

A Flock of Doves: U.S. Women's Colleges and Their Names

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Tableau Drama, 1940s
Courtesy of Ursuline College Archives

Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley (Miller-Bernal 2000, 34). These are the familiar names of the Seven Sisters, elite New England colleges founded in the nineteenth century to provide higher education for women.

Rooted in Greek mythology, the term "Seven Sisters" refers to the daughters of the Titan Atlas and the Oceanid Pleione. In one explanation, the nymph's name derives from *plein*, "to sail," so she becomes the "sailing queen" and her

daughters “sailing ones.” A common version of the myth relates that Zeus saved the sisters from Orion by turning them into a flock of doves, *peleiades*, later transformed into the constellation Pleiades (Gibson 2007). Applied to the cluster of seven campuses, the name reflects the aspirations of both female students, poised for metaphorical flight, and the model institutions that would transform their lives through education.

While few higher educational institutions in America have names that invoke classical mythology as explicitly as the Seven Sisters, all give evidence of clearly articulated naming practices tied closely to their purpose and goals. This paper examines a specific subset of U.S. colleges and universities, those founded for women’s education, and analyzes the ways in which their names connect them to persons, places, or concepts central to their mission. The names of these institutions supply key markers of gender and affiliation that identify them to constituencies and prospective students.

Emergence and Differentiation of Female Colleges

In the early decades of the 1800s, opportunities for the education of women emerged in establishments called female institutions, female academies, or young ladies’ seminaries. From the Northeast, the phenomenon spread quickly, so that by 1900 there were close to 150 women’s colleges across the country, a number that would continue to rise for the next sixty years (Landy 2002, 62).

In naming themselves, early women’s institutions borrowed the nomenclature of their male counterparts. They favored the term “seminary”(less for religious training than for the regulated residential life they provided), a choice that was most prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century but persisted well into the later decades. Among the 191 schools included in this study, for example, 5 originally called themselves “Female Institutions,” 12 used the term “Female

College," and 23 were "Female Seminaries." The prominence of "female" in these names not only identified their student body but also hinted at social expectations for women's education that distinguished their curricula from those of male institutions.

After the Civil War, when secondary and postsecondary education expanded, some of these women's schools developed preparatory departments for those who would attend the growing number of colleges (Woody 1929, 363, 395). Curricula evolved from the secondary to the collegiate level and from the classical male model to one with more inclusive offerings in the sciences, modern languages, and literature. When recognized as a four-year college, the newly chartered institution often changed the term it used in its name to reflect advanced learning. Thus, Mount Holyoke, the first of the Seven Sisters, was established as a female seminary in 1837. It became the Mount Holyoke Seminary and College in 1888 and then Mount Holyoke College in 1893.

By the late nineteenth century, three distinct models of operation characterized higher education for women. First were the separate, single-sex institutions, such as Wellesley or Vassar. The second single-sex model, the coordinate college, enabled two nominally affiliated institutions to hold separate classes for males and females. The H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, for example, was affiliated with Tulane University in 1886, making it the first degree-granting college for women within an American university. Three years later, Frederick A. P. Barnard, president of Columbia College, established Barnard College when the trustees of Columbia refused to admit women. The third operating model, coeducation, began at Oberlin College in 1833. Radical for its time, coeducation grew in popularity from mid-century, when the West and Midwest land grant universities adopted it, beginning with Iowa in 1855 (Newcomer 1959, 12). By 1880, with the growth of public education, the majority of women in

college attended coeducational campuses (Miller-Bernal 2006, 3).

As a subgroup, Catholic women's colleges developed later than their Protestant and non-denominational counterparts. They grew from a separatist impulse that sought to protect the Catholic community from secular influences and religious discrimination at a time when many private women's colleges excluded Catholics. By the late nineteenth century, the church sponsored a number of men's colleges, but none admitted women. Then, in 1884, U.S. bishops called for institutions to prepare teachers for the burgeoning parochial school system. The College of Notre Dame of Maryland, first to respond, opened in 1895.

The number of Catholic colleges founded for women, often by congregations of religious women to educate their own Sisters, had reached 142 by 1968 (Landy 2002, 66). Catholic campuses ultimately accounted for over half of U.S. women's colleges and universities overall, 55% by Thomas Landy's estimate (2002, 368). (For comparative purposes, our sample includes 44.0% Catholic, 15.7% Protestant, 35.6% private, and 4.7% public institutions.) These institutions contributed to the democratization of education in the United States but, less fortuitously, proliferated an economically inefficient network of overly small colleges. Over the past forty years, the number of Catholic women's colleges has steadily declined, reflecting an accelerating rate of cultural assimilation among U.S. Catholics as well as a downward trend in women's campuses nationwide.

As a whole, the number of independent, religiously affiliated, and public women's colleges grew to almost 200 by the end of World War II (Landy 2002, 62). The system sustained its numbers into the 1960s, even while the proportion of women attending coeducational institutions increased (Miller-Bernal 2006, 7). Then the multiple sociopolitical factors behind the civil rights and women's

rights movements led even prestigious men's colleges like Yale and Princeton to admit women.

