. In some Southern cities, private gender-separated schools existed, but these were mainly used by wealthier families, people with higher incomes who could afford the tuition costs.<sup>11</sup> When John and Matilda opened up the one-room normal school in Berea, it was very much like many other schoolhouses across the South. It was small, coeducational and run by a religious organization. By the time Berea opened its doors as a coed common school, it was relatively common for boys and girls to learn together. Because schools and homes were coed spaces, the idea of having children learn in a coeducational space was not seen as a threat to patriarchal social orders. Berea's revolutionary acts came with the addition of higher education and interracial education.

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<sup>9</sup> Lasser, 51-54.

<sup>10</sup> David B. Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, 13-27.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 46-77.

### **Historical Context of Higher Education**

Pre-Revolutionary War colonial educational institutions were founded on the Oxford-Cambridge ideal. That ideal centered around the concept that colleges were whole and complete institutions within themselves, with housing, food, and other resources available for students.<sup>12</sup> This model was exported to several of England's colonies, including India, parts of Africa, and parts of Southeast Asia. Historian Frederick Rudolph coined the term "collegiate way," and in 1963, a Harvard College<sup>13</sup> advertisement described it as

Students lived together in the college buildings in constant contact with their teachers. They worked and played together, creating the very special kind of community which has been characteristic of the American college ever since. American colleges, following Harvard's early example, have adopted the Cambridge-Oxford pattern rather than that of the continental universities.<sup>14</sup>

This model of a fully functional, all-in-one community for students to live and work in became the dominant model in the United States. This model was very much influenced by the fact that most elite children also attended boarding schools at an early age in Europe. (The U.S. did not adopt this model for primary education. Similarly, Berea College, and others, were set up so that

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<sup>12</sup> Thelin, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Harvard College (now University) is important to this discussion of higher education because it was one of the earliest colleges in the colonies.

<sup>14</sup> Thelin, 7.

the needs of students were met on campus. However, not all needs were always met by the institution. In the case of Berea, Matilda and the Ladies Board of Care took on the task of creating better health resources and sanitation for students. For example, the Ladies Board of Care advocated for students to have access to nurses after several students were ill one winter. This is discussed more in depth later in the chapter.

One shift from the Oxford-Cambridge model of schooling was in governance. American colleges rejected the idea of having faculty be in charge of the institution, electing to have boards of trustees instead. This gave power to outsiders, brought in more potential donors, and helped colleges be legally defined as “an incorporated institution.” This particular model came from Scottish colleges.<sup>15</sup> Berea College had a diverse group of trustees from the beginning which demonstrated their commitment to racial diversity. From 1866 through 1878, Rev. Gabriel Burdett was the first Black trustee member at Berea. Historian V. Vaughn’s research indicates that Berea College may have been the first institution to have a Black trustee. Even Oberlin College’s records indicate that their first Black trustee did not arrive until 1950. Other Black men served on Berea’s Board of Trustees for the entirety of its existence.<sup>16</sup> This governing structure gave the Board of Trustees at Berea the power to make decisions regarding interracial dating and marriage, instead of giving the faculty the option to decide. This is also discussed later in the chapter.

### **Colleges, Religion, and Funding**

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<sup>15</sup> Thelin, 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> RG 2/Series 6/Box 1/Folder 5, RG 2.0: Board of Trustees. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

Financially, the colonies were unable to follow the Oxford-Cambridge model in exact detail. In England, “colleges” were individual institutions which were “privately endowed, relatively autonomous units that were linked in a federation,” meaning there were several specialized colleges that were all under the name of one university. American colonial colleges could not afford the financial demands of building whole universities all at once. Instead individual colleges had several “founding donations” that were small in comparison to endowments and donations in England.<sup>17</sup> Because schools were unable to secure large endowments when they were founded, they were “perpetually dependent on tuition payments and donations.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, colleges in the colonies developed a pattern of securing money from religious groups in order to keep tuition low.

Because American colleges were predominantly dependent on donations from religious groups, sometimes those groups attempted to gain control of an institution by having the most donations and board members at a school. In the nineteenth century, this religious competition led to colleges being founded by specific denominations. Through this practice each religious denomination had its own institution. One reason for religious donations was an interest in training students for missionary work with Indigenous people, which was to be carried out by the colleges and those who attended them. In this regard, many colleges also played a significant role in supporting the ideology of settler colonialism. The other reason religion was closely related to philanthropy at colleges was that fundraisers made a connection between “good works” (i.e. financial support for a college) and getting into heaven.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thelin, 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 14-16.

Because of the Second Great Awakening, the trend of different religious groups founding colleges skyrocketed as denominations fractured. The “upsurge in religious spirit” led many institutions to seek students through religious channels in order to support the training of more ministers.<sup>20</sup> In 1800, there were twenty-five degree-granting colleges in the US. By 1860, there were 241. This number does not include the forty colleges that opened and then closed during this period. Fourteen of the 241 new colleges were chartered by the state of Kentucky.<sup>21</sup> Among them was Berea, founded as a non-denominational school in 1855.

After 1850, the role that religion played in funding higher education shifted. Instead of individuals making donations to institutions to support specific denominational schools, larger religious organizations began fundraising and distributing funding for education across the country. One of those organizations was the American Missionary Association (AMA). This group was connected to the Congregationalist church and had an extremely organized and efficient fundraising arm. Another form of growing philanthropy for higher education was through foundations. Some northern foundations were looking to fund schooling schools for Blacks - schools for newly emancipated slaves, in the South, especially during Reconstruction. Many of these funds were given to religiously backed schools. The AMA was known for funding and supporting schools for the recently-freed Black Americans.<sup>22</sup> Berea benefited from both of these funding streams. The AMA was the earliest supporter of John’s preaching and of Berea College. This organization directly paid for the salaries of some faculty and administrators.

Schools changed how they advertised for and sought students after the Civil War. Before the war, schools relied on regional ties and positive notoriety to get students in the doors. After

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<sup>20</sup> Altbach, 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> Thelin, 41-44.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 100-101.

the Civil War, with a more nationalistic environment and focus on unity, schools began advertising more based on their religious denominational ties. The hope was to draw in more potential donors and more students from across the country.<sup>23</sup> Berea's challenge was that it was a non-denominational institution. Thus, they had to attract students based on either their belief in gender or racial equity. Berea's funding from the AMA made this easier because students were able to pay less for a private education.

Berea College's recruiting successes came in some degree from the effects of the Second Great Awakening. Berea and other coeducational schools' "evangelical pragmatism" dictated that they find and support as many students as possible in order to spread the word of God most effectively.<sup>24</sup> When it came to women entering higher education, there were two dominant religious approaches. The first was most popularly articulated by Catherine Beecher. She spoke widely about her ideas on women's education and domesticity. She argued that mothers and female teachers were the moral leaders of the nation, even more than preachers. She advocated for women stepping up and to fulfill those roles, and said that women needed proper educational training in order to do this. By becoming teachers and good mothers, they were in effect fulfilling the will of God. This was an extension of Republican motherhood.

Alternatively, Mary Lyon argued that women were "responsible to God more than their identity as women." She believed that women could fulfill God's call in almost any way, not just as teachers and mothers. Though she did expect women to still socially remain in female dominated spheres, her argument suggested that essentially all women needed to be educated in order to fulfill their Godly calling (this related to the teachings about individual achievement

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<sup>23</sup> Turpin, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Turpin, 31.



which came from the Second Great Awakening). In the end, because Lyon's plan better aligned with evangelical pragmatism, it won out as the dominant model.<sup>25</sup> Schools like Oberlin and Berea relied on this example. The more students they could take in and educate, the more graduates they created who would be in a position to spread the word of God. This meant that bringing in women and Black students could serve a profound and necessary religious purpose.

At the same time that large numbers of women entered higher education in the early nineteenth century, the role of religious colleges shifted. Before, schools were focused on developing and strengthening students' relationships with God. After this shift in emphasis, schools became more interested in facilitating students' "ethical relationships within the community."<sup>26</sup> Focusing on interpersonal relationships was seen as a very modern social concept. As more schools became coeducational, colleges developed "explicit articulation[s]" of "gender-appropriate roles in society."<sup>27</sup> This is to say that, even with increased access to college for female students, schools remained interested in controlling their behavior. Berea's challenge was to balance gendered expectations with changing racial expectations in a state fractured by pro and anti-Civil War sentiments.

