

## Chapter One

### Edith Lesley Wolfard: Founder of Lesley University

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Edith Lesley Wolfard founded the Lesley School, now Lesley University, in 1909. She has never been the subject of a stand-alone biography, nor included in standard biographical references. On the face of it, other than the founding of Lesley, her contributions to American education, thought, or leadership do not appear significant. Attention to her life story and to the parallel early history of the Lesley School, however, reveals a woman entrepreneur, activist and educator whose life is emblematic of that of a number of women and men of her era. Her story suggests how new vocations and gateway educational institutions created economic and social opportunities for hundreds of thousand of women and men in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Understanding these opportunities is critical in understanding how and why American society evolved in this period as it did.

Consider Edith Lesley's statement on the "purpose of the school" in the original Lesley Normal School circular:

The Normal Course for Kindergartners, herewith announced, aims to give to young women a thorough preparation for kindergarten work, together with certain opportunities for general culture, and for the attainment of a clear view of the larger issues of education.

By linking the experiences and public activities of Edith Lesley until the time she began her school, to the three broad purposes in this initial announcement, we can begin to assess the significance of Edith Lesley Wolfard.

### Families

Of her origins Edith Lesley Wolfard later said that her parents' families represented "two phases of Maine life of the period – the rugged and thrifty farm life, and life on the sea" (Buxton, 1938). While there was some truth to this representation, the facts of her parents' lives, create a more complex portrait.

"I Had Perished had I not Persisted," was the family motto of the Leslies, minor Scottish nobility. For a time it was also the motto of the Lesley School. Whether or not the Lesleys descended from Scottish nobility, as she apparently believed, Edith Lesley was right to cite the idea of persistence as a core value in her family story as well as in that of her school.

Alonzo Lesley was born about in 1823 in Sidney, Maine.<sup>1</sup> The Lesley family ended up in Carmel, Maine, where they struggled financially; family land was sold at

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census records: 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850. The spelling of the family name in most early records is "Leslie." The consistent spelling of "Lesley" appears only in Cambridge and Lesley School records, but it is adopted here for earlier generations of the family because it is the spelling Edith Lesley used. While no vital record has been located that definitively names Alonzo as a son of Amasa, deed activity and the

auction to satisfy debts in 1841 (*Bangor Whig and Courier*, 1841). Alonzo moved to Bangor, 16 miles east of Carmel, in the mid-1840s. He probably trained there as a shoemaker. By 1849 he was a partner in Crowell & Leslie, makers of boots and shoes. His sister Amanda married Charles Hayward, who would build a substantial grocer's business and serve a term as Mayor of Bangor. The business, political, and social connections Charles and Amanda Hayward could provide probably served the Lesleys well.<sup>2</sup>

Alonzo Lesley joined the California gold rush in 1850, apparently staying there for over a decade. By 1864 he was living in Panama, then called New Grenada, where he worked for the Panama Railroad. In the summer of 1866 the company sent him back to Bangor to recruit employees.

It was probably on this trip that Alonzo proposed marriage to Rebecca Cousens; whether they were already acquainted is not known. They married on Feb. 20, 1867 at Christ Church in Aspinwall, New Grenada (now Colon, Panama).

Rebecca Wilson Cousens was born in 1832, probably in Trenton, on the Maine coast. Her father was a mariner who worked his way up to ship's captain. About 1851 the family relocated to Belfast. It is likely the family enjoyed some material advantages. Rebecca probably attended school for more than the usual five or six years. Possibly she received private tutoring or even attended a private school. Rebecca Lesley would write the "Lesley Hymn" for her daughter's school, indicating artistic interests and possibly formal arts instruction. These interests would be echoed in Edith Lesley's concerns with culture and cultivation in her life and that of her school. The Cousens family were also ardent Unitarians, and Edith Lesley embraced both the Unitarian faith and concomitant liberal social causes throughout her adult life.

Following the deaths of her parents, by the late 1850s Rebecca Cousens was the head of the family, taking care of her younger siblings. In 1860 they are living in a Belfast widow's household, and Rebecca lists her occupation as "domestic," indicating the family's economic straits. By 1866, with her sisters settled and her brother home from the Civil War, she may have felt free to strike out on her own.

Alonzo and Rebecca Lesley had been married almost five years when their first child, Edith Leah, was born on January 27, 1872, probably in the village of San Pablo, a station along the Panama railroad. Rebecca Lesley was 39; Alonzo was about 48. New Grenada was largely the creation of the Panama Railroad, which existed primarily to take erstwhile Californian goldminers from the eastern port to the western port of the isthmus (McCullough, 1977). Alonzo's work for the Panama Railroad may have been as an engineer or surveying for the line. The family probably lived in railroad-constructed housing, with supplies coming from Aspinwall. Doctors had not unlocked the secrets of illnesses such as yellow fever, typhoid, or malaria, while the tropical environment wreaked havoc with European and American technology, clothing, and food. An American family would have found it difficult to maintain a familiar style of living (McCullough, 1977).

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execution of a power of attorney in 1850 clearly link the two. Also, Joseph Leslie, certainly a son of Amasa, named one of his own sons Alonzo.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations without attribution are from *Bangor Daily News* and/or its successor, the *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*.

