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Introduction

IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE number of women in the United States who were trained in architecture markedly trailed that of men; but paradoxically, the divergent forms of their practice allowed them to reach a larger and broader audience to advance Modernism. Women in architecture effectively advocated for a particular kind of Modernism in which the International Style—an austere idiom codified by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in its famed *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (1932)—was balanced by a more “humanized” expression, as the architectural historian William H. Jordy labeled it. By incorporating historical and regional references, the buildings were intended to be “physically more comfortable.”¹ Far from the simplified view presented in the traditional histories of Modernism, and equally far from the caricature advanced by postmodernists, the modern movement was notably diverse. And yet, although women architects promoted it through a variety of means, their contributions are only occasionally documented in period literature or, more often, unacknowledged or forgotten.

The house Eleanor Raymond designed in 1931 for her younger sister Rachel C. Raymond (1895–1971) in

Belmont, Massachusetts, exemplified a new type of Modernism that inspired subsequent variations (fig. 1.1). Historic images of the house show that it possessed the geometric austerity of the 1920s villas of Le Corbusier and other Europeans with whom Raymond was enthralled, but at the same time, the building incorporated locally familiar materials and accents of strong color, often relating to on-site vegetation. The interior could not have been more of a contrast as it was filled with comfortable furnishings and a hodgepodge of antiques (fig. 1.2).² The overall aesthetic of the house recalls the way that architectural historian Daniel P. Gregory describes the wood-framed farmhouse designed in 1927 by the Bay Area architect William Wilson Wurster for his grandmother, Sadie Gregory, in Santa Cruz, California: “It represented an in-between stage in the evolution of Modernism: not traditional, not avant-garde, but free-thinking and pragmatic.”³ Similarly, Raymond thought about the Belmont house as a continuation of the experiments in domestic architecture by the Europeans she admired but nonetheless connected it to the landscape and architecture of the Northeast. Moreover, she designed it while working on *Early Domestic Architecture of Pennsylvania* (1931), the publication in which she documented historic vernacular

1.1. House (now demolished) designed in 1931 by Eleanor Agnes Raymond for her sister Rachel C. Raymond, 9 Park Avenue, Belmont, Massachusetts. *Eleanor Raymond Photographic Collection, Historic New England, gift of James E. Robinson III.*



1.2. Rachel Raymond house interior, c. 1932. *Raymond Collection, Historic New England, Robinson gift.*

buildings in photographs that emphasize simple geometries like those of the Rachel Raymond house.

Raymond was interested less in social housing than in designing modest houses for individuals or families. As she once explained, her mission was to plan informal, flexible, and livable spaces “with the owners instead of for them.” She was humble and had no intention of creating a monument to herself in a signature style, as male architects tended to do.⁴ Raymond carried her design sensibility into the many roles she played as an alumna of the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture—as critic, lecturer, donor, volunteer, alumnae president, and trustee. Informally founded just a year before she enrolled in 1916, the school was incorporated as an educational institution in 1924 and was distinguished for being exclusively dedicated to the professional education of women, most of whom were college graduates, frequently from the Seven Sisters (fig. 1.3).⁵

The director, Henry Atherton Frost (1883–1952), also taught at Harvard, where he was recognized for his work with beginning architecture students in graphics (descriptive geometry, isometric and axonometric projection, shades and shadows, and perspective) and freehand

drawing, as well as design. The Cambridge School pedagogy progressed over time—from informal tutorials and occasional lectures to structured curricula composed of the histories of architecture and landscape architecture, graphics, freehand drawing, design (which included the completion of numerous “special” problems), construction, and professional practice.⁶ By 1941, students were required to base much of their work on actual sites and to produce models that showed the details of construction instead of making elaborate Beaux Arts–oriented drawings of hypothetical buildings, as students had done twenty years earlier. Nonetheless, the school never deviated from its core principle that all entering students share a broad first-year curriculum encompassing the fundamental elements of design, after which they could concentrate on their chosen discipline of either architecture, landscape architecture, or (beginning in 1935) “interior architecture.”⁷ Students were taught to consider a building and its corresponding landscape as a single design problem instead of two separate assignments, which was the more customary approach in design; a centerpiece of the school’s method of training was collaboration.⁸ Though influenced by the evolving curricula at Harvard—since many Cambridge School instructors were also employed there—the Cambridge School was different in that its small size and gendered focus made it possible to adapt its curricula to compensate for any perceived deficiencies of the students. For the same reason, the school was able to respond to student demand for more complex problems, expanding beyond the domestic realm, which was the stereotypical assignment for women and an early mandate of the school.