### **Women Enter Higher Education**

By the 1840s, calls for women's education were well received among the upper class.<sup>28</sup> Benefits varied from the possibility of "upward mobility marriage" to women learning to do "women's work" more effectively to women gaining some level of power and prestige. These

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 40-46.

<sup>26</sup> Turpin, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. The demand for women's education came predominantly from religious groups who wanted more women to be missionaries after the Second Great Awakening and who wanted women to be able to read in order to teach the Bible to their children. A smaller but very strong call for education came from women who wanted equal educational opportunities.

assets in educating women, however, were limited to the upper class and to a basic level of education, and did not include an expectation that elite women would continue on for higher education. One major critique of coeducational colleges and universities was the fear that women would not marry and have children. The first generation of women who attended college in the 1850s through the 1890s got married approximately 50% of the time, while their peers who did not attend college got married about 90% of the time. Even the second generation of women who attended college after 1890 were criticized despite a higher rate of marriage than the first generation. Their marriage rate was still lower than the larger population, and this worried leaders concerned about biological and social reproduction - because if elite women did not have children, how could they demonstrate their education by teaching their children?<sup>29</sup>

While attitudes regarding a basic schooling for women were largely positive in this time period, attitudes toward women's higher education were largely negative. In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau published a pedagogy about women in higher education which stated,

A woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of a woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 15.

Though Rousseau was French, the sentiment was that women should be subservient to men and most people in the US agreed with this notion. A minority of the population, however, found the prospect of educating women enticing. Researcher Margaret A. Nash explains that the attitudes toward higher education were complicated. Providing women access to education was seen as “extremist” by more conservative groups out of fear that education would make women assertive and in opposition to men. But some believed the best way to advance women’s collegiate level education was to build their own separate institutions for women. This was especially common in the South.<sup>31</sup> There were not necessarily more institutions for women in the South, but the primary places that women could receive an education in the South was at a women’s only institution.

Before 1800, there are no conclusive records that show women received formal collegiate level education.<sup>32</sup> This increase in the availability of higher education likely stems from an increase in the population of the middle class. As fewer people were needed to work in the fields due to technological advances, children and teens started having more leisure time. Access to educational opportunities increased as the pool of possible students also increased. Normal schools became more common and women were deemed the best potential teachers for these young students. In addition, the Second Great Awakening increased the need for missionaries higher. In order to do the job well, women had to be able to read and write to better spread the word of God. These two new fields opened to women and a small number of schools took on the task of educating women. Therefore, opportunities for women to work became available and the need for women’s education increased.<sup>33</sup> Oberlin College was one of the first and most radical

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<sup>31</sup> Thelin, 84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 54-56.

<sup>33</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 15.

examples of this, as the first college in the country to practice coeducation and interracial education. And by 1860, at least 44 of the 200+ institutions were enrolling women in collegiate level courses. Most of these institutions were female-only schools, and were not technically called colleges in their early days. Instead they were framed as an “academy,” “female institute,” or “seminary for women.”<sup>34</sup>

As coeducation became more common the national prevailing public opinion, of institutions that offered coeducation, was that those schools were low on funding and thus poor quality. The stereotype came from the greater financial need of these smaller institutions due to a lack of established donors and beneficiaries. Large and more established colleges like Harvard did not have to open their doors to women because they had strong endowments and many wealthy young men to fill their classes.<sup>35</sup> Newer institutions needed the financial support that welcoming new female students could offer because often, women paid full tuition. Additionally, coeducational institutions were more available to the middle and lower classes. And probably also helped expand access to education as a result. During the nineteenth century, over 70% of first-generation college students (who were predominantly middle and lower class) attended coeducational colleges, indicating that most of the first-generation college students could not afford institutions that were segregated by gender. Historian Jana Nidiffer explains that in the beginning of the movement for coeducational colleges, “the presence of women on campus was a tangible sign of an institution’s lack of wealth and prestige.”<sup>36</sup> Berea, as an institution that had

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<sup>34</sup> Thelin, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Ivy League colleges like Harvard did, however, open up schools for women. The Seven Sisters (Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, and Radcliffe colleges) are the first seven female equivalents of an Ivy League education.

<sup>36</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 20-27.

both female and Black students, was also seen in this light as being ‘not prestigious’ due to its open door policy. Not surprisingly, a large majority of their students were deeply impoverished.

Because most institutions were private before 1860, coeducation in higher education was not a common option until the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Though not all of the institutions were called “colleges,” historian Christie Anne Farnham’s research on nineteenth-century higher education for women in the South showed that women usually received schooling that was academically rigorous and comparable to male colleges.<sup>38</sup> This research disproves a dominant myth that women’s colleges were less rigorous and thus, less prestigious.

Academically rigorous education was not available to all women, however, as many colleges created a women’s track. For example, Oberlin College enrolled women in a “Ladies Course” which was supposed to be less demanding than the schooling their male peers received.<sup>39</sup>

Coeducation became more common but mostly in the public sector, such as at smaller normal schools and state universities. This background is significant because it reinforces my argument that the contributions that Matilda made to women’s education and campus life had a profound influence on the development of women’s schooling at other institutions.

Similar to early colonial desires to socialize the future male leaders of the Northeast, some of the Southern institutions created for women were meant to teach them to be good wives and mothers, instead of being centered around the classical studies of their male counterparts. Berea was an outlier in comparison to these institutions. Women worked and learned alongside their male classmates from normal school through the collegiate school. In a speech given by

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> Thelin, 54-56.

<sup>39</sup> Ladies Courses or tracks usually consisted of home economics classes, crafting classes, and childrearing classes. They also taught reading and basic math skills, but avoided some of the more difficult subjects such as Latin and Greek. Berea College did not have a Ladies Course. Women and men enrolled in the same classes.

John Fee in 1869, he argued that excluding women from education would be “barbaric,” and that women were meant to be men’s associates in not just the teaching of morals to children, but also in science and writing.<sup>40</sup> Though all of the students at Berea experienced gendered and racial socialization, it was with the intention of making women and men equal partners in marriage and in life. Unfortunately, we have no speech from Matilda about what her beliefs were. The speech came from John, but judging from the available evidence about their marriage, they were both equal partners in all of their endeavors.

Even after a decade of success with coeducation at Berea, and a handful of other institutions, in 1873 a former member of the Harvard Medical School faculty named Dr. Edward H. Clarke published a treatise railing against women’s education. In *Sex in Education; or, a Fair Chance for the Girls*, he stated that women’s biology dictated women’s fate, and that “women’s brains were less developed and could not tolerate the same level of mental stimulation as men’s [brains].”<sup>41</sup> This publication revisited the debates coeducational colleges, and put administrators at schools like Berea on the defensive. making the work at Berea subject to more scrutiny. Patricia A. Palmieri explains that some historians believe that this revamped debate led many colleges to compromise their coeducational values, arguing they gave into “genteel domesticity, health regimes, and upholding, rather than revolutionizing, the cultural norms of the “cult of true womanhood.” Palmieri argues that these historians have gotten it wrong and suggests that Clarke’s book forced several coeducational and women’s schools to work even harder to make education for women equally challenging compared to their male counterparts, making their work even more revolutionary. These debates showed women that their role was as more than a

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<sup>40</sup> RG 13.07/ Box 1/ Folder 1, BCA 0254: Berea College Vertical Files. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 17.

student, because women had to prove that they were just as capable as their male peers, they demonstrated that women deserved to be in class with men.<sup>42</sup>

### **Racial Integration in Higher Education**

Diversity in and access to higher education increased after the Morrill Act of 1862, a groundbreaking piece of federal legislation that established land-grant universities. The act made affordable education more available by establishing a “complex partnership in which the federal government provided incentives for each state to sell distant Western lands, with the states being obligated to use the proceeds to fund advanced instructional programs.” Initially used to promote education in new territories and states, land grants were offered in every state, not just the West.<sup>43</sup> Education became more attainable for low-income students. Though this new source of funding was helpful, it did not cover everything. Thus, foundations and fundraising organizations were still vital to colleges’ economic survival.