Since then, the number of women's college has dropped precipitously, from 233 in 1960 to 90 in 1983, as most closed, went coed, or merged with "brother" institutions (Miller-Bernal 2006, 9). Two of the Seven Sisters chose these paths; Vassar became coed in 1969 and Radcliffe merged with Harvard in 1977. The movement toward coeducation, influenced by financial factors related to recruitment, tuition production, and alumni/ae donations, has since gained legal precedent. In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled in *Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan* that under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment public schools may not discriminate on the basis of sex without proving "exceedingly persuasive justification" (O'Connor). By 2007-08, only 56 U.S. women's colleges remained on the membership roster of the Women's College Coalition (2007). (One of these, the Women's College of the University of Denver, did not appear in our data sources; the other 55 are identified below.)

Methodology

The collective trajectory of women's institutions features as part of the history of U.S. higher education (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006; Mahoney 2002; Oates 2002; Harwath, et al. 1997; Chamberlain 1988; Solomon 1985; Newcomer 1959; Woody 1929). They are likewise included in the encyclopedic dictionaries of Songe (1978) and Brenner (2003) and the compilations of Brown (2007). However, while college and university histories gloss name origins, and collective sources track name changes, no resource offers an analysis of institutional name choices in the aggregate.

This study uses the names of 191 self-identified women's colleges reporting data at either or both of two collection points. The first is the report of 266 women's institutions included in the 1947-48 Educational Directory of

the U.S. Education Office. The second is the report of 76 women's institutions included in the 1993 statistics of the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (Harwath, et al. 1997, 106). These data-collection points were chosen as representative of single-sex education for women across the second half of the twentieth century. Additional data on the colleges involved were obtained from institutional websites, electronic databases, archivists, communications directors, and, especially for colleges that have closed, print histories.

The 1947-48 directory provided information on 266 institutions for women separated into four categories: colleges and universities (155), professional and technological schools (9), teachers college and normal schools (25), and junior colleges (77). Criteria for inclusion involved accreditation by regional agencies, approval by state departments of education, and/or recognition by the Association of American Universities. In the directory, data for institutions attended by predominately Negroes were reported separately, but we combined data from the two African-American female colleges (Bennett and Spelman) with data from the other colleges, for a total of 157. [We recognize that the term "Negroes" is no longer appropriate but report it in this context as the historically accurate designation.] The directory grouped teacher colleges (four-year, degree-granting institutions) with normal schools (two- or three- year, non-degree-granting programs), and it listed junior colleges in a separate category; we did not include data from any of these latter institutions.

For purposes of this paper, then, only data from degree-granting colleges that offered a four-year liberal arts program are included. The 1947-48 directory did not consistently indicate whether women's colleges listed under the aegis of coeducational institutions had coordinate status. We elected to include both designated coordinates and those colleges that were listed under coeducational institutions but

appeared to retain separate identifies as women's colleges. As a result, our data indicate 23 known coordinate colleges.

The 1993 data came from the National Center for Educational Statistics in its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System "Institutional Characteristics" and "Fall Enrollment" surveys, unpublished data tabulated by the National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning (Harwath et al. 1997, 106). Unlike in the 1947-48 directory, institutions here self-reported affiliation (Catholic, Protestant, public, and independent). However, because there were no separate categories for institutional type, four-year and two-year degree-granting institutions are indistinguishable; we have included all of these in this paper. Of the 76 institutions that appear in the 1993 data, 57 had previously reported in 1947-48, while 19 had not, even though they were known to be operating in 1947-48.

Thus the 191 institutions discussed here include 157 from the 1947-48 directory, 15 additional easily identified women's colleges within or affiliated with coeducational institutions, and 19 women's colleges reporting in 1993 although not in 1947-48.

Three areas of potential confusion require explanation.

1. In both reports colleges identified themselves as public, private, or denominational. The 1947-48 report used the term "private," but the 1993 report used the term "independent." For the sake of consistency, our discussion applies the term "private" to both. In cases where institutions with known religious affiliations identified themselves as private, an equally accurate designation, our discussion treats them as they self-reported. Among many examples, Rivier College, Seton Hill College, and College Misericordia self-reported as private in 1947-48 but were staffed by congregations of Catholic Sisters.

2. The institutions studied are proud of their longevity, and many claim the earliest possible founding date. Moravian College for Women, for example, traces its roots to a girls' school founded in 1742, even though it did not grant degrees until 1863, after it had become the Bethlehem Female Seminary. Despite evident differences in criteria, related to questions of endowment, charter, and curriculum, our discussion accepts the founding dates supplied by the institutions.
3. Between 1947-48 and 1993 several institutions moved from the status of "college" to "university." A smaller number changed their names completely, like St. Mary of the Springs College, which became Ohio Dominican College in 1968 and Ohio Dominican University in 2002. The scope of this paper makes it impossible to discuss all these changes. Except for relevant examples, our discussion throughout retains the names that institutions reported in 1947-48.