Years later Edith Lesley Wolfard said of this period,

During the time my father was in Panama he had many interesting experiences. Among them was a visit from Louis Agassiz, the great naturalist and some of his associates. My father collected many specimens for him, and this collection is now in the Agassiz Museum at [Harvard University,] Cambridge (Buxton, 1938).

This story refers to the so-called Hassler Expedition that Prof. Agassiz made in 1872. This is the first known connection of the Lesleys to Harvard, to which both Edith Lesley and the Lesley School later had important connections.

The family emigrated to Bangor in 1874 or 1875, consistent with the startup of Alonzo Lesley's shoe and boot business in Bangor in September, 1875. Edith Lesley later reported that her parents were advised to relocate because of the dangers of bringing up a child in the tropics.

The Lesleys' second child, Olive, was born in December, 1875. The family moved to 7 Adams St. and by 1880 Rebecca Lesley was operating that residence as a boarding house. Evidence suggests she operated boarding houses more or less continuously for at least the next 20 years.

It is fair to inquire whether Edith or Olive Lesley attended kindergarten, or whether Rebecca Lesley was affected by kindergarten ideas. The kindergarten as named and invented by Friedrich Froebel was transplanted to the U.S. beginning in the 1860s. Froebel believed kindergarten complemented the care given by mothers through structured nurture offered by trained teachers. He created "a new culture of child nurture and education in which older child-rearing methods were renovated and put to modern uses" (Allen, 1988 p. 25; Beatty, 1995; Shapiro, 1983). Froebel believed that man was the physical embodiment of God's reason. The material world is only an expression of inner divinity. The evolution of natural forms corresponds to the stages of child growth, and the best education led the child to the consciousness of unity and how to reach it.

At the core of the Froebelian kindergarten were the "gifts and occupations." Gifts were twenty play items, and with them teachers and children were to perform activities meant to develop innate understandings and knowledge of the forms and actions they embodied. The occupations included domestically-oriented activities such as sewing, drawing, weaving, clay modeling and paperwork. Songs and games gave an avenue for self-expression and taught the individual that he or she contributed to the whole (Ross, 1909).

Froebel believed all women possessed a maternal nature, and called upon those who were also sensible, intellectually active, and single to apply their maternalism in working in kindergartens. Indeed, his system called for regular home visits by kindergartners to demonstrate these methods to mothers. Froebel's spiritual beliefs were grounded in a generalized conception of Unity. Liberal Protestants and others could embrace the kindergarten movement and could use the democratic, cooperative spirit of the kindergarten as a model of tolerance regarding cultural, religious and ethnic differences (Allen, 1988).

At the time of his death in 1852 Froebel had wanted to transplant his ideas to America. Elizabeth Peabody, American woman of letters and teacher, was inspired by reading about his methods and opened Boston's first kindergarten – the nation's second -

in 1860. In 1867 she went to Germany and met several prominent Froebelian educators, and realized she knew relatively little about Froebel's actual system. Miss Peabody returned to Boston, renounced her former practice, and resolved to educate the lay public about the true kindergarten.

During the 1870s the opening of kindergartens, and general interest in the movement, began to accelerate (Baylor, 1965). Boston was the site of key events and institutions during kindergarten's early days. In 1874 for example Elizabeth Peabody founded *The Kindergarten Messenger*. She used this publication not only to spread the word of kindergartening, but also to endorse legitimate Froebel training classes and their graduates (Harvey, 1928).

Among Miss Peabody's receptive listeners was philanthropist Pauline Agassiz Shaw. The public kindergarten that Elizabeth Peabody had opened in Boston in 1870 had closed when appropriations were not sufficient. Mrs. Shaw reopened the closed school and gradually underwrote an extensive network of kindergartens, eventually supporting 31 of them in Boston, Cambridge, and other nearby towns (Baylor, 1965).

One of the movement's most important training schools, the Garland Training School, was also located in Boston. Its graduates included Caroline Aborn and Lailah Pingree, who would both become kindergarten supervisors in the Boston schools, and Anne L. Page, who would train the Lesley sisters as kindergartners.

The permanent establishment of the kindergarten idea in Bangor dates from 1875, just as the Lesley family would have arrived back from Panama. In July of that year the local paper reported interest by "prominent Bangor ladies" in the system and *The Kindergarten Messenger*. That same fall Annie Arnold opened a kindergarten in the city. In 1877 an advertisement in the local newspaper announced the opening of another kindergarten by "the Misses EP and AF Hammatt," who were trained in Boston and Philadelphia. By 1879 three more private kindergartens were operating in Bangor, all run by women entrepreneurs.

Thus in answer to the question, could the Lesley sisters have attended kindergarten, it is clear that they could have, and that Rebecca Lesley could have been one of the "ladies of Bangor" who interested themselves in kindergartens, mothers' classes, and the like. Whether further research will settle this point remains to be seen.

The Lesley home in Bangor served as a center of young women's comings and goings, beginning with family members and encircling others over time. Rebecca Lesley was also involved in the lives of her nieces Emily and Maud Alden and nephew Carlos Alden, the children of her sister Adelaide, who had died in 1875. It appears their widowed father shared their care with his sister-in-law. Emily in particular appears to have lived more or less full time with the Lesleys until her marriage in 1890. Thus Rebecca Lesley reprised her role as caretaker for younger family members, this time with the children of her deceased sister.