Institutions that were open to Black students in the South were almost exclusively private denominational colleges, such as Spelman College or Howard University. None were interracial and coeducational like Berea, but following the Civil War numerous missionary groups sought to provide opportunities for Black students to receive an education. Philanthropy that was available for the Black colleges came from three main sources: northern whites, foundations, and Black philanthropists.<sup>44</sup> One of the most powerful funding groups was the American Missionary Association. (AMA) They had a “civilizing mission” in which they wanted to raise Black leaders

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<sup>42</sup> Lasser, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Thelin, 74-76.

<sup>44</sup> The third group was the smaller of the three, but it’s worth noting them because it adds an important dimension to the discussion of the history of higher education by highlighting the fact that to Black leaders also worked to provide education for Black students. Often, the efforts to create educational opportunities for Black students is only documented when done by white people. This area of study is still vastly under researched.

in a Eurocentric way, and this required permanent higher education.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, this led to an organization made of white abolitionists and missionaries to make “unilateral decisions regarding the educational needs of blacks.” As if with the same breath, For example, while the Freedmen’s Aid Society (created by the AMA) stated that the purpose of higher education for Black students was “to educate... a number of blacks and send them forth to regenerate their own people.”<sup>46</sup> The prevailing educational opportunities for Black students were therefore created under a paternalistic guise of equity. The goal was not one of mutually assured success of two equals, rather, but a desire for separate spaces for Black and white students to learn. Though Berea College received significant funding from the AMA, it is clear that the AMA did not share the same notions of social and racial equity that Berea’s founders did. This difference is indicated by Berea’s housing, dining, and socializing policies which favored complete integration in all aspects of campus life.

One important debate was regarding the curriculum that should be made available to Black students. For example, between 1860 and 1890, there were nationwide debates about whether Black students should be trained in liberal arts or industrial and applied fields. This debate was distorted by entrenched belief systems and largely led by foundations like the AMA. This philanthropy coming from the North often went to segregated Black institutions that offered education in skilled crafts and trades. This was no accident. Funders were giving money to those institutions specifically to “make education for African Americans part of a plan for regional economic development within the confines of a conservative, racially segregated social and political structure.”<sup>47</sup> Similar to earlier debates about abolition versus gradual emancipation,

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<sup>45</sup> The “civilizing mission” implies what it sounds like: whites saw Blacks and African Americans as uncivilized and wanted to reshape the Black community in the image of white communities, but with less rights than white people.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, 238-241.

<sup>47</sup> Thelin, 102.



many philanthropists viewed southern racism as wrong, but it did not necessarily follow that they viewed African Americans as their equals.

Industrial philanthropists played a significant role in the education of Black Americans. William H. Baldwin, Jr., who served as one of the founding members of the Southern Education Board, was one of these industrial philanthropists, made clear his dislike of the missionary schools. He argued that Black Americans needed to learn discipline through manual labor to keep a “natural environment” of racial subjugation.<sup>48</sup> This made fundraising for Berea very difficult because of its heavy reliance on AMA funding. Despite these desires by outsiders to economically and socially segregate by race, Berea College continued on with their mission in the early years. They were initially able to resist these pressures because the community at large was created by the college, and thus most of the people in the area supported interracial and coeducational schooling to some degree.

In 1866, Berea College opened their doors to men and women, Black and white students. Berea was open to everyone before the Civil War, but no Black students attended then. In 1866, John and J.A.R. Rogers reported to the AMA that they had purchased land around the school to be sold to Black families only. They hoped that more Black families would settle in the region and the community would reflect the interracial values of the school.<sup>49</sup> The institution even documented the diversity of their school. During the 1866-1867 school year, there were 167 students in total. By the 1872-1873 school year, there were 263 total students. Though student counts became more detailed over time, the total number of Black and white students was estimated to be around two thirds Black and one third white between these scholastic years.

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<sup>48</sup> Anderson, 246-247.

<sup>49</sup> Data Regarding Berea College, RG 13/13.09: American Missionary Association, Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, Ky.

From 1873 onward, the number of Black students was calculated as exact percentages rather than rounded fractions. Until 1892 (when William Frost was brought on as the second President of Berea College), the number of Black students at the institution was 50% or higher.<sup>50</sup> This information is relevant because it helps frame Berea's early commitment to interracial education.<sup>51</sup>

Berea College was unique in its interracial and coeducational founding ideals, but it is important to note that some other schools were interracial— though not coeducational— before and during Berea's founding. By 1852, Black students had attended the Institute at Easton, Pennsylvania, the Normal School of Albany, New York, Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, Rutland College in Vermont, Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, Athens College in Athens, Ohio, and Hanover College in Indiana.<sup>52</sup> Some medical schools also admitted Black students. What Berea did differently was they took two groups that were largely left out of educational spaces in the past, and put them together. For Southern Black students and poor white students from the mountains, Berea was the best option.

### **Women Administrators in Higher Education**

Deans of Women, as a profession, were relatively common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century at coeducational colleges, large and small. More often than not, they were the enforcers of rules and regulations for the female students. As colleges became

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<sup>50</sup> RG 13.07, Box 1, Folder 6: Associated Items: Blacks at Berea. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>51</sup> Berea College had to work hard and intentionally to be successful in the world of higher education, and Matilda's role as an administrator can only be understood through context. The following section gives greater understanding to the historical background of higher education, and how Berea fits into that picture.

<sup>52</sup> Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861: A History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War*, (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1968), 277.

increasingly coeducational and the social and cultural expectations of young women shifted, the role of Dean of Women was gradually replaced by other offices that took over the work. By the end of 1970, Deans of Women were almost completely replaced by teams of student affairs professionals. In effect, entire teams of people had to be professionally developed in order to take on the several hats that Deans of Women wore, including Student Activities, Student Leadership, Community Engagement, Residence Life, Veterans Affairs, Greek Life, and more recently, Offices of Diversity and Inclusion.

The progression of women in positions of administration did not start with Deans of Women, but rather with matrons and committees of women, who were often the wives of campus faculty and administrators. At Oberlin, the group that acted as administrators for female students was called the Female Department, led by a "Lady Principal." At Berea, they were called the "Ladies Board of Care." It was composed of the wives of male administrators, and for the first twenty years of its existence, it was under the leadership of Matilda Hamilton Fee as the President of the Ladies Board of Care.

At Berea College, the Ladies Board of Care, from what historians can tell, went unpaid for their work. As the female student population grew, the board was tasked with making the rules and regulations for the female students to follow. Once Berea had its first dorm for female students, college administrators recognized that the need to hire a matron and Lady Principal was an urgent necessity. The Lady Principal and matron both lived in the dorm with the female students as residential positions. The Lady Principal acted in *loco parentis* (in place of the students' parents) and the matron was responsible for duties like cooking and cleaning. At Berea, the duties of the matron were not formally listed until 1894, but were likely similar to the duties of a matron in the mid-1860s. The duties included,

To have the rooms in order for occupancy.

Care of the buildings, including public rooms, hall, water closets,  
etc.

Care of the linen closet and College laundry.

Care of washroom and ironing room, including oversight of girls  
while using these rooms.

To see that meals are provided for sick as requested by the Lady  
Principal.

With the Steward, responsibility for meals and kitchen and dining  
room work.<sup>53</sup>

The position of Lady Principal and Matron were monitored by and reported to the Ladies Board of Care, came about as a direct response to coeducation. In addition to supervising the living arrangements of the female students, the Lady Principal and matrons were tasked with the "moral guardianship" of the students.<sup>54</sup>

By 1891, The Lady Principal's duties, were far more cumbersome and included:

To enter students and assign them to classes with advice of  
Schedule Committee.

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<sup>53</sup> Series 1/Box 1/Folder 2, RG 5/5.15: Administrative Divisions: Student Life. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>54</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 136-138.

To keep a record of grade reports, etc.

To assign rooms to students in Ladies' Hall.

To give out keys to the girls and receive deposits for same.

To have oversight of the students in the Hall, -including their care of their rooms.

Care of the students sick in the Hall, including direction of diet.

Meals to be sent to students' rooms only on Lady Principal's order.

To assign girls to use of laundry and furnish list of assignments to Matron.

Oversight of Reading Room.