The analysis that follows each of the tables below offers a discussion of major trends and a selection of representative cases; the length of the paper precludes exhaustive treatment. In all areas, our material incorporates multi-source data, with inevitable inconsistencies, and we welcome emendations from readers. As a whole, however, results readily reveal the functions of naming practices among women's colleges.

Categories and Descriptions

The names of the 191 reporting colleges and universities are classified by type in one of seven categories.

Institutions named for persons are identified under *female names* (Table 1), *male names* (Table 2), and *joint personal names* (Table 3). Female and male names include not only names of human founders and benefactors but also, for

religious-sponsored institutions, heavenly patrons. Collectively, personal names account for 59.8% of U.S. women's college names.

A quarter of the institutions (25.1%) have adopted names based on *placenames* (Table 4). Most of these incorporate state or city names.

Thirteen institutions (6.8%) carry *denominational or overtly religious names* (Table 5). This category includes institutions using a denominational title (e.g., Catholic, Wesleyan) and those using a religious name that cannot otherwise be classified as the name of a person or place (e.g., Rosary, Mercy).

Fourteen institutions (7.3%) bear names that combine two of the above categories in a *hybrid name* (Table 6). The majority of these pair the name of a person with a placename, typically the city or state in which the institution is located.

Two institutions (1.0%) have created unique names that proved impossible to classify by any of the categories above. These are listed under *other forms of names* (Table 7).

For each category, a table lists the name of the institution, the state in which it is located, its founding date, its affiliation, and the dates for which data are available on it as a women's institution. Thus, an "x" in each of the last three columns indicates whether it appeared in the 1947-48 report or the 1993 report and, for purposes of comparison, whether it continues to exist as a member of the Women's College Coalition in 2007-08. Coordinate institutions are marked with (C).

Collectively, the data show a pronounced preference for names that provide both a gender marker and a means for colleges and universities to highlight their distinct heritage.

Institutions Carrying Female Personal Names

Of the 191 institutions studied, 67 (35.1%) were named for women (Table 1).

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Table 1: Female Personal Names

N = 67 (35.1%)

(C): Coordinate Institutions

Name	State	Date	Affil.	1947	1993	2007
Agnes Scott College	GA	1889	Priv	x	x	x
Bessie Tift College	GA	1849	Baptst	x		
Clarke College	IA	1843	RC	x		
College of Our Lady of the Elms	MA	1928	RC	x	x	
College of St. Catherine	MN	1905	RC	x	x	x
College of St. Elizabeth	NJ	1899	RC	x	x	x
College of St. Mary	NE	1923	RC	x	x	x
College of St. Rose	NY	1920	RC	x		
College of St. Scholastica	MN	1912	Priv	x		
College of St. Teresa	MO	1916	Priv	x		
College of St. Teresa	MN	1907	RC	x		
Cottey College	MO	1884	Priv		x	x
D'Youville College	NY	1908	RC	x		
Flora McDonald College	NC	1896	Prsbyt	x		
Flora Stone Mather College (C)	OH	1888	Priv	x		
Fontbonne College (C)	MO	1841	RC	x		
Good Counsel College	NY	n.d.	RC	x		
H. Sophie Newcomb College (C)	LA	1886	Priv	x		x
Hood College	MD	1893	Priv	x	x	
Huntingdon College	AL	1854	Mthdst	x		
Immaculata College	PA	1920	RC	x	x	
Immaculate Heart College	CA	1916	RC	x		
Jackson College (C)	MA	1910	Priv	x		
Judson College	AL	1838	Baptst	x	x	x
Ladycliff College	NY	1933	Priv	x		

Le Clerc College	IL	1929	Priv	x		
Lesley College	MA	1909	Priv		x	
Loretto Heights College	CO	1891	RC	x		
Marian College	IN	1851	RC	x		
Mary Baldwin College	VA	1842	Priv	x	x	x
Mary Manse	OH	1872	RC	x		
Mary Washington College (C)	VA	1908	State	x		
Marycrest College (C)	IA	1939	RC	x		
Marygrove College	MI	1905	RC	x		
Marylhurst College	OR	1893	RC	x		
Marymount College	KS	1922	RC	x	x	
Marymount College	NY	1907	RC	x	x	
Maryville College (C)	MO	1872	RC	x		
Marywood College	PA	1915	RC	x		
Mount St. Mary's College	CA	1925	RC	x	x	x
Mount Mary College	WI	1913	RC	x	x	x
Mount St. Mary College	NH	1935	RC	x	x	
Mount St. Scholastica	KS	1924	RC	x		
Notre Dame College	OH	1922	RC	x		
Our Lady of the Lake	TX	1895	RC	x		
Pembroke College (C)	RI	1891	Priv	x		
Queens College	NC	1857	Prsbyt	x		
Radcliffe College (C)	MA	1879	Priv	x		
Regis College	MA	1927	RC	x	x	x
Rivier College	NH	1933	Priv	x		
St. Francis Xavier College for Women	IL	1847	RC	x		
St. Mary College	KS	1923	RC	x		
St. Mary of the Springs College	OH	1911	RC	x		
St. Mary's College	IN	1844	RC	x	x	x
St. Mary's College	NC	1876	Priv		x	