In about 1883 the Lesleys moved to No. 1 Broadway, a gracious brick home at the foot of a wide avenue. Built by lumber merchant Samuel Veazie, this imposing structure became the family's next boarding house venture. By chance or design, this home also became a nexus of female educators whose ideas and characters must have influenced Edith Lesley.

The previous tenant of No. 1 Broadway, Mrs. Eben Blunt, let rooms to Anna M. Warner, a graduate of the Garland Training School, to open a kindergarten in 1882. In

1884 Anna Warner moved her successful enterprise into a new facility, at 35 Columbia St. A private (elementary) school was also opened there by Bertha M. Howe, a graduate of the Framingham, Mass. state normal school. A newspaper story explained how the success of the kindergarten led to the establishment of the school, and that Miss Howe was assisted by “Miss Emily Alden, of this city.” Anna Warner and Bertha Howe boarded with the Lesleys in 1885 and 1886; Emily Alden, Edith and Olive’s cousin, also lived at No. 1 Broadway. Maud Alden would also go on to become a kindergarten teacher in Brooklyn, suggesting all four cousins were heavily influenced by these kindergarten enterprises and the women behind them.

Edith Lesley graduated from elementary school in June, 1887. For the next two years she studied with Helen I. Newman of Bangor, who later ran a private school in Bangor for nearly 30 years. Her obituary would state:

Scholarly in her own tastes and acquirements, exact in her knowledge in a surprising number of fields, a lover of art and all things beautiful, rigid in her standards as an educator, she put into the life of her school the spirit of refinement and aspiration which were native to her.

The emphasis on refinement and culture would be important to Edith Lesley in her own school design.

By the time she left Maine, Edith Lesley had spent her teenage years acquainted with and watching at work at least three women who ran their own schools; one of these schools had operated in her own family’s home. Several teachers boarded with the Lesleys, including her cousin. Their planning, meetings, receiving of prospective students, and preparations would have gone on in the Lesley boardinghouse, and the adults living there would have discussed all kinds of matters related to these endeavors. It is difficult to escape the idea that these experiences influenced Edith and generated, or continued, her interest in schooling and becoming a teacher; even led, as she expressed later, to her wanting “a school of my own.”

The Lesley family’s tenure at No. 1 Broadway ended with its sale to a boarding house operator. The Lesleys moved to 112 State St., where Rebecca Lesley’s attempts to fill rented rooms produced the only advertising found connected to her various ventures. This may indicate that the family was struggling to re-establish its business. In the spring of 1890, the Lesley family moved to Boston.

Why the family relocated is not entirely clear. Alonzo Lesley would have been familiar with Boston through his business. Boston’s progressive environment featured many educational and cultural options for women, suggesting multiple paths to vocations as well as for volunteering; fewer options were available in Maine. Subsequent events suggest the primary motivation was economic: Rebecca Lesley’s ability to succeed as a boardinghouse operator was probably imperative in maintaining the full family income. Boston, with its more varied clientele and its high boarding and lodging rate, may have appeared a better opportunity. Soon after their move however, the family abandoned this enterprise:

Mr. Alonzo Leslie, who went from this city, to Boston a short time ago with the intention of conducting a boarding house in that city, has found the outlook not as he expected, and has given up the place which he had decided upon.

The family remained in Boston until the following year, while Alonzo plied his shoemaking trade. The most arresting fact that has emerged from this period is in the form of a brief newspaper story from early December, 1891:

The announcement of the engagement of Mr. Owen G. Davis of Middlesborough, Ky., and Miss Edith Leslie, of Boston, has just been made. Both formerly resided in this city and they will receive the congratulations of many friends here and elsewhere.

Owen G. Davis was the son of Owen Warren Davis, who owned the Katahdin Charcoal Iron Company and later founded a railroad. About 1888 the family moved to Kentucky, where Owen W. pursued coal mining and coke-making. Though we know that the younger Owen both wrote and performed in Bangor's amateur theatricals, it is not clear where or how his early schooling took place. He entered Harvard College in 1890, attending for two years, then studying geology at the Lawrence Scientific School for a year. He did not finish a degree, and by the summer of 1893 he was working as a mining engineer in Kentucky. How long Edith and Owen were acquainted before Owen proposed is not known.

The family's Boston interlude, including her engagement, is nowhere referenced by Edith Lesley, though she remained closely connected to Boston affairs for the rest of her life. Sometime during 1891, the family relocated to the Agassiz neighborhood of Cambridge, and Alonzo Lesley once again set up a shoemaking business. It can be assumed however that the family was once again looking for a boardinghouse opportunity.

The neighborhood north of Harvard Yard, east of Massachusetts Avenue (then called North Avenue) and west of Harvard's Agassiz Museum and Divinity Hall grounds was largely residential. To the south Harvard had acquired the majority of the so-called Jarvis estate, and for many years the college's main athletic fields, Jarvis and Holmes, occupied much of the area. In 1890 the college moved its team play to Soldier's Field, presaging new building in the area. Industries in East Cambridge and along the river attracted workers, and residential housing sprang up in the surrounding neighborhoods (Emmet, 1978). Whereas once the smaller villages of Cambridge were separated and surrounded by open fields, orchards and woods, rapid building characterized the city at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Reconstructing Edith Lesley's life until 1897 when she began to work as a kindergartener in the public schools, requires extensive interpretation of limited sources. We know that she never completed high school. Whether Rebecca Lesley ran a boarding house at 11 Everett St., where the family resided from 1892 until 1898, is not known, but the evidence points that way. In October, 1896 Alonzo Lesley was hit by a drover's team while he was crossing a street in Harvard Square. A local paper reported, "It is thought he was seriously injured." As he died five years later after a protracted illness, including paralysis, it may be that this accident disabled him.