To teach such classes and have such general care and responsibility as the Faculty directs.<sup>55</sup>

When a new Lady Principal was hired, the Ladies Board of Care invited her to a meeting to explain the “unwritten regulations [for] governing the occupants of the Ladies' Hall.”<sup>56</sup>

Unfortunately, it is difficult to say what this meant specifically. These duties today would fall under the offices of Academic Advisors, the Registrars' Office, Residence Life, Housekeeping, Health Services, and Faculty. The wide array of responsibilities held by the Lady Principal

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<sup>55</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 17.

<sup>56</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 11.

illustrates how important women were in the administration of the female students. And how integral Matilda's leadership of the Ladies Board of Care was.

On multiple occasions, the Lady Principal might make a decision which, after further consultation with the Ladies Board of Care, would be either endorsed or reversed. For example, at the January 7th meeting in 1886, rumors of a female student attending a party without permission and "habitually having gentlemen escorts from evening meetings" was brought to the attention of the Board. The Board advised the Lady Principal to investigate and report back if the rumors were true before taking action.<sup>57</sup> But there are an untold number of instances where the Lady Principal must have made decisions based on her own understanding of the rules, making students more susceptible to unconscious biases.<sup>58</sup> For example, at the same meeting referenced above, the Ladies Board of Care discussed the Lady Principal's ban on the female students dancing in the Ladies Hall. The Board endorsed her decision, and discussed the "practicability of organizing a gymnastic class" for the women instead.<sup>59</sup>

In an advertisement for the school, John wrote that the female students were in the "constant presence and association of [a] matron and lady teachers... so that their presence with the young ladies is not merely in the recitation rooms, but daily and hourly."<sup>60</sup> As coeducation became more common in the mid-nineteenth century, the job became more regulated. The primary difference between the Lady Principal, matron, and Ladies Board of Care at Berea, and

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<sup>57</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Discussed later in this chapter was an incident where the Lady Principal forbid an interracial couple from seeing one another, a decision later reversed by the Board of Trustees. Just because the school ideologically believed in equality did not mean that every member of its faculty and staff acted accordingly.

<sup>59</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 7.

<sup>60</sup> RG 13.07/ Box 1/ Folder 1, BCA 0254: Berea College Vertical Files. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

that of other institutions, was the fact that the school's desire to control female students' activities was complicated by the fact that it was an interracial campus. Administrators were trying to regulate the behavior of intelligent young women, many of whom were away from the watchful eye of their parents for the first time. Kentucky had a law on the books that restricted interracial marriage and Berea's existence as interracial threatened that law. The racialized and gendered dynamics of society called for the women administrators at Berea to balance women's safety and Black students' safety from violent outsiders opposed to Berea's mission. This was complicated in 1872 when Berea made interracial dating and marriage among students allowed (this is discussed more later in the chapter).

For colleges that had on-campus housing for women, like Berea, the need for a Ladies Board carried other implied needs. The women on these boards were serving as *loco parentis* to the students in the absence of their parents. Without strict rules and clear guidance, most parents would not send their daughters away to be educated. Therefore, Matilda and other women on the Ladies Board of Care were expected to be more than administrators, but guardians as well. Their monthly meetings indicate that they discussed a myriad of concerns facing the female students. Often, women on these boards investigated issues individually and took into account all circumstances facing the female student. For example, when a female student was being housed with a local woman, and it became clear that this was an unsafe environment for the girls, the Board stepped in to "see what could be done to remove the child from the evil influences with which she is surrounded."<sup>61</sup> The Board charged Matilda to investigate and report back. They also discussed both finding alternative places for the students to live and they discussed targeted

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<sup>61</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 25-26

fundraising that would pay for the women to live on campus. The final outcome is not documented, but the fact that the Board did everything they could to help the student indicates a commitment to women's best interest and education.<sup>62</sup> Though they were strict, their goal was always to rehabilitate the female students of whatever wrong they did so the student could rejoin the community.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, despite the fact that there was a rise in female administrators for the female students, there was not a similar rise in male administrators for the male students. Male students were monitored and reprimanded by faculty members, not administrators. For example, in one Ladies Board of Care meeting, they voted to "request Pres. Fairchild to make some remarks in chapel or to the young men in regard to their making themselves too familiar with the Ladies sitting too close to them while calling etc."<sup>64</sup> This request came because, as much as the Lady Principal, matron, and Ladies Board of Care were able to control the female students, they had no authority over the male students. The fact that they had to call on the president of the college to speak with the young men shows something else: that women were the only ones the institution was interested in maintaining constant supervised control over. Matilda's role in guiding and monitoring the female students was crucial to maintaining social order, even if it was only the female students being controlled.

The rise in hiring matrons and Lady Principals was supposed to be in response to purported behavioral issues caused by coeducation, even though it was well documented that a majority of disciplinary issues came from the male students. Female administrators were thus

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<sup>62</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 25-26

<sup>63</sup> Turpin, 73.

<sup>64</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 6.



tasked with controlling the women's actions around male students. At a Ladies Board of Care meeting in 1889, the Board moved that the Lady Principal “speak with the young ladies in regard to maintaining a dignified ladylike deportment, especially in the presence of the gentlemen.”<sup>65</sup>

The social regulations the female administrators imposed on the female students existed not only to maintain order, but also to protect those students from possible social taboos that could lead to outsiders’ violence. Coeducation was constantly under attack throughout the nineteenth century and as discussed earlier, female students felt like they needed to prove their worthiness and value in colleges to disprove negative gender stereotypes. The pressure for perfection was not lost on the Ladies Board of Care or Matilda, and they regulated the female students accordingly.

### **Student Culture and Campus Life**

In early colonial colleges, the only student groups that existed were debating groups and literary societies. These groups were often student organized and run, and created a strong culture of community on campuses. By looking at campus life and what students worked for, as well as what they did after finishing their education, historians can glean the values an institution had.<sup>66</sup> Student life on college campuses was “self-contained” and led to “deep loyalties instead of intense hostility,” allowing for more communal spaces on campus rather than competitive.<sup>67</sup> At Berea, the student values manifested through social groups supporting literacy and religion. And because of Berea’s mission to provide education for all, these values were shown in how the school responded to gender, class, and race.

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<sup>65</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Thelin, 22-23.

<sup>67</sup> Altbach, 46-47.

Students organized “an elaborate world of their own within and alongside the official world of the college.” Historian Leon Jackson explains that these intricate communities developed out of an interest in an “enriched” college experience. It was also an effect of the time. “To undergraduates, Republicanism had growing appeal, ranging from a post-Revolutionary War interest in individual rights and self-determination to students’ vicarious fascination with the ideas and social movements they associated with the French Revolution.”<sup>68</sup> The desire to learn from one’s peers in community, and find a sense of self and independence through those associations, students nationwide demonstrated that just as the college influenced students, the students influenced the college.<sup>69</sup>

Though schooling was opening up to women in the mid-nineteenth century, at most institutions women were barred from access to and participation in extracurricular organizations and activities. Women had to make their own way within the walls of many of these coeducational institutions. Most extracurricular activities were run and controlled by the men on campus, so women created their own literary societies and organizations, often against the desires of the institution. Because of this, women created a culture within coeducational environments that allowed them to socially thrive.<sup>70</sup> Women's lack of access to social spaces led to them creating many of their own spaces, similar to how women in higher society did. In addition to women's literacy clubs, female students also created women's debate clubs. They also "wrote women's magazines and newspapers of special 'women's pages' inside the dominant campus publications," and formed sororities. These spaces, often created outside of the official

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<sup>68</sup> Thelin, 65.

<sup>69</sup> One unofficial organization was the sewing society which was a space for women to come together and work on some of their crafting projects. It is likely that several other groups existed but they were not documented. RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>70</sup> Thelin, 98.

realm of college administrators, were places where women could come together and have safe spaces to cope.<sup>71</sup> Despite all that Berea College did to support women in higher education, inequities remained. That the women students took the initiative to develop organizations allowed them the space to grow.

The earliest group at Berea College for women was The Literary Society, which had a complementary male group. Though it likely started much earlier, the oldest program pamphlet on record is from 1886. The group held annual gatherings where debates took place. From the meeting minutes and club constitutions left behind by these students, the values of educational equity come through. For example, the male and female groups had annual gatherings where the groups debated one another. Even among the officers, which the groups appear to have shared officers, there were always women and men holding positions of leadership.<sup>72</sup> Other women-only groups were sparse at Berea before the twentieth century, but the two listed among group constitutions included the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Women's Christian Association. Both groups were a way for women to further explore their roles as religious activists. Granted, these groups imply that the female students, like the administrators, were interested in social control and social reform.<sup>73</sup> Social control was justified as a necessity. Students and administrators alike feared that without near perfection, women would never be fully respected within the realm of higher education.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 24.