This comprehensive training gave Cambridge School women an edge in that each was prepared to expand beyond her own specialization into other areas of design. Still, none escaped the overarching problem that the field was fraught with sexism—in hiring practices, promotions, titles, assignments, salaries, and construction-site supervision. Women trained in architecture at coeducational institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)—where they were allegedly perceived as a “nuisance”—were vulnerable to prejudice from the time they were first admitted in the late nineteenth century.⁹ Regardless of where they trained, many were able to innovate meaningful professional situations in which they could apply their knowledge and skills to move beyond entry-level drafting work. Advancing Modernism in a variety of capacities was the path to their success.

This study considers the ways women created gratifying forms of professional practice without the benefits of male-dominated educational and professional networks. In doing so, it builds on groundwork provided by feminist historians. Linda Nochlin's call to arms, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (*ArtNews*, 1971), opened debate on two particularly salient issues: the lack of historiographical attention paid to women artists and the absence of institutional support for them. More than four decades later, when the architectural historian Despina Stratigakos echoed Nochlin by asking another question in her book, *Where Are the Women Architects?* (2016), she recognized that women still were excluded from high-level architectural practice and that they were receiving far too little attention from scholars and critics.¹⁰

It was not until thirty years after the Cambridge School closed that scholars began to show any interest in the school. In 1973, Doris Cole devoted a chapter to it in her pioneering publication about the history of women in architecture; four years later, Mary Otis Stevens (b. 1928), an architect trained at MIT, referenced the school in her chapter on women's "Struggle for Place" in the catalog for the pathbreaking exhibition *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, spearheaded by the architect-critic Susana Torre (b. 1944).¹¹ In 1987, landscape architect Dorothy May



I.3. Photograph of women graduating from the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (1915–42), Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1940. *Left to right:* Alice Morgan Carson, Franziska Maria Alma Porges, Katharine Frances Wilson, Priscilla Congdon Gladding, Ann Murphy Halle, and Elizabeth-Ann Campbell. *Private collection.*

Anderson (1916–93) published a specific history about her alma mater, *Women, Design, and the Cambridge School*, which was informed by a survey she had sent to alumnae; two years later, she contributed a chapter in the publication *Architecture: A Place for Women*.¹²

Like the scholarship on the Cambridge School, the first studies of women in architecture from the late nineteenth century onward are broad in scope but underscore the women's decisive roles in shaping the built environment. In the only essay to address gender in the well-known volume edited by Spiro Kostof, *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession* (1977), architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright argues that the traditional association of women with the home led some of them to limit their architecture practices to domestic design.¹³ One of their roles, according to Wright, was that of the "reformer," a reference that recalls the nineteenth-century women examined by Dolores Hayden in her influential book, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (1981). There, she describes "material feminism," efforts by women to reconceive the built environment, especially the home, to achieve progressive objectives and improvement in the lives of women.¹⁴

In 1974, both the West Coast Women's Design Conference at the University of Oregon in Eugene and the Women in Architecture Symposium at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, demonstrated the attention being directed toward the state of women in the profession, including its multiple barriers to full participation.¹⁵ At the latter, where the psychological and social implications of women practicing architecture were of particular concern, a positive note was sounded by Natalie L'Hommedieu Griffin de Blois (1921–2013) in a workshop entitled Architectural Practice, or The Rewards of Building Buildings.¹⁶ Having achieved the level of associate partner in the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, she was one of the few women who could reflect on her experience in the design and construction of large commercial projects. Echoing a statement from 1955 by the modernist architect Pietro Belluschi, Gwendolyn Wright referred to Griffin de Blois as "that exceptional one," meaning that she was a woman able to have a career in architecture on a par with a man.¹⁷