Edith Lesley did not marry Owen G. Davis, so sometime in this period their engagement ended. Neither mentions the other in any records that have survived. Perhaps his dropping out of Harvard in 1893 precipitated the breakup, or perhaps the broken engagement led him to drop out. Perhaps his lack of respectable vocational direction dismayed Edith, or her parents. At this point, thoughts of a life of service or the taking up of a profession may have taken center stage for her.

### **Charity and Community**

The themes of culture and of larger views of education, two of the goals of the early Lesley School, are reflected in Edith Lesley's sustained interest in and support of the Cambridge Neighborhood House, East End Mission, and Margaret Fuller House settlements in Cambridge, as well as her involvement with Boston's Elizabeth Peabody House during the 1910s and 1920s. Her later connections may indicate volunteer work at one or more of these settlements beginning earlier. Throughout the urban United States, settlement houses were organized to promote better relationships between the classes, as well as to bring culture, education and refuge to the immigrant neighborhoods of major American cities. Those founded in Cambridge were no exception.

Cambridge Neighborhood House, opened in 1879 as a day nursery and kindergarten and incorporated by Pauline Agassiz Shaw in 1910, focused on programs to benefit mothers and children. The girls' trade school run by the organization, with courses in dressmaking, designing and cooking, was eventually absorbed into the city's schools. The Margaret Fuller House, founded in 1902 by the YWCA, served young girls living in the heavily immigrant-settled East End of Cambridge (Woods and Kennedy, 1911).

Edith Lesley's ties to the Elizabeth Peabody House were perhaps the most important in discerning influences on her as well as the sphere of her subsequent activities, because it was founded as a kindergarten-focused settlement for Boston's immigrant-populated West End. For many years the house hosted meetings of local kindergarten groups, and for a time the alumnae association of each local kindergarten training school furnished and supported a room in the house and stocked an educational library. It is possible that Edith Lesley volunteered at the Peabody House, before or after becoming a kindergarten teacher; her connection and that of the Lesley School to its activities is documented as early as 1913.

Based on later connections and donations, we can also surmise that she and the rest of the family were closely tied to the First Parish Church (Unitarian) in Harvard Square. Its minister would perform her marriage, for example. She gave money to the First Parish Church and various Unitarian charitable funds all throughout the period for which there are records of her giving. Many early ceremonies of the Lesley School were held in the church itself, ranging from Convocation to Baccalaureate sermons. While further work may reveal more focused activity on committee service at the church, it is certainly clear that the connections between the First Parish and the Lesley School were multi-layered and ongoing throughout Edith Lesley Wolfard's active tenure as head of the school.

## Education and Vocation

Edith Lesley Wolfard self-reported studying in Freiburg, Germany after education in Maine and before her kindergarten training, suggesting that this is the order of her educational experiences (Sargent, 1930). Probably after this trip, Edith Lesley completed her kindergarten training at the Page Kindergarten Normal School in Boston.

The Page School was operated by a distinguished local kindergartner. Anne Lemist Page was born to a wealthy Danvers family in 1828. She was able to pursue academic interests in botany and other subjects. Her education was eclectic. When the Danvers public high school opened, for example, she was 20; nonetheless she enrolled in and graduated from it. After that she remodeled a barn on the family property and kept a school for young children. Anne chose to learn about the kindergarten in her late 40s, completing the Garland Training School's program in 1879. She taught kindergarten for a time in an immigrant Boston neighborhood, at the Cushman School; later she taught in Danvers. She wrote a biography of Froebel that formed a chapter of the popular book, *The Kindergarten and the School* (Page, 1886). In addition to her educational activities, she helped found or fund the free kindergarten in Danvers, the Danvers Historical Society, and the Danvers Women's Association, and publicly supported women's suffrage.

"Manifestly spiritual," she believed it was "her supreme duty as a religious woman to train as many children as possible, and later to train as many young women as possible, in the higher and more spiritual ideals of education." Miss Page founded her training school in 1885. Her local influence was considerable; when Wellesley College built its child study center in 1913, the funding came from one of her students, at whose request the building was named in Miss Page's honor.

Anne Page's interests would echo some major themes of Edith Lesley's life, and this path, as well as Miss Page's very public spiritualism, may have been factors in her choice of the Page School. In addition to providing training, Anne Page was yet another entrepreneurial woman founding a kindergarten training school in her own name, adding to the several examples Edith Lesley had already witnessed.

The public school teaching career of Edith Lesley began in November, 1897, when she was appointed assistant kindergartner at the Riverside School on Putnam Ave., Cambridgeport, at a salary of \$400 a year. In March 1899, she was promoted to head kindergartner and her sister Olive, who had also trained with Miss Page, was appointed her assistant – an arrangement that continued for several years.