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Sarah Lawrence College	NY	1928	Priv	x		
Scripps College	CA	1926	Priv	x	x	x
Seton Hill College	PA	1918	Priv	x		
Siena Heights College	MI	1919	RC	x		
Siena College	TN	1922	Priv	x		
Skidmore College	NY	1903	Priv	x		
Smith College	MA	1871	Priv	x	x	x
Villa Maria College	PA	1920	RC	x		
Ursuline College	LA	1927	RC	x		
Ursuline College	KY	1938	RC	x		
Ursuline College	OH	1871	RC	x	x	x
Wilson College	PA	1869	Prsbyt	x	x	x

Many of these institutions bear the names of founders, usually their earliest benefactors. Some, like Agnes Scott or Sarah Lawrence, adopted their founders' full names. Others chose founders' surnames, such as Clarke (Sr. Mary Frances Clarke, founder of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary); Cottey (Virginia Alice Cottey); and Smith (Sophia Smith). Pembroke College was named not for its own founder but for Marie de St Pol, the fourteenth-century countess of Pembroke who founded Pembroke College, Cambridge. Radcliffe College was named for Lady Ann Mowlson, née Radcliffe, who established the first scholarship at Harvard in 1643. Queens College, which traces its 1722 charter to George III and its name to his consort, opened as Charlotte Female Institute in 1891. Its name went through three permutations before becoming Queens College in 1912, still in honor of Queen Charlotte of Mecklenberg.

Two apparent anomalies derive from women with male religious names. Regis College was named for Sister M. Regis Casserly, founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston. Similarly, St. Francis Xavier College for Women was founded by Mother Francis Xavier Warde.

In some cases, women's names were attached to colleges subsequent to their founding. Four examples from Table 1 illustrate this option. The College for Women at Western Reserve University, founded in 1888, was renamed Flora Stone Mather College in 1931 in honor of her large bequest to the school. The New Jersey College for Women at Rutgers, established in 1918, was renamed for its first dean, Mabel Smith Douglass. Forsyth Female Collegiate Institute, later Monroe Female College, was renamed Bessie Tift College in 1907 and then Tift College in 1956. Tuskegee Female College became Alabama Conference Female College in 1872, then Women's College of Alabama in 1910. It was renamed Huntingdon College in honor of Selina Huntingdon eleven years before it went coed.

The 38 Catholic colleges in Table 1 account for 56.7% of all colleges named for women. Among these Catholic institutions, the majority (34 of 38, or 89.5%) are named for heavenly patrons rather than human benefactors. Most frequently chosen in this category is the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose name appears in 26 of the 39 colleges overall named for female saints (66.6%). Some, like those with the several iterations of St. Mary, reveal clear connections. Others combine the name of Mary with a topographical feature or image: Marygrove, St. Mary of the Springs, Mary Manse ("Mary's House"). Good Counsel College honors her through implicit reference to her title as "Our Lady of Good Counsel," as does Loretto Heights College for "Our Lady of Loretto." The three Ursuline Colleges are named after St. Ursula, patron of learning throughout the Middle Ages and of the founding Ursuline Sisters. Two Dominican institutions, both with "Siena" in their names, allude to a favorite medieval patron, St. Catherine of Siena, who was a Third Order Dominican. By contrast, the College of St. Catherine (familiarily, St. Kate's) is named for St. Catherine of Alexandria.

Whether at its origin or renaming, the decision to name a college after a female highlights its purpose as a women's

college. While there are women's colleges named for men (see Table 2 below), the reverse is not true: no men's colleges named for women appear. Of course, because many formerly women's colleges have admitted men, multiple coed institutions now bear women's names. Historically, however, the presence of a woman's name in the title of the institution has served in effect as a gender marker for single-sex education. In the four examples of renaming above—Tift, Huntingdon, Flora Stone Mather, and Douglass—the term “female” was dropped exactly when a women's name was assumed. This correlation suggests that adoption of a female name was at that time a sufficient indicator of status as an educational institution exclusively for women.

Institutions Carrying Male Personal Names

Among the institutions studied, 38 (20.0%) were named for men (Table 2). Comparison to the 67 named for women (Table 1) makes it clear that women's institutions were almost twice as likely to choose female names as to choose male names.