Following the initial spate of publications, historians and critics continued to address the role of women as professional architects while also engaging in a

broad-ranging recovery of the history of women and the built environment. As a cofounder of *Heresies, A Feminist Journal on Art and Politics*, for example, Susana Torre was instrumental in dedicating its 1980 issue to the theme of “Making Room: Women and Architecture,” which addressed the social, political, and economic implications of the involvement (or lack thereof) of women in design.¹⁸ The succeeding discussion of women modernists built upon the literature that followed in the 1980s and beyond.¹⁹ Of note is the pioneering scholarship of the architectural historian Alice T. Friedman, who drew attention to the role of women as patrons of modernist architects in her book *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (1998). As this study also shows, in a variety of capacities, women who exerted an influence on Modernism did so by virtue of their female collaborators and supporters.

While it is important to acknowledge the ways that sex and gender affected how women architects identified themselves as well as how they were known by others, it is also problematic to apply current terminology to earlier periods. The words *woman* and *women* are used advisedly in this text with an awareness of the varied terminologies applied to gender identification at the time of this writing. As far as can be determined from historical records, the women architects examined here were cisgendered rather than gender nonconforming—meaning that their gender identity and senses of self were congruent with the sex assigned to them at birth—and they presented as women throughout their lives.²⁰

Some of the women found ways to escape from widely held assumptions about the capabilities of women and men. For example, even though she prevailed in the face of gender prejudice, Ellamae Ellis League (1889–1991) of Macon, Georgia, was among those who outwardly rejected the label *woman architect*, declaring in an interview, “I was always an architect, not a woman architect but an architect. I encourage women going into the profession not to concentrate on being separate as a woman but to concentrate on being a good architect.”²¹ Correspondingly, when at midcentury the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia commissioned Elizabeth “Bess” Hirsh Fleisher (1892–1975) to design housing for its nurses, she insisted, “sex has nothing to do with the design”—despite the fact that women would also own and occupy the building.²²

On the other hand, some architects appealed to end users precisely because they were women. Historical



I.4. Eleanor Raymond. *Private collection.*

examples include the Berkeley Women’s City Club (1930), one of the better-known buildings by Julia Hunt Morgan (1872–1957) of San Francisco; an English cottage for Tau Zeta Epsilon (a society of arts and music at Wellesley College), designed by Raymond in 1929 in collaboration with two other alumnae, Esther Parsons (Brabson; 1902–92) and Helen Frances Baxter Perrin (O’Rourke; 1903–94); and an award-winning clubhouse in the Bay Region style for the women’s ZLAC Rowing Club in San Diego, produced in 1932 by Lilian Jeannette Rice (1888–1938), who was also a crew member and served as club president from 1915 to 1916.²³ There were other situations in which the perspectives of women architects added tremendous value to projects. In the 1940s, based on their previous experience of combining their two families in one house, Jean Bodman Fletcher and Sarah “Sally” Pillsbury Harkness (1914–2013) influenced the layout of Six Moon Hill, the celebrated community development in Lexington, Massachusetts, which is still appreciated for its family-centered plan.

The occasional woman presented herself with elements of masculine dress or engaged in aspects of practice identified as male. Morgan regularly donned a formal shirt and tie, as did Raymond (fig. I.4). The architect Theodate Pope Riddle (1867–1946) renounced her given name, Effie, at age nineteen to adopt Theodate, the name of her grandmother and one that she could shorten to the

more masculine-sounding Theo, by which she became known.²⁴ Without historical evidence or personal information, it is hard to say more about these instances of gender nonconformity and how they affected the personal lives of women architects.

More often, however, their gender presentations conformed to social and cultural norms. Because training in architecture required a significant investment of both time and money, most women architects came from financially stable backgrounds. Scholarships and grants were rare for women, though Marion Lucy Mahony Griffin (1871–1961) and Natalie Griffin de Blois attended college with the support of generous patrons. In certain instances, women obtained influential positions in architecture by unconventional paths that did not include years in higher education: Louise Blanchard Bethune (1856–1913), one of the earliest professional woman architects in the United States, is an example.²⁵ Still, the most effective and visible women advocates for modern architecture primarily came from privileged backgrounds and thus conformed to the social expectations for bourgeois women even as they worked against the stereotypes that limited their professional opportunities.