That the Lesley sisters embarked on teaching in urban, public kindergartens is probably no surprise given their interest in addressing the needs of immigrant and poor people. Boston was at the forefront of the burgeoning municipal kindergarten movement, and due to its proximity to Boston as well as the influence of Harvard leaders, Cambridge was not far behind. Pauline Shaw underwrote three free kindergartens in Cambridge beginning in 1878. In 1888 some 1,600 citizens petitioned the Cambridge School Committee that these kindergartens should be incorporated into the public schools. The School Committee voted in 1890 to establish public kindergartens. In a few years there were eight kindergartens employing 16 teachers and serving over 400 students (Gilman, 1896).

The growth of immigrant neighborhoods such as Cambridgeport, where the Riverside kindergarten was located, meant rapid increases in the school's class size. By 1903 there were two graded classrooms there, averaging 68 students each; while the kindergarten class size is not stated, one can assume it was equally large. In the Lesleys' own neighborhood, parents petitioned the committee to put kindergarten in the Agassiz School. The committee denied this petition, based on lack of space. The success of Cambridge's public kindergartens was manifest, but the city struggled to provide enough resources for them.

The inclusion of kindergartens in public school systems was an important development. The public kindergarten movement balanced idealism about the purposes of education with assumptions about the ability of poorer and immigrant parents to assimilate themselves and their children into American society. In Massachusetts 12 of the 20 largest cities and towns had public kindergartens by 1914, including several contiguous with or within commuting distance of Cambridge, such as Somerville, Newton, and Salem. Smaller communities such as Brookline also adopted the kindergarten in this period, which meant that opportunities for trained teachers were expanding.

Proponents of "new" or "progressive" education were influenced by many kindergarten ideas, including the child-centered approach, the significance of play, and the idea of classroom as community. John Dewey adapted the term "occupations" from Froebel to describe some of his own pedagogic activities, while G. Stanley Hall lauded Froebel's idea of racial recapitulation. The kindergartners were also embracing some of the new ideas in psychology and physiology as they impacted teaching and learning. Lucy Wheelock for example urged her students to update their teaching with the best of new educational techniques and theories. More kindergartners experimented with materials, free play, and even with fixed curriculum.

Edith Lesley worked the classic kindergarten split schedule: Mornings in the classroom with the children, and afternoons visiting homes, counseling mother, and promulgating the latest child-raising ideas. This was one of Froebel's core ideas and faithful followers held fast to it. Merl Wolfard later stated that Edith Lesley was one of these committed disciples, "and endeavored to teach through 'doing' as far as is practicable." She was what we might call today a situational educator, who thought education meant "disciplining the mind so as to be able to take in something of the total situation in which both teacher and pupils must function in any particular environment" (Wolfard, n.d.).

Throughout her career in Cambridge schools, Edith Lesley would have had contact with many teachers, families, school board members, Harvard faculty, and others who would later play roles in the founding and building of the Lesley School. This network would prove important in establishing the Lesley School. It also reaffirmed her progressive interests and may have introduced her to another cause: the playground movement.

The establishment and funding of public, free playgrounds was a social reform effort contemporaneous with, and sharing many features of, the settlement movement. The movement emphasized the links among organized play, personal health, character-building, safety, and democracy. The first supervised public playground, the Sand Gardens, was opened in Boston in 1886. The movement spread rapidly into other cities,

and in 1906 the Playground Association of America (PAA) was established. Boston reformer and Harvard alumnus Joseph Lee, an early supporter, became an internationally known playground champion; he served as president of the PAA and wrote extensively about the playground. The city of Boston as well as private organizations and area settlement houses soon included playground work as a staple of their offerings (Anderson, 2006). In 1910 Lee Hamner declared,

The playground of today is the republic of tomorrow. If you want twenty years hence a nation of strong, efficient men and women, a nation in which there shall be justice and square dealing, work it out today with the boys and girls on the playground (1910).

In addition to promoting certain virtues, the playground inoculated against less desirable contagions: “Recreation is stronger than vice and recreation alone can stifle the lust for vice,” according to Jane Addams. The supervised games and activities were not just promoting the natural playfulness and need for physical exercise of children; they also built character and promoted republican values. Like so many of the progressive impulses of the day, the playground movement married sincere wishes for reform and opportunity with concerns that without intervention, disorder and disharmony would build within an increasingly heterogeneous society.

### **The Idea of a School**

In 1900 the Lesleys moved, for what proved to be the last time, to 29 Everett St. This move may have been made to allow Rebecca Lesley to again operate a boarding establishment. Perhaps Edith and Olive influenced this choice, because their new home already had a history as a multiple family house and private school. If even then Edith Lesley was planning to open her own school, there were few sites better suited for it.

In about 1875 Sarah H. Page (no relation to Anne L. Page), had opened her “select school” for young children out of the family home at 29 Everett St. She was born in 1821 in Newburyport, and was living in Cambridge as early as 1859, when she worked as an assistant teacher at the Washington School. By 1863 she is listed as boarding at “T.A. Carew’s, 29 Everett.” Thomas A. Carew had married her sister Mary Page in 1848. They had two daughters, Mary and Abby.