Table 2: Male Personal Names

N = 38 (20.0%)

(C): Coordinate Institutions

Name	State	Date	Affil.	1947	1993	2007
Albertus Magnus College	CT	1924	RC	x		
Aquinas College at Milton	MA	1956	RC		x	
Aquinas College at Newton	MA	1961	RC		x	
Barnard College (C)	NY	1889	Priv	x	x	x
Bennett College	NC	1873	Mthdst	x	x	x
Cardinal Stritch College	WI	1937	RC	x		
Coker College for Women	SC	1908	Priv	x		

College of Mount St. Vincent	NY	1910	RC	x		
College of the Sacred Heart	LA	1887	RC	x		
College of St. Benedict	MN	1913	RC	x	x	x
College of St. Francis	IL	1920	RC	x		
Converse College	SC	1889	Priv	x	x	x
Endicott College	MA	1939	Priv		x	
Goucher College	MD	1885	Mthdst	x		
Hunter College (C)	NY	1870	City	x		
Lander College	SC	1872	Mthdst	x		
Lasell College	MA	1851	Priv		x	
Meredith College	NC	1891	Baptst	x	x	x
MacMurray College for Women	IL	1846	Mthdst	x		
Moore College of Art and Design	PA	1848	Priv		x	x
Mundelein College	IL	1930	RC	x		
Nasson College	ME	1912	Priv	x		
Peace College	NC	1857	Prsbyt		x	x
Randolph-Macon Women's College	VA	1891	Mthdst	x	x	x
Russell Sage College	NY	1916	Priv	x	x	x
St. Francis College	IN	1890	RC	x		
St. Joseph College	CT	1932	RC	x	x	x
St. Joseph's College	MD	1902	RC	x		
St. Joseph's College	ME	1912	RC	x		
St. Joseph's College for Women	NY	1916	RC	x		
Simmons College	MA	1899	Priv	x	x	x
Stephens College	MO	1833	Priv		x	x
Vassar College	NY	1861	Priv	x		
Wells College	NY	1868	Priv	x	x	x
Wheaton College	IL	1860	Priv	x		

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William Smith College (C)	NY	1908	Priv	x		
William Woods College	MO	1870	Priv		x	
Winthrop College	SC	1886	State	x		

As with institutions that chose female names, these colleges most often chose the name of a founder or benefactor. Russell Sage College, for example, was funded by a woman but named for a man. Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage founded it in honor of her husband Russell, who had left her his fortune. The Illinois Institute was renamed Wheaton College when Warren Wheaton donated land for its relocation. A number of colleges were named for progressive church leaders, such as Rev. John F. Goucher or Cardinal Samuel Mundelein, and for other notable men, such as Senator James MacMurray, Major James Lide Coker, financier Henry Wells of Wells Fargo Express, or nineteenth-century politicians John Randolph and Nathaniel Macon. The serenely named Peace College honored William Peace.

Among Catholic women's colleges with men's names, the majority honor saints, usually patrons of founding congregations, such as the College of St. Benedict (founder of the Benedictines), the College of St. Francis (founder of the Franciscans), or the College of Mount St. Vincent (founder of the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity, with whom St. Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity were affiliated). St. Joseph is often invoked as special protector by Marian congregations, St. Thomas Aquinas or St. Albert the Great (Albertus Magnus) by Dominican congregations.

Institutional histories make clear the importance of male patrons, whether human or heavenly, in supporting women's education. Male names lent an aura of stability and authority to colleges. Interestingly, although more than half of these founders were women, they chose male names for their institutions. Their choice hints at the extent of prevailing

patriarchy, which awarded greater influence and resources to men, even as the education these colleges provided would eventually become a means to greater equity for women.

Institutions Carrying Family or Associate Personal Names

Only 9 of the women’s colleges studied were explicitly named for couples, siblings, or associates (Table 3).

Table 3: Family or Associate Personal Names

N = 9 (4.7%)

(C): Coordinate Institutions

Name	State	Date	Affil.	1947	1993	2007
Barry College	FL	1940	RC	x		
Fisher College	MA	1903	Priv		x	
Harcum College	PA	1915	Priv		x	
Hollins College	VA	1842	Priv	x	x	x
Mary Hardin-Baylor College (C)	TX	1866	Baptst	x		
Mills College	CA	1852	Priv	x	x	x
Shorter College	GA	1873	Baptst	x		
Spelman College (C)	GA	1881	Baptst	x	x	x
Wheaton College	MA	1834	Priv	x		

Harcum, Hollis, Mills, and Shorter Colleges all specify that they were named for both the husband and wife donors, although in each case they carry the husband’s surname. Wheaton College in Massachusetts provides an interesting contrast to Wheaton College in Illinois (Table 2) in that the Massachusetts school was named for a father-daughter pair. After the death of his daughter Eliza Wheaton Strong, Judge Laban Wheaton’s daughter-in-law encouraged him to establish a school in the daughter’s memory. Wheaton Female Seminary in Massachusetts, which became Wheaton College in 1912, thus carries the surname of both the benefactor and

the honoree. Mary Hardin-Baylor College honors a non-related female and male, Mary Hardin and Judge E. B. Baylor.