<sup>72</sup> Literary Society Programs/Box 18/Folder 24, RG 07/7.00: Campus and Student Organization Records, Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, Ky.

<sup>73</sup> Women's Organizations/Box 26/Folder 1A, RG 07/7.00: Campus and Student Organization Records, Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, Ky.

<sup>74</sup> Covered earlier in this chapter were debates about women in higher education and how worthy those students were of being on campus. The female students had to prove that they were intellectual equals with men, but also morally and socially equal.

One on-campus group at Berea which showed how student organizations helped develop a self-contained society was the Harmonia Society. The singing group began in 1871 and was open to all students. Student leadership in students shifted from year to year, with both men and women serving as leaders. The group even held concerts multiple times each year.<sup>75</sup> This group is significant because it is the first documented organization at Berea and it was, from the beginning, open to all students. Though no documentation exists to explain how Matilda and the Ladies Board of Care reacted to the formation of this group, it is likely that they did approve the creation of the organization. Due to several incidents documented in the Minutes of the Ladies Board of Care, female students frequently asked permission to organize or do group activities, and sought that permission from that group. One informal group that continued to seek permission from the Ladies Board of Care were women who “had requested to be allowed to dance among themselves for a short time Friday evenings.”<sup>76</sup> The Ladies Board also supported general socialization among the women by holding socials in the Ladies Hall where the students could play games purchased by the Board. Though students led the way for social organizations, it was Matilda and the other administrators who approved and supported those groups.<sup>77</sup> The early Ladies Board of Care had fewer members and relied more heavily on Matilda as the President, Matilda. Her role in approving the Harmonia Society set a precedent for future organizations inclusive policies.

Despite attempts to create equitable education for all, classism in educational institutions was rampant. For example, at graduation ceremonies as early as the colonial times, students were

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<sup>75</sup> Harmonia Society/Box 17/Folder 1, RG 07/7.00: Campus and Student Organization Records, Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, Ky.

<sup>76</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 29.

<sup>77</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 34.

lined up by family rank. The only known school that did not follow this practice was the College of Rhode Island (now Brown University), where students were lined up alphabetically.<sup>78</sup> By the time Berea College formed, classism was integral to the way that most institutions functioned. In the South especially, institutions of higher learning were “exclusive and expensive,” making them far more elitist than schools in the Northeast. The most notable examples in the South included the University of Virginia and South Carolina College.<sup>79</sup> Berea, on the other hand, was actively anti-caste, adding this language in their charter and working to accommodate low income students through the student work program. Students working on campus were able to use their money to either pay for school or other goods and services, which allowed more low-income students the opportunity to attend the school.<sup>80</sup>

Part of the early desire to socialize students, as noted by historian Phyllis Vine, came from colonial leaders who were concerned that parents were not doing enough to raise their sons to be the future leaders of the colonies.<sup>81</sup> But the desire to socialize future leaders was one complicated by class, because colonial leaders assumed future leaders were from elite backgrounds and could afford the limited but expensive schooling available in the eighteenth century.<sup>82</sup> In a speech by John in 1869, he argued that by sending low-income students to school, the community was fighting back against the wealthy. He stated that when low-income society members allow for the upper classes to make decisions, that this was “just what the slaveholder

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<sup>78</sup> Thelin, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>80</sup> As important as the student work model was, it still contained flaws. For example, a document showing the student pay rates among women were 3 cents lower than the hourly rates for men, on average. This indicated a strong gender bias at Berea that was seldom acknowledged. RG 5/5.24/ Box 3 / Folder 2, RG 5/5.24: Administrative Divisions: Labor Program Office. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>81</sup> Thelin, 69.

<sup>82</sup> In the nineteenth century, the word “caste” referred to class. Being “anti-caste” at Berea meant making education available for everyone regardless of income.

wanted - that he should do the thinking and the planning, and you the working; and this, if pursued, is just what will always keep you or any part of the community, white of colored, a servile class.”<sup>83</sup> Matilda's role among the female students was to take the ideas that John preached and make them a reality on campus by support anti-caste, anti-racist organizations.

When John argued that education was a weapon against the wealthy, he meant it for Black students just as much as for poor and female students. Black students thus worked to create spaces for themselves on campus through extracurricular activities. A sense of community was vital to the retention of Black students. In a study on the history of extracurricular activities among Black students from 1868 through 1940, historian Monroe H. Little shows that because Black colleges were often created by white missionaries, the on-campus activities largely mirrored those seen on campuses the missionaries attended as students. Additionally, due to increased isolation, both because of geographical location and separation from families, Black students likely needed these opportunities to come together.<sup>84</sup> No documentation is currently available to show whether the Black students at Berea created their own organizations on campus as a safe environment from conscious and unconscious racial biases from their white peers. However, it is likely that some groups did exist. This shows that even as Berea worked to be inclusive, there were always students left out. Because female students on campus were both Black and white, the lack of Black students known involvement in campus groups represents a potential failure on the part of Matilda and the Ladies Board of Care.

### **Significant Administrative Feats at Berea College**

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<sup>83</sup> RG 13.07/ Box 1/ Folder 1, BCA 0254: Berea College Vertical Files. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>84</sup> Monroe H. Little, “The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students, 1868-1940,” *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 87 (Winter, 2002), 43-44.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, many institutions of higher education were not making the necessary changes to support coeducation. Therefore, the female administrators often took on the task of advocating for female students in addition to ensuring their compliance with college rules by monitoring their behavior.<sup>85</sup> By being "agents of social control," these administrators were also advocates. They monitored students' "behavior in and out of class, prescribed proper dress, neatness, and cleanliness," and were in effect taking actions that supported the health and wellbeing of female students.<sup>86</sup> Most important was the student's reputations and possibly their ability to use their education for class mobility.

D. W. Cain, a 1893 graduate of Berea College, recalled their experience as a Black student in an interview in 1924.<sup>87</sup> They remembered little incident with themselves personally, but admitted, "I have seen white students unused to the association with colored people refuse to sit by them in class, but I have seen these same white students become the best of friends of these students they at first refused to sit by."<sup>88</sup> Developing a not only tolerant but also loving environment at Berea took significant efforts. Administrators, staff, and teachers were tasked with that work. This section highlights some of the major decisions that Matilda and the Ladies Board of Care made which directly contributed to a cohesive community at Berea College. Most notably were contributions to health and sanitation and rules concerning dating and courtship.

In Berea College's 1868 publication of its laws and regulations, rule number thirty two stated, "Every student shall observe habits of strict cleanliness, and tidiness in his person, and

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<sup>85</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 138.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 183-184.

<sup>87</sup> The gender of the student was not listed in the research which necessitates the use of non-gendered pronouns.

<sup>88</sup> RG 13.07, Box 1, Folder 1: Associated Items: Blacks at Berea. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

keep his room neat, and orderly, and at all times subject to the inspection of the Faculty.”<sup>89</sup> What is first important to note is that this is the only rule specific to cleanliness in all of the rules and regulations publications. Second is that there was the possibility for faculty to check a room. For the female students, however, this was not the case; the matron and the Lady Principal took on this task. In all of the official rules of the college— where this specific rule is repeated, — only the faculty are listed as those responsible for upholding this rule, thus diminishing the efforts of the matron, Lady Principal, and the Ladies Board of Care in their advocacy for women’s health. For example, in 1889, the Board made strong demands for the college to hire an on-campus nurse who would be able to help during the winter months. This request was made following a particularly difficult winter where “malarial fever, mumps, and tonsillitis were the prevailing diseases.”<sup>90</sup> This demand was not met until the early 1890s.

Despite a rising number of women entering higher education, by 1870 a majority of midwestern colleges did not offer basic essential needs for their female students such as "housing, medical care, or physical education facilities," even though those same things were available to the male students.<sup>91</sup> Matilda's work with the Ladies Board of Care took on these very challenges with health services, demands for a nurse, and some physical education offered through gymnastics classes.<sup>92</sup> In January of 1895, just a few months before Matilda passed away but while she was still attending meetings, the Board made demands for “waste-pipes” to be

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<sup>89</sup> Series 1/Box 1/Folder 1, RG 5/5.15: Administrative Divisions: Student Life. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>90</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>91</sup> Carolyn Terry Bashaw and Jana Nidiffer, 23.