The Carew family did not own the property; Sarah had purchased it together with another sister, Abby. The house was both home to the extended family, and their place of business. Several of the teachers Sarah Page employed boarded with her sister Mary; one business fed the other. By the late 1880s, niece Mary Carew was one of these teachers. All may not have been well in the Carew household; in the 1880 U.S. Census Mary Carew lists herself as head of house, even though Thomas Carew was alive. A separation and attendant economic hardship may explain why Mary Carew took boarders. It is striking how closely the early Lesley School would follow this pattern: its intimate size, the combination of boarding with a school, and the involvement of family members.

During the 1890s the Carew daughters married and moved away, and Thomas and Mary Crew both died. In late 1899, Sarah and Abby Page moved to Lowell to live with

their widowed niece. The Lesley family was living and taking boarders at 29 Everett St. by 1900, probably paying rent to the Page family. A year later, Alonzo Lesley died.

What finally impelled Edith Lesley to plan her school? Was it, as she implied in a statement many years later, a wish of hers over many years? Was she tiring of the routines of public schools, or the low pay, or both? Had she always planned to retire from active teaching when she turned 40? Did she perceive opportunities in training for young women that she wished to pursue? Having worked so closely with Olive, did they decide to start the business together?

Gertrude Malloch, an early faculty member and later principal of the school, suggested that the founding was linked to the donation of a million dollars by Joseph Lee to Harvard's then-Division of Education to encourage kindergarten education. She also recalled that a committee of Cambridge women trying to open more kindergartens in the city met in the "annex" (probably Sarah Page's schoolroom) behind 29 Everett, and that their work together with heightened interest in kindergarten may have impelled Edith Lesley to make her plans (Malloch, 1959). There was also legislative activity regarding kindergartens; a bill to require all communities of 10,000 residents or more to open kindergartens was filed in the Massachusetts legislature in 1909, perhaps raising her hopes and those of other committed kindergartners that larger enrollments and thus greater demand for trained teachers, were around the corner.

Edith Lesley's public comments on why she was establishing a school dovetail with the first statement of the school's purpose, pointing to larger aims:

I plan not merely to set up another training school; I plan for us to be different; to consider the individual of basic importance; to inculcate the ideal of gracious living; and to foster the tradition of American democracy.

Promoting individual development, the importance of culture, and an interest in engendering citizenship and democratic principles would continue to be themes during the next three decades of the school's history.

Merl Wolfard later explained her belief that "education consisted in disciplining the mind so as to be able to take in something of the total situation in which both teacher and pupils must function in any particular environment" (Wolfard, n.d.) Her own statement about her approach to education as a community function complements this analysis:

It has always been my opinion that whatever extremists may say about education one fact remains: education should be a preparation for life . . . life in this world necessitates cooperation with others. Communities, families and professions are not just a collection of individuals; they are made up of human beings who are dependent upon each other for success.

There is an underlying intellectual framework implied in her statements about kindergarten being embedded in a larger set of educational issues. In this phrasing we can glimpse Edith Lesley as a thinker, as well as see the influence of her deliberate and selective college studies.

From 1904 to 1908, Edith Lesley enrolled as a Special Student at Radcliffe College. She took courses such as “General Introduction to Philosophy,” “Metaphysics,” and “The Kantian Philosophy” taught by Josiah Royce; a yearlong seminary focused on “Mind and Body” given by Hugo Munsterberg; and George Palmer’s “Ethical Seminary.” The focus on philosophy may indicate she was striving to broaden her formal education, contemplating an avocation beyond the kindergarten classroom. She participated in at least one social organization at Radcliffe, the “Deutscher Verein” which organized German cultural events and lectures every other Friday. She took similar coursework at the Harvard Summer School. Taken together these studies and activities suggest Edith Lesley constructed a deliberate plan of self-improvement and expansion of her knowledge.

As Edith Lesley began to organize her ideas for a kindergarten training school, she would have surveyed existing local programs. While municipal kindergartens were supported in both Cambridge and neighboring Somerville, two of the ten largest cities in the Massachusetts, there was no kindergarten teacher training in either city. In Boston, the Boston Normal School included a kindergarten training program and was free to city residents. In the spring of 1909 the Garland Training School ceased to offer kindergarten training, ostensibly because its leaders found young women could not mature sufficiently as teachers in a two-year course of study. Miss Wheelock’s Kindergarten Training School offered Froebelian kindergarten training and supplemental work in the primary grades and social welfare. Annie Coolidge Rust operated a training school that included playground courses (added perhaps a few years afterward) and a mother’s course. The Perry Kindergarten Normal School and the Training School for Kindergarten were also options. At each the tuition was \$100 a year, which is precisely what Edith Lesley would charge (Lazaerson, 1971).

Another influence would have been the division in the profession about what the content of kindergarten, and by extension teacher training for kindergarten, ought to be. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the movement’s rapid growth and the impact of American progressive education led to dissensions among kindergarteners. The International Kindergarten Union attempted to sort out claims and concerns during a nine-year process (1903-1912) of trying to agree on a comprehensive statement of Froebelian principles. The so-called Committee of Nineteen could not agree, however, and ended up writing a report in three parts. The “Uniform Program” of strict Foebelian orthodoxy was championed by St. Louis educator and writer Susan E. Blow; Patty Smith Hill of Teachers College, New York, focused on flexibility and modernization; and Elizabeth Harrison of Chicago took a moderate position, maintaining some classic kindergarten methods while inviting innovation.