Spelman College honors the maternal surname of Laura Spelman Rockefeller, daughter of Harvey Buel and Lucy Henry Spelman, rather than the philanthropic dynasty of the Rockefeller family whose name she adopted upon marriage. The founding of this college suggests not only a strong commitment to higher education for African-American women but also a desire to associate the maternal name with the eleemosynary impulse.

Two institutions were named for founding siblings. Fisher College carries the name of brothers Myron C. and Edmund H. Fisher. Barry College honors Mother M. Gerard Barry, prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan; Bishop Patrick Barry; and Rev. William Barry.

For all these colleges it is evidently quite important to their historical memory that no single founder/funder assume greater importance than the other, even in cases where only the male surname was applied. These name choices suggest a progressive sense of marital and gender equity, perhaps even a mutual philanthropic vision.

Institutions Carrying Placenames

The second largest group of women's colleges (48) is identified by placename (Table 4).

Table 4: Placenames

N = 48 (25.1%)

(C): Coordinate Institutions

Name	State	Date	Affil	1947	1993	2007
Adelphi College	NY	1896	Priv	x		
Alabama College	AL	1896	State	x		
Alverno College	WI	1887	Priv		x	x
Bay Path College	MA	1897	Priv		x	x
Beaver College	PA	1853	Prsbyt	x		

Belhaven College	MS	1894	Prsbyt	x		
Bennington College	VT	1932	Priv	x		
Blue Mountain College	MS	1873	Baptst	x	x	
Briar Cliff College	IA	1930	RC	x		
Bryn Mawr College	PA	1885	Priv	x	x	x
Cedar Crest College	PA	1867	Evang & Ref	x	x	x
Chestnut Hill College	PA	1924	RC	x	x	
College of New Rochelle	NY	1904	RC	x	x	x
Columbia College	SC	1854	Mthdst	x	x	x
Connecticut College for Women	CT	1911	Priv	x		
Elmira College	NY	1855	Priv	x		
Georgian Court College	NJ	1908	RC	x	x	x
Greensboro College	NC	1838	Mthdst	x		
Keuka College	NY	1890	Baptst	x		
LaGrange College	GA	1831	Mthdst	x		
Lake Erie College	OH	1856	Priv	x		
Limestone College	SC	1845	Priv	x		
Maryland College for Women	MD	1853	Priv	x		
Midway College	KY	1847	Priv		x	x
Mississippi State College for Women (C)	MS	1884	State	x	x	
Mount Holyoke College	MA	1837	Priv	x	x	x
Mount Vernon College	DC	1875	Priv		x	
Nazareth College	KY	1920	RC	x		
Nazareth College	MI	1889	RC	x		
Nazareth College	NY	1924	RC	x		
New Jersey College for Women (C)	NJ	1918	Priv	x		x
Oklahoma College for	OK	1908	State	x		

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Women (C)						
Pennsylvania College for Women	PA	1869	Priv	x	x	x
Pine Manor College	MA	1911	Priv		x	x
Radford College (C)	VA	1910	Public	x		
Rockford College	IL	1847	Priv	x		
Rosemont College	PA	1921	RC	x	x	x
Salem College	NC	1772	Morvn	x	x	x
San Francisco College for Women	CA	1921	RC	x		
St. Mary-of-the-Woods College	IN	1840	RC	x	x	x
Southern Virginia College for Women	VA	1867	Priv		x	
Sweet Briar College	VA	1901	Priv	x	x	x
Texas State College for Women (C)	TX	1901	State	x	x	x
Webster College (C)	MO	1915	RC	x		
Wellesley College	MA	1875	Priv	x	x	x
Western College for Women	OH	1855	Priv	x		
Westhampton College (C)	VA	1914	Baptst	x		
Women's College of the University of South Carolina (C)	SC	1919	State	x		

Many of these carry readily recognizable names of cities or states, while others, like Rosemont College (in the city of the same name) or Keuka College in Keuka Park, New York, are more obscure. Midway, source of the name of Midway College, claims distinction as Kentucky's first railroad town, built halfway between Lexington and Frankfurt and halfway between Versailles and Georgetown. Western College in Oxford, Ohio, was a daughter school of Mount

Holyoke to the east. Some carry placenames applied to more than one topographical feature. Beaver College, for example, was founded in Beaver County near the Beaver River.

In several instances, place and institution date from the same period, blurring the question of which preceded the other. Both the college and the town of Bryn Mawr, Welsh for “big hill,” share the name of the farm of an early Quaker emigrant who came to the area to escape religious persecution. St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, in St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, was begun by the Sisters of Providence almost immediately upon their arrival from France; soon the reputation of the college had eclipsed that of the town. Three colleges were named for private lands: Belhaven, for the ancestral home of its Scottish founder; Sweet Briar, for the plantation on which it was founded; and Georgian Court, for the estate of George Jay Gould, from whom the property was obtained. Pine Manor College adopted the name of a campus building nestled among the pines.