<sup>92</sup> The Ladies Board of Care at Berea was actually approached with the request for a gymnastics class. This was because the Lady Principal had forbidden the female students from dancing in the halls. Berea may have been radical, but it, like so many other societal forces, worked to restrict the movement of women. RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.



placed on each floor of the Ladies Hall. The demand came from requests that students made about having heated bathrooms during the winter as well as designated places for “slop” to be placed. It was found that slop (human excrement) was being placed in the yard and led to a terrible smell. This also exposed students to poor health conditions, increasing their risk for sickness. The demands for designated spaces for slop were eventually met, but not without several demands and communications from the Ladies Board of Care.<sup>93</sup>

Other health related concerns of the Board included the physical fitness of the female students. The difficulty in creating programming that was viewed as socially appropriate while still challenging the students was a balancing act. From an example discussed earlier, the Lady Principal had caught female students dancing in the dormitory. She made the decision to restrict this type movement and instead, a gymnastics class was offered. In a 1886 Ladies Board of Care meeting, the Board “endorsed the action of the Lady Principal in prohibiting dancing in the Ladies Hall.”<sup>94</sup> Though dancing was eventually permitted on Friday evenings only, the initial desire to restrict the movements of female students, even when only among one another, shows the degree to which the Board was invested in social control. Dancing was somewhat taboo among very religious groups.<sup>95</sup> Matilda’s role here was to ensure that the female students were acting according to social and cultural norms of the town, such as piety. If they did not, it could lead to backlash from community members concerned about promiscuity among the female students.

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<sup>93</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 29-34.

<sup>94</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 7.

<sup>95</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 29.

Related to restricting the movement of students, the Board took on the task of creating and implementing several rules. There were six rules that were specific to gender relations that show up in the first documentation of Rules and Regulations, published in 1868. Because they carried such weight on campus, they are listed in full below:

24. Ladies are required to be at their rooms by 7:30 P.M. during the fall and winter terms, and by 8:00 P.M. during the spring term, and gentlemen at 10:00 PM; and after 9:00 o'clock to refrain from singing or any thing that may disturb the repose of others.

25. Students are prohibited, on pain of expulsion, from visiting those of the other sex at their rooms, or receiving visits from them at their own, except by permission in case of serious illness.

26. Ladies and gentlemen are not permitted to go together for a walk, or ride, or attend social gatherings, without permission from the appropriate authorities, and only at such hours as may be designated.

27. Ladies shall not receive calls from gentlemen, except at such hours, and under such restrictions, as the Ladies' Board of Control may designate, and only in the public parlor where they board.

28. Young men are required, in their association with ladies, to respect all the special regulations of the Female Department, oral and written.

29. Any student entering into the marriage relation, without special permission from the Faculty, shall be considered as permanently debarring himself from the privileges of the Institution.<sup>96</sup>

Each of these rules were first discussed at a Ladies Board of Care meeting before being given to the Board of Trustees as a suggested rule. And regularly, these rules were revisited and revised as necessary. The President of the Ladies Board of Care wrote a report for the Board of Trustees on an annual basis, but suggestions and recommendations could be made any time during the year. In one set of meeting minutes from 1893, the group voted on a new rule and sent it to the Board of Trustees, and stated that the rule became permanent.<sup>97</sup> This implies the Board had influence among the Trustees, and that when the women administrators made rule and regulation suggestions, they were taken seriously. This can also be seen through more specific examples, including times when rules were debated and changed during a Ladies Board of Care meeting, and then showed up in the Rules and Regulations publication the following year. For example, the Ladies Board of Care did their best to control the female students even when they did not live on campus grounds. There were concerns that the female students living off campus were not doing school work during the designated study hours. As a result, the Board made a ruling that put more strict requirements on those students requiring them to do study hours during the same time as students living on campus. The requirements were later dropped in 1889 as the Board

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<sup>96</sup> Series 1/Box 1/Folder 1, RG 5/5.15: Administrative Divisions: Student Life. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY. Rules like number twenty-nine existed far into the twentieth century.

<sup>97</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 26.

decided they had no way of truly controlling the non-residential students.<sup>98</sup> This rule was then seen in the 1891 Rules and Regulations book.<sup>99</sup> Some efforts to control women off campus grounds were met with a positive response, such as in the case discussed earlier where the Board looked into rehousing female students who were not living in a safe environment off campus.

Among the several rules listed in the published rules and regulations, as well as rules and discussions of rules in the Ladies Board of Care minutes, gender comes up repeatedly. As a coeducational institution, this makes sense. Berea prided itself on being racially equitable in its educational pursuits and it seems that in almost every way, this was true. Even so, there is one documented incident where race became a point of debate: interracial dating and marriage.

Rules that restricted the interactions between men and women already existed, such as strict visitation hours and attending events with a person of the opposite sex. But in 1872, interracial dating was brought to the Board as a concern. A white man and a black woman, both students, began courting one another and attending events together. Social rules implied that the two were therefore dating. The Lady Principal at the time forbade the interactions between the two. There are no documents that indicate if the Ladies Board of Care and Matilda, as the President, knew about this. The information showed up instead among faculty who, as those in charge of creating rules for the male students, began debating the issue. John G. Fee was concerned that the faculty would rule against the couple, and called an emergency Board of Trustees meeting in order to take a vote there. Later it became clear that the white male in the couple was a nephew of John and Matilda, which surely swayed John's vote. Due to his

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<sup>98</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY, 24.

<sup>99</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 7, Berea Rules and Regulations, Record 5.36/Folder 7/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

persuasion among the trustees, the group voted to permit interracial dating and marriage.<sup>100</sup> The new rule did not show up in any of the following year's rule books. What we can never know is if Matilda knew about this specific ruling and how she may have felt about it, or even if she fought against it. But because of the public nature of the debate among faculty, she likely knew. Even though the issue seems to have skipped over the authority of the Ladies Board of Care in the approval process on its way to the Board of Trustees, Matilda's lack of action in reprimanding the Lady Principal is possibly one of her failures as an administrator.

Matilda worked behind the scenes of the institution, with individuals and groups, supporting students, staff and faculty alike. Her leadership as the first President of the Ladies Board of Care and her later membership on the Board show a clear commitment to "the improvement and advancement of the education morally, mentally, physically, spiritually of the young ladies in Berea."<sup>101</sup> Understanding her influence requires reading between the lines of numerous reports and archival documents. Every social and cultural barrier she was tasked with navigating led to successful interracial and coeducational higher education in the South during a time of racial unrest and fractured communities. Her work, however, has largely been unremembered and unacknowledged. The conclusion explores the reasons why her contributions were forgotten and how Berea fell from grace moving into the twentieth century (and as Matilda and John fell from grace).

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<sup>100</sup> Sears, "*A Practical Recognition of The Brotherhood of Man*," 71-73.

<sup>101</sup> RG 5.36, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes for Ladies Board of Care, Record 5.36/Folder 8/Box 1, RG 5/5.36: Administrative Divisions: Ladies Board of Care. Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

## Conclusion

### A History and Legacy Erased

By the end of her life, Matilda lived through the Civil War, saw a rise and fall in rights for Black Americans, and watched three of her six children pass away. As she aged, her role on the ladies Board of Care decreased. In 1885, she stepped down as the President of the Ladies Board of Care and opted to be a general member. She continued to serve on the Board until the month before her death in 1895. In her later years, she didn't write as many letters and seems to have led a quieter life, even working to keep up with the changing social norms of the country. In 1892, she wrote a letter to Mrs. Frost (the First Lady of Berea College), explaining her new enlightened views on Women's Suffrage. Matilda explained, "Our daughter Mrs. Embree... is in advance of her mother on the Women's Suffrage question," which is to say that she felt her daughter was more progressive on the issue than she was. But Matilda also felt she had come a long way on the issue and was "greatly in favor" of it.<sup>1</sup> As Matilda's life was winding down, she continued to push herself to learn and grow intellectually. But even as Matilda progressed in her belief system, the system of higher education seemed to regress at the same time.