We can gain some insight into where Edith Lesley and thus the Lesley School fell within this continuum, from the list of core texts in the school’s 1913-14 catalogue. Two of the eight recommended books were by Susan E. Blow, two were by Elizabeth Harrison, and one was by Anne L. Page. Judging from these texts, Edith Lesley Wolfard was a moderate to conservative disciple of Froebel. The major influence of modern educational thought, perhaps a result of her Radcliffe experiences, was the inclusion of a required psychology course, and later psychological measurement, in the Lesley School’s core curriculum.

## The New School

The school's circular, "A New School for Kindergarteners," was published in the first half of 1909. An advertisement appeared three times in *The Cambridge Chronicle*. These publications together with word of mouth were how Edith Lesley promoted her new school. She was now lead kindergartner at the Houghton School, built in 1904 to replace the Riverside School a few blocks east on Putnam St. While she did collaborate with others to teach the courses, including her sister Olive, it seems that the planning of the new school was closely held. This is consistent with Gertrude Malloch's later observation that in general Edith Lesley Wolfard "seldom discussed a new plan, she just announced it" (Malloch, 1959).

Edith Lesley's first idea for where to hold her school was probably to use space at the Houghton. The Cambridge School Committee minutes of April, 1909 stated that her request "to use the kindergarten room in certain afternoons, was referred to the acting superintendent." She ended up renting three classrooms from the Cambridge School for Girls, at 36 Concord Avenue. Classes were held in the Concord Avenue school for several years, before moving onto what became the Everett Street campus. The school also used Brattle Hall (now the Brattle Theater) near Harvard Square for active games, socials, and formal dances.

The Lesley School opened on Sept. 17, 1909 probably with seven students. Classes were added semester by semester to create the first curriculum for the students. Their training was dominated by classic kindergarten methods. A member of the first class, Anna Savolainen, recalled a classroom project:

. . . Making paper designs which were pasted in a large book with black covers. The books were used in kindergarten instruction. In them we copied music of kindergarten songs, made original programs for the school year, etc. All these were marked for neatness and originality. I still have my black book.

The re-creation of the occupations and presenting the examples in bound books is a classic Froebelian instructional technique, practiced in most American kindergarten training classes of this period. Evidence suggests that Lesley students continued to produce these books well into the 1920s, as long as the Froebelian philosophy dominated the curriculum of the school.

The first circular of the Lesley School provides a valuable window into the thinking and planning of Edith Lesley for her school. Miss Lesley arranged the original courses into three groups: Kindergarten theory and practice; Education; and Supplementary Courses. She separated kindergarten from (other) education, and included in the "supplementary" coursework physical education and primary education methods. In her thinking the purely kindergarten training course comprised one compartment; formal theories of education another; and methods outside of kindergarten, were yet another way or mode of thinking about education.

Attention to the arts signals the importance of the arts and culture in Edith Lesley's philosophy. There is agreement that kindergarten education "contributed heavily to changing the primary school program" in art education, changing it from a practical and vocational skill "to a more aesthetic and expressive activity for the child."

Imagination and not imitation was the primary goal of this approach (Anderson, 2006). One can see in this focus the seeds of Lesley's ongoing attention to the arts and a consistent connection to expression and creativity.

In addition to kindergarten training the first circular proposed "A Course for Work in the Playground." In 1909 the PPA published "A Normal Course in Play" that included subjects such as child development, play theory, eugenics, games and activities, handicraft, and nature study, consistent with subjects studied by kindergartners. The proliferation of playgrounds requiring trained supervisors may have spurred Edith Lesley to add this emergent vocational field to her offerings.

The seven original faculty represent the significant strands of Edith Lesley's professional and intellectual development up to this time. In addition to herself and her sister, they were Elsie Aldrich Burrage, Boston kindergartner; Ernst Hermann, director of physical education for the city of Quincy; Harvard education faculty Henry W. Holmes; Martin Mower, Harvard instructor in fine arts; and Josiah Royce, who as we have seen, was frequently Edith Lesley's teacher at Radcliffe. Anna Savolainen remembers Edith Lesley teaching "philosophy of life," child study, and the theory and methods of Friedrich Froebel. She also recalled Olive Lesley teaching folk dancing, games, and storytelling. Ernst Hermann was a distinguished playground educator, while the influence of Harvard and the centrality of its network to Miss Lesley's plans are evident.

The Frobelian philosophy included the idea that individuals are all important and unique; Miss Lesley took time to know each student, and indeed "even after the school had developed to the point where she had many teachers in her faculty, she insisted on teaching one or two classes herself in order to keep a personal contact with the student's individuality." Edith Lesley Wolfard could also be strict; her husband recounted an instance in which a student tried to justify her misconduct by saying, "I did the best I could," and her response was, "Perhaps your best is not good enough." Likewise, she advised others to hold Lesley students to high expectations, telling a later president and dean, "The girls at Lesley will give their best when the best is expected from them. Insist on these standards. Demand the top not the second-rate."