Placenames were the least likely choices for Catholic colleges, whose names more often invoked religious heritage. Three chose the biblical town of Nazareth and one honored Mount Alverno, which featured in the life of its patron, St. Francis of Assisi.

The relatively large number of colleges in the placename category (48) shows a strong connection to geographical location. Gender-neutral on the whole, a few of these names bear oblique, residual reference to founders or patrons, as the above examples attest. Most, however, are simply named for their city or state of origin. Among them, somewhat anachronistically after the inauguration of coeducational land grant universities, eight public or state colleges separated female and male students and appended the gender marker “for women.”

Institutions Carrying Denominational/Religious Names

A small number (13) of women's colleges carry explicitly denominational or overtly religious names (Table 5).

Table 5: Denominational/Religious Names

N = 13 (6.8%)

(C): Coordinate Institution

Name	State	Date	Affil.	1947	1993	2007
Catholic Sisters College (C)	DC	1911	RC	x		
College Misericordia	PA	1924	Priv	x		
College of the Holy Names	CA	1868	RC	x		
Emmanuel College	MA	1919	RC	x	x	
Incarnate Word College	TX	1881	RC	x		
Mercy College	MI	1941	RC	x		
Mercyhurst College	PA	1926	RC	x		
Mount Mercy College	PA	1929	Priv	x	x	x
Moravian College for Women	PA	1863	Morv'n	x		
Rosary College	IL	1901	RC	x		
Trinity College	DC	1897	RC	x	x	x
Trinity College	VT	1925	RC	x	x	
Wesleyan College	GA	1836	Mthdst	x	x	x

Despite a long tradition of religious affiliation, very few colleges studied carry distinct denominational markers, such as Wesleyan College, named for the founder of Methodism. Two factors may explain the small number. First, most Protestant liberal arts institutions were not women's colleges. Instead, they were coeducational, established to train ministers—and, coincidentally, their future wives—for work on the frontier. It is important to note, however, that in the conservative postbellum South, several church-related schools

(principally those sponsored by Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists) supported single-sex education for women.

Secondly, at their origin and for major portions of their history, women’s colleges sponsored by specific denominations enrolled only members of the founding churches, and recruitment among those members was active and direct. Within insider groups, the origin and purpose of these colleges were well known, and for this reason few seem to have felt the need to add overt markers of religious identity.

Two Catholic colleges are named after the Trinity, while four evoke devotion to Jesus (Emmanuel College, Incarnate Word College), Mary (Rosary College), or both (College of the Holy Names [of Jesus and Mary]). Those founded by Religious Sisters of Mercy favor “Mercy” in their names, a reflection of their devotion to Our Lady of Mercy. One of these, College Misericordia, takes its name from the Latin for “heart of mercy.” Another, Mount Mercy, was renamed Carlow College in 1969, both to avoid confusion with other Mercy colleges and to identify with the congregation’s founder, Catherine McAuley, born in Carlow, Ireland.

Institutions Carrying Hybrid Names

Several colleges bear dual-category names, many that carry reference to a person, along with an identifier of city or state location (Table 6).

Table 6: Hybrid Names

N = 14 (7.3%)

Name	State	Date	Affil.	1947	1993	2007
Barat College of the Sacred Heart	IL	1857	RC	x		
Barber-Scotia College	NC	1867	Prsbyt	x		
Catholic College of Oklahoma for Women	OK	1889	RC	x		
College of Mount St.	OH	1920	RC	x		

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Joseph-on-the-Ohio						
College of Notre Dame of Maryland	MD	1895	RC	x	x	x
College of St. Mary-of-the-Wasatch	UT	1926	RC	x		
Dominican College of San Rafael	CA	1890	RC	x		
Duchesne College of the Sacred Heart	NE	1916	Priv	x		
Dunbarton College of the Holy Cross	DC	1935	RC	x		
Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart	NY	1917	RC	x		
Milwaukee-Downer College for Women	WI	1851	Priv	x		
Notre Dame College of Staten Island	NY	1931	RC	x		
Our Lady of Cincinnati College	OH	1935	RC	x		
St. Mary's Dominican College	LA	1910	RC	x		

Barber-Scotia College was named for its founder and its Scottish Presbyterian roots. Milwaukee-Downer adopted the name of its city and its benefactor, Judge Jason Downer. Barat College of the Sacred Heart combines the name of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat with that of the congregation she founded, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Duchesne College of the Sacred Heart, also founded by the Society of the Sacred Heart, likewise attaches the name of St. Philippine Rose Duchesne, pioneer missionary and educator. Other Catholic colleges join placenames to those of their founding congregations of women religious (e.g., the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, founded by the School Sisters of Notre Dame; Dunbarton College of the Sacred Heart, built on the

former Dunbarton [sometimes Dumbarton] estate) or to names of religious patrons (e.g., Our Lady of Cincinnati College).