### **Waning Interest in Higher Education**

In the late nineteenth century, there were attempts at data collection about higher education. This research, though limited, showed that there was decreased interest in acquiring and funding higher education.<sup>2</sup> This trend drastically affected Berea College. From the end of Fairchild's term as Berea College's President into the beginning of Frost's term, there was a

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<sup>1</sup> RG 1.02, Box 2, Folder 17, Transcript: "A Letter From Matilda Hamilton Fee to Mrs. Frost," September 1892, Record Group 01/1.02: John G. Fee Papers, Berea College Archives, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>2</sup> Thelin, 94-95.

marked decrease in available funding for interracial and coeducational schooling. This loss can be attributed, in some part, to the increased availability and national interest in practical education over a liberal arts education for Black students. Interest in donating to colleges that were interracial and coeducational decreased as the novelty of that social concern and the memory of the Civil War faded. Additionally, there were ongoing debates about what type of education Black students should receive. Steeped in racist ideology, there was a growing national movement toward offering separate educational opportunities. The debates among educators and funders were framed as being over “liberal versus practical education in the black colleges.” The issue here was that “for the black colleges, ‘practical education’ usually carried with it the baggage of race combined with socioeconomic tracking within an increasingly industrialized economy.”<sup>3</sup> The debates about integrated liberal arts education that Berea College was initially able to avoid now influenced their fundraising and function as William Frost (Berea College’s second president) started accepting Northern money and stopped seeking Black students for admission.

Following the national debate about coeducational colleges between the 1860s through 1890s, a strong and cohesive backlash from public leaders contributed to the further deterioration of higher education. During what is now known as the “Progressive Era” from 1890 through 1920, concerns about white women receiving an education and not getting married increased. Male educators and doctors claimed that a college education led to celibacy among female students. In one of President Theodore Roosevelt’s speeches to Congress in 1905, he focused on concerns about lower marriage rates and birth control. In the speech, he popularized the term “race suicide,” the idea that by white women not reproducing, they were negatively affecting the

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<sup>3</sup> Thelin, 101-102.

white race. More specifically, “the incapacity or unwillingness of the Anglo-Saxon race and particularly its highly educated members to marry and reproduce unleashed fears that within a generation or two they would die out.”<sup>4</sup> This fear that the “Anglo-Saxon race” would “die out” within a few generations became increasingly prevalent as more women attended colleges, even though this ideology was present when Berea College opened and during the early debates about coeducation.<sup>5</sup> The national landscape— coupled with the concerns about interracial dating and marriage— made the fear of race suicide a far-spread concern, especially after the Civil War. Berea College was initially able to silence or at least ignore concerns by local and state leaders. Eventually, though, these external pressures became internal pressures and Berea College lost sight of its mission.

### **The Fees Leave Berea**

With a new wave of denominational churches in the 19th century, denominational differences became more important and were divisive. Most colleges favored one religious group or another based on the majority belief system within the Board of Trustees. Often, donors or administrators joined or left based on their belief that the school was drifting too far from their personal religious convictions.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, John left the Union Church in Berea due to differences in religious beliefs surrounding baptism. He later left the college over his concern that Frost was not focused enough on interracial education. Though John leaving the church is important to understand, what is more important is understanding how Berea College moved away from its

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<sup>4</sup> Lasser, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 55-57.

<sup>6</sup> Thelin, 28-29.



original mission of racial equity, and how this shift distorted the early history and success of the college— including Matilda’s role with the female students.

President Fairchild and John remained focused on interracial education during their entire time serving Berea College. But in 1889, Fairchild died and John called on William B. Steward to replace him. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown, Steward turned many on the Board of Trustees against himself, and the Board voted in two new anti-Steward members in 1892. The Board then called for Steward’s resignation and asked William Frost— a former professor of Greek at Oberlin College and student of Harvard— to become president of Berea College. John was against this nomination from the beginning, but was outvoted. It wasn’t long after this that Fee stepped down from the Board, believing they were moving in a direction that ignored the institution's original mission. This became apparent when Frost did two things. First, he believed that Black people were inferior to white people. Second, he chose to concentrate Berea’s efforts toward recruiting students from “Appalachian America,” who were predominantly white.<sup>7</sup>

Matilda served on the Ladies Board of Care as President for the first twenty years of the institution’s life. Afterwards, she served as a member of that Board until she died. Her husband John stopped working at Berea around the time Matilda passed away. He made it clear that he left as a result of President Frost’s efforts to end “Berea's long standing commitment to radical coeducation.”<sup>8</sup> Frost’s shift of focus away from educating students of all races in an attempt to secure more money from Northern donors stood in stark contrast to the focus at the beginning of Berea College’s fundraising, when positioning the college as a “cure for slavery’s mutual harm” was the priority. Berea College had attracted early donors, especially before the 1890s, based on

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<sup>7</sup> Paul David Nelson, “Experiment in Interracial Education at Berea College, 1858-1908,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jan., 1974), 18-20.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 206.

their interest in supporting both Black and poor white students during Reconstruction. However, society had demonized the poor white as “ignorant, uneducated, and unlikely to break their allegiance to the Democratic Party” which caused organizations like the American Missionary Association to stop working with poor white students.<sup>9</sup> Poor white people were then classified as “white trash” by the media, and groups dedicated to restoring some sense of peace in the American South ignored this constituency almost completely. This blatant disregard resulted in a rebranding of southern whites and the invention of “Appalachia.”<sup>10</sup>

The American Missionary Association was best known for funding schools for Black students. Their funding model was based on socially raising recently freed African Americans separately from white students. Additionally, the AMA found that funding poor white students was more difficult because they were often more reluctant to participate in AMA schools.<sup>11</sup> Because free Blacks were not being accepted into Northern collegiate institutions, Black leaders and abolitionists largely agreed that the best route was segregated schooling, believing that no institution could function properly with interracial systems and structures.<sup>12</sup> Berea College, however, was an exception. John G. Fee was largely credited with the success of Berea’s interracial schooling model. Uncredited was Matilda and her work with the female students on campus. Nevertheless, the AMA funded Berea for several years until the investment in Black communities and the investment in white communities became different entities, meaning that no one organization funded both. The AMA remained focused on serving Black communities, but

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<sup>9</sup> Smith, 210-212.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 211-212.

<sup>11</sup> Joe M. Richardson, *Cristian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*, (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 232-233.

<sup>12</sup> Woodson, 265.

only when segregated. The AMA did not start investing in poor whites until the late 1880s, just before Frost became president and began the fracturing of Berea College.<sup>13</sup>

As Northern donors became more difficult to secure in the late nineteenth century, President Frost chose to shift Berea's approach in fundraising. At Oberlin College, the Trustees chose to change their fundraising model. At Berea, Frost chose to change who they catered to as an institution. He began traveling and making speeches at various places across the country, asking attendees, "Have you ever heard of Appalachian America?"<sup>14</sup> He is thought to have renamed the people who were formerly referred to as "Mountain People" or, by many northerners, as "white trash."<sup>15</sup> Frost reframed the region as being "geographically remote" and as having "antiquated manners, and linguistic variance." He was attempting to show the Appalachian region as starkly different from poor whites. By doing this, he framed the region as a new frontier. One which needed investment, rehabilitation, and one which could be conquered and profited from. Frost hoped that by making the region a new "wilderness" to be tamed and dominated, more Northerners would invest in the poor white people who lived there. He was right.<sup>16</sup>

White Northerners' growing xenophobia against immigrants helped fuel and fund this endeavor. Because of Appalachia's rebranding as a new region, Northerners saw the area as an "internal colony" to be used and exploited for resources in the same way England used the

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<sup>13</sup> Richardson, 232-233.

<sup>14</sup> Smith believed that Frost was the first person to coin the term "Appalachian / Appalachia" in referring to the people in the Mountainous region of Eastern Kentucky. The word Appalachia was originally spelled Apalchen or Apalachen and referred to Indigenous tribes living near Florida. When the tribes were pushed North and settled in mountainous regions (throughout the Appalachian Mountains in the South), the area was sometimes referred to by the tribes that once lived there. When Frost used the term, he used it to describe the people in the area, who were predominantly white. Frost coined the term to be used to describe a cultural group.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, 212-115.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 212-115.