As the focus of the school was on teaching and learning, there was little organized social life at first. Occasionally Miss Lesley would hold a tea at her home for the students. In December, 1911 she organized the school's first Candlelight Service, a time to tell Christmas stories and sing traditional songs and carols, which continued for decades. The first students also gave public recitals or demonstrations of what they were learning, from at least 1913 on, as was the custom for all kindergarten schools in Boston.

None of the students in either the first or second entering class boarded there; all lived at home. The second extant catalogue, and those for several years afterwards, specifically reference the access to Lesley afforded by "the new subway." During the third or fourth year of the school's history, a few young women desiring boarding were placed in the neighborhood.

Edith Lesley worked in the Cambridge public schools until September, 1911, a few months after the first class graduated; she would marry the following February. Olive left teaching at about the same time. Edith and Olive Lesley would have worked mornings in their kindergarten classroom, and taught at the new school in the afternoons; one wonders how they also kept up a schedule of home visits, the typical afternoon work of kindergartners, unless they divided those duties.

The fact is that the early school was one among several commitments for the Lesley sisters. Olive Lesley for example organized “a regular summer school” kindergarten for Dr. Wilfred Grenfell at his Labrador mission between 1910 and 1912. She also spoke about kindergarten methods and demonstrated folk dancing in area schools, opening a School of Dance at the Lesley School in 1914, though this effort does not seem to have lasted long (Grenfell, 1919). The sisters maintained a network of connections to the kindergarten movement within and beyond the Boston-Cambridge area. In 1913 for example Olive addressed the IKU annual meeting in Washington, DC. They also participated in the early stages of the U.S. Girl Scout movement. Edith Lesley Wolfard was elected President of the Boston council of scouting in 1914, and in 1916, Olive Lesley was lecturing on scouting in Fitchburg.

The school was also enmeshed in progressive movements of the day. Lesley students volunteered or were placed in settlement house settings to apply their skills. Several early graduates were employed in local summer playgrounds, and it may be that further research will reveal an ongoing connection to playground supervision.

Not later than 1913, the Lesley School expanded its offerings to include training for elementary teachers, focused on the early elementary grades (first through third, later expanded to grade 4). This is consonant with the movement to influence primary education and to ensure that kindergarten and primary teachers knew each other’s work. Primary teachers were increasingly organizing their classrooms to be cooperative, use more games and songs, and embrace the idea of education enhancing individual development. The connections to kindergarten ideas were organic, and the appeal of elementary is equally clear; the school would appeal to many more potential students were elementary education offered.

By 1913 there were about 43 graduates of the Lesley School; most of whom were teaching. Early research on the origins and subsequent lives of these young women has suggested some interesting commonalities. Many were second-generation Americans, and the first in their families to attend any kind of post-secondary institution. A few were non-traditional students; one was a widow with a young son who went on to a career in kindergarten teaching; another was an orphan living with relatives in a nearby town; Anna Savolainen was older and had completed some kindergarten training in Finland before emigrating. Whether by accident or design – and if further research can shed light on this distinction, it would be important to know – the Lesley School was a gateway institution for some number of its students, a fact that continues to shape the institution’s mission.

### **Conclusion**

Explaining Edith Lesley’s decision to found her school, as well as its subsequent growth, requires looking at environmental as well as personal conditions. Christine Ogren has argued that public normal schools served a distinctive student body through the 1900s, which was older, heavily female, likely to have had previous work experience, and with less access to liberal arts colleges. In the north she sees evidence that these schools also served ethnic minority groups. By the turn of the century traditional colleges were becoming more elite, and less attainable due to rising tuition; state normal schools provided an important option to those desiring education and career paths in teaching. We

can extend this argument to help explain the proliferation of private normal schools in some areas, such as greater Boston: A confluence of liberal attitudes towards women's roles and girls' education; employment opportunities; and the lack of a state-sponsored normal school in Boston itself, all probably contributed to the founding of so many private teacher training schools, many focused on kindergarten and early primary grades, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ogren, 2005).

As Claudia Goldin has demonstrated, just after the Lesley School opened, enrollments in U.S. high schools began to climb rapidly, particularly enrollment in the so-called English curriculum, not the Greek and Latin preparatory curriculum required at elite liberal arts colleges. This uniquely American phenomenon reflected the emergence of jobs requiring more education than common schooling but not four years of college, including kindergarten and elementary school teaching, fields that until the 1940s were dominated by women holding normal school degrees (Goldin, 1998). High school degrees opened the doors to occupations with status, and conversely, large numbers of high school graduates who could go into teaching meant expansion of public education could continue unabated.

We can posit that these conditions, combined with the entrepreneurial models she witnessed and sense of mission she developed, linked to her concern with social conditions, led Edith Lesley to open her school. Training in kindergarten had a wide-ranging appeal to young women and their parents, even in those families in which formal education past grade school was not common, and to first- or second-generation Americans. Networked into Harvard College and local social change movements, Edith Lesley Wolfard gave her students a wide exposure to culture, politics, and vocations. We are accustomed to think of the higher education revolution in the U.S. – wide access to college education - as occurring after World War II. If we expand our notion of this revolution to post-secondary education of all kinds, we might see Edith Lesley Wolfard and her peers as contributing to another important social change, which continues to have consequences today, and which has the potential to both widen and deepen our collective understanding of the choices and opportunities open to America's young people in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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