The apparent impulse here, especially for those that append placenames, is toward specificity. A dual name allows an institution to connect its foundation to its location or distinguish itself from others of the same name.

Institutions Carrying Other Forms of Names

Two uniquely created names proved difficulty to classify under any of our categories (Table 7).

Table 7: Other

2 names, 1.0% of the Institutions

Name	State	Date	Affil.	1947	1993	2007
Brenau College	GA	1878	Priv	x	x	x
Lindenwood College for Women	MO	1827	Prsbyt	x		

Both of these institutions take pride in having created unique names. Brenau College explains that it adopted its name from German and Latin terms for “refined gold.” Lindenwood (previously Linden Wood) College for Women reports that it adopted its name from the grove of linden trees that shaded its campus.

Transition and Transformation

Although the phenomenon of college renaming is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that this practice is closely related to the accelerating trend toward coeducation. From the 1960s on, as women’s colleges increasingly went coed they not only dropped overt gender markers (e.g., “for Women”) but in some cases adopted a completely new name as one means of marking their new identity.

Beaver College, listed above under placenames (Table 4), merits discussion here for its recent name change. Founded in 1853 between the Beaver and Ohio Rivers in western Pennsylvania, it retained its name when it relocated to the eastern part of the state in 1925. With the advent of the Internet and global search engines, however, this name became problematic. Bette E. Landman, then president, noted that the name “too often elicit[ed] ridicule in the form of derogatory remarks pertaining to the rodent, the TV show ‘Leave It to Beaver’ and the vulgar reference to the female anatomy” (CNN). In response, the college set out to create a new name for itself, one that would be, in carefully outlined parameters, “intriguing,” “appealing,” “easy to say, read, and spell,” and close to the beginning of the alphabet. It needed to be free from both “academic, geographic, and religious limitations” and “negative or offensive connotation.” In 2001, the school settled on “Arcadia,” which it describes as the “picturesque region of Ancient Greece known for its peacefulness and simplicity,” a place that nurtured poets and philosophers and freed them to pursue “independent thought and artistic inquiry” (“Arcadia University Name Change” 2007).

Conclusions and Directions for Further Research

The combined 1947-48 and 1993 data make it clear that the majority (59.8%) of women’s colleges were named for people (35.1% female, 20.0% male, and 4.7% family or associate). Of the 114 colleges in these categories, 67 were named for women. Seven institutions with hybrid names also include names of women, as do 8 of the 9 institutions with names of family members or associates. The proclivity for choosing women’s names (42.9% of the total) appears both intuitive and intentional, a means of highlighting the purpose of these colleges and the agency of their female founders or patrons.

The second largest number of these institutions was named for places. This choice suggests a high degree of town, city, or state loyalty. Many women's colleges remained quite small throughout their histories and, at a time of limited population mobility, attracted students from a narrow geographic compass. They relied on regional name recognition and appealed to a sense of rootedness, with the promise to broaden their students' world but in a familiar setting. By contrast, larger colleges, often those in urban centers, chose to highlight their location and rely on a major metropolitan area to attract a more diverse and cosmopolitan student body.

The nature of this discussion as a "snapshot" of women's colleges in 1947-48 and 1993 glosses over the significant changes that took place in U.S. culture between these two data-collection points. Within that half-century, the civil rights movement proposed new models of inclusion, and the women's movement demanded gender equity. Women's colleges, begun in an era when they were women's only path to higher education, suddenly appeared more atavistic than innovative. In the abrupt shift toward merger, closing, and coeducation that resulted, only four factors seem to have affected sustainability: urban location, historical prestige, wealth/endowment, and ties to a particular subculture of prospective students (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006, 376-79). As important as it may have been at a college's founding, an institution's name would have little power to extend its longevity.

Certainly from 1947-48 on, cultural trends in the U.S. indicate rising expectations for colleges and universities in both liberal arts and the professions. Academic reputation and standing drive an increasingly monolithic and secularized system of higher education. As distinguishing characteristics blur, institutions rely on branding and marketing to perform roles like those once played by names in marking gender and identity. Longitudinal study can highlight ways in which

women's colleges historically have used their names to underscore their unique purpose. Further study could focus on colleges that have intentionally altered their names, for the purpose of determining what cultural factors at what point in their history prompted those changes. The results can be useful in identifying the impact these factors have had on the viability of individual institutions and the phenomenon of women's education as a whole.

Lastly, it should be remembered that the persistence of name can mask the marked decline that women's colleges and universities experienced between 1947-48 and 2007, when their numbers dropped from 191 to 56. Vassar, Pembroke, Queens, Skidmore, Mills, Trinity: all of these names—and many others—remain, but they are now attached to coeducational institutions. Continued study of the names of women's colleges and universities needs to acknowledge the sociological implications of this pervasive shift from single-sex to coeducational institutions.

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