American colonies. The new search for coal was one way that Northerners invested in the Southern economy. Northerners wanted a reliable Republican voter base and feared that due to voter suppression among Black voters, in the form of literacy requirements, Northerners would lose their stronghold in the South. Investment in the “poor Mountain People” became essential then in securing a reliable Republican voter base and ensuring ongoing profits in the coal mines.<sup>17</sup> Frost capitalized on this new stream of donors.

Frost started advertising the school almost exclusively to white students in the beginning of his term in 1892. In one letter to a prospective student in 1901, who was concerned about being around Black people, Frost wrote, “It is quite possible for people to attend Berea and have no more to do with the colored people than at their home. White and colored students never room together and seldom board at the same places.”<sup>18</sup> As students became more aware of Frost’s attempts to segregate the school in the mid-1890s, some did their best to fight back. They chose to continue living and working together, despite administrators providing ways for students to self-segregate.<sup>19</sup> Frost believed he was working to get rid of sectional lines by having Black and white students see each other on campus, stating “It is no unimportant part of a white boy’s education to see the Negro treated as a man.” Obviously, this was not erasing racial lines. This was using Black students for the benefit of white students, a far cry from the original mission of Berea College.

Frost’s reengineering of the institution’s message shifted student ideology. By the very end of the nineteenth century, white students were petitioning the school to remove the Black

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, 217-221.

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, 228-229.

students from all parts of college and academic life.<sup>20</sup> Even Booker T. Washington wrote a letter to Frost expressing his disappointment in the direction the institution was heading.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the Kentucky Colored Teachers' Association issued a resolution urging Black students not to attend Berea College.<sup>22</sup> The Black students needed convincing, however. Frost's efforts were so successful that by the 1903-1904 school year Black students only made up 16.4% of total enrollment at Berea, a large drop from 51.4% in 1892, the year he became President.<sup>23</sup>

Most histories of the Reconstruction Era took an overly simplified view of Southerners: Southerners were either enslaved or enslaving others. To fully understand the circumstances in Appalachia that made it possible for Berea's dramatic funding shift, the concurrent need for reconstruction for poor white people must be considered. Funding was being provided for wealthy Southerners who were working to rebuild the economy and for newly freed African Americans. The work of Reconstruction was therefore unsuccessful because educational reforms did not "pair with racial development." In reality, recently freed African Americans were not receiving much funding or help from the North, either. Because of Frost and others like him, the idea that Black people were receiving more resources than poor white people became prevalent. This effectively pitted poor southerners against Black Americans due to structural and resource inequality. Northern white people were confused as to how poor white southerners had become "degenerates."<sup>24</sup> They were therefore persuaded to step up and provide funding for the poor white Southerners. As was mentioned before, however, funding for interracial schooling was

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<sup>20</sup> Nelson, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, 228-229.

<sup>22</sup> RG 13.07, Box 1, Folder 1: Associated Items: Blacks at Berea, "The Southern School." Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>23</sup> RG 13.07, Box 1, Folder 6: Associated Items: Blacks at Berea, "Colored Students in Berea." Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 215-217.

dwindling. When Northern money came in, it came with strings attached; they wanted racially segregated schooling.

The final nail in the coffin of Berea's interracial education came in 1904 with the passage of the Kentucky Day Law. What is first important to note is that in 1891, Kentucky added an amendment to the state constitution that forbade interracial education in public schools. Berea was initially exempt from this rule because it was a private institution. In 1904, however, Representative Carl Day introduced legislation that banned interracial education in private institutions as well.<sup>25</sup> Five members of the House and five members of the Senate voted against the passage of the bill, essentially risking reelection. Unfortunately, the measure passed in 1904.<sup>26</sup> Frost, the Board of Trustees, and alums of the college fought back through letter writing and personally appearing in front of the legislature. When the case was taken to the Kentucky Court of Appeals, it again passed. Berea had little time to segregate the institution before large monetary penalties were imposed. Berea's case went to the Supreme Court in 1908, four years after dismissing all Black students from the institution. They again lost.<sup>27</sup>

In the fall of 1904, Frost and the administration at Berea divided the institution's assets and put \$200,000 aside for relocating the Black students. Andrew Carnegie heard about Berea's predicament and donated \$200,000 to the school. The money was meant as a reimbursement to the institution, but Berea combined the donation with the divided assets, bringing total scholarship money to \$400,000. This helps illustrate the point that, though people admired the work Berea accomplished, they came to agree that it was time to racially segregate students. The

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<sup>25</sup> Nelson, 23-24.

<sup>26</sup> Scott Blakeman, Filson Club, and Filson Historical Society, "Night Comes to Berea College: The Day Law and The African-American Reaction," *The Filson Club history quarterly*, Vol. 70, Is. 1 (Jan., 1996): 11.

<sup>27</sup> Nelson, 23-24.

money was used to send the remaining Black students to various schools and colleges in surrounding regions. Many students matriculated to all Black institutions without the help of Berea College, but those who couldn't were divided based on interest and available openings at Chicago University, Fisk University, Howard University, Gammon Theological Seminary, Hampton Agricultural and Industrial Institute, Illinois Medical College, Kentucky Normal and Industrial Institute, Knoxville College, and Louisville State University.<sup>28</sup> Half of these schools were geared toward teaching technical skills, robbing the Black students of Berea's a liberal arts education and further diminishing the original mission of Berea College.

The racial cracks in the foundation were always there, but the final blow to Berea's mission came in 1911. First, Berea opened the Lincoln Institute in Simpsonville, Kentucky. The school opened to support the Black students of Kentucky with technical skills. Some of the remaining money set aside for Black students was used to open the school, but its aim went against the Berea mission of equal educational opportunities for all.<sup>29</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the Lincoln Institute did support the education of Black students, and this is a positive, but it also functioned within the white supremacist ideology that Black people were inherently inferior to whites by only teaching technical skills. Maybe it was coincidence or maybe it was an effort to fully break from their connection to interracial education, but that same year, Frost worked to rewrite the school's Constitution. A commitment to the coeducation of the races changed to a commitment to white mountaineers.<sup>30</sup> With that final act, the erosion of Berea's mission was complete. When J.A.R. Rogers wrote a history of Berea College in 1902,

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<sup>28</sup> RG 13.07, Box 1, Folder 6: Associated Items: Blacks at Berea, "Negro Alumni." Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Blakeman, Filson Club, and Filson Historical Society, "Night Comes to Berea College: The Day Law and The African-American Reaction," *The Filson Club history quarterly*, Vol. 70, Is. 1 (Jan., 1996): 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Nelson, 23-24.

titled *Birth of Berea College: A Story of Providence*, he glossed over John G. Fee's work at the school and framed him as someone who divided the community when he left. It's worth noting that Rogers only mentions Matilda as a wife, and not as an administrator. The fact that John and Matilda left because the national conversation about interracial education was shifting, and that they were unable to shield Berea from the influence of that conversation, was not addressed in that history.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Lost Legacy of Matilda**

Historians like Hannah Peck and Richard Sears acknowledge Frost's divisive work at Berea, but focus more on how much he was able to raise for the endowment during the entirety of his term, thus framing him as a positive figure in the institution's history. What they failed to do was fully acknowledge the progress that was destroyed by Frost, and they failed to give credit to Matilda for so many administrative decisions that held the school together. Matilda's role as an administrator at Berea and her work to uphold the school's mission are not documented in Berea's history books. Her decisions and the impact of her leadership are instead revealed through the primary sources and archival material that showed the results of her work. Beyond this, Matilda, and early female administrators in general, are left out of higher education's history. Limited sources exist that help frame the impact that women had on higher education, and most do not go far enough. This research should inspire others as they learn about the history of their own institutions of higher learning because women, like Matilda, are often left out of the official records of higher education.

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<sup>31</sup> John A. R. Rogers, *Birth of Berea College: A Story of Providence*, (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Company, 1902), 155-158.



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- RG 5.23, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 42 C, Memorial Booklet: Matilda Hamilton Fee (1895), Record Group 5.23/Folder 42C/Box 1, RG 5/5.23: Administrative Divisions: Alumni and College Relations. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.
- RG 13.07/ Box 1/ Folder 1, BCA 0254: Berea College Vertical Files. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.
- Series 1/Box 1/Folder 2, RG 5/5.15: Administrative Divisions: Student Life. Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea, KY.
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