Heterosexual marriage loomed large in their communities, and given that a professional collaboration with a husband could increase the prospect of his wife practicing architecture, many women married men from similar backgrounds. According to the sketch completed by the Austrian-born architect Franziska “Fran” Maria Alma Porges (Hosken; 1918–2006), immediately after she and her female colleagues were allowed into Harvard’s architecture department in the fall of 1942 came “the story . . . [of] newlyweds” (fig. 1.5). Some women architects, however, followed bourgeois expectations by abandoning their hard-won careers and devoting themselves solely to the home front. For instance, during World War II, Faith Gregg Bemis Meem (1902–89) proudly parented four evacuated British children in addition to her own daughter.²⁶

A significant group of women avoided the expectations of heterosexual pairing by eschewing marriage and partnering with other women. An outstanding example of this sort of household formation is that of Eleanor Raymond and Ethel Power, who spent their adult lives together as partners at their home in Boston and at their summer residence in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Power was one of the succession of editors at *House Beautiful*—“all of them with short tenures and most of



1.5. Page in *The Architectural Sketchbook* / Fall 1942 by Franziska Porges. Franziska Porges Hosken Papers, Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University.



I.6. Eleanor Raymond, studio of Amelia Peabody, Mill Farm, Dover, Massachusetts, 1933.

them women”—according to historian Monica Penick, who credits her with the magazine’s “upward trajectory” prior to the influential editorship, from 1941 to 1964, of Elizabeth Gordon (1906–2000).²⁷ Yet, unlike Gordon, who was an infamous opponent of the International Style, Power championed Modernism during her decade-long tenure, especially as interpreted by her American contemporaries, Raymond chief among them (see Appendix II).²⁸ In 1934, *House Beautiful* was sold and relocated to New York, and although a new editor took over, Power continued to contribute articles and shape the content. In “I’ve Got My Own Ideas,” published in September 1937,

she creates her own version of a modern house in a story in which she and her fictitious husband “Gregory” receive a windfall of \$10,000 that allowed them to commission a family home.²⁹ The ideas Power presents are consistent with her position as editor; what is remarkable is her need to contrive a heterosexual marriage and family for herself. As such, it demonstrates the societal pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations as well as to the strong connection between concepts of the home and the nuclear family. Despite what she implied in the article, Power, in fact, relished the summer home she created with Raymond, writing in a poem addressed to her in

1967, “I cannot imagine anything lovelier than here, in this place where I am. Here are beauty, quiet, well-being; here is my Sanctuary Hammock; and here are you.”³⁰ Publicly, however, neither Power nor Raymond discussed their relationship. They also did not name their sexual orientation—even late in life when Raymond told an interviewer, “I never wanted a husband or to have children. I wouldn’t have the slightest know-how of how to take care of children, nor would I want to take care of them.”³¹

Not all relationships between partnered women architects lack documentation: an exception, for example, are the letters exchanged by the African American artist, architect, and educator Amaza “Mazie” Lee Meredith (1895–1984) and her life partner, the educator Edna Meade Colson (1888–1985).³² The archive of their correspondence and scrapbooks at the historically Black Virginia State University in Petersburg, where they both taught, evinces the passion between the two women; moreover, letters from members of both their families document their acceptance of them as a couple (c.2–3).³³ Historians have argued that Black culture was more open to romantic relationships outside of heterosexual marriage than the white culture from which most modernist women architects sprang. For example, in Harlem, not far from Teachers College, where Meredith and Colson studied, lesbian weddings were known to exist in the 1920s and 1930s, sometimes even involving one member of the couple “passing” (as a man) to obtain a marriage license.³⁴ Meredith was also the product of an interracial marriage, a type of pairing more tolerated in Black than white communities.

For Power and other women in the period, being a modernist (or “a modern” as they were sometimes referred to at the Cambridge School) often meant something different than it did for men, although in some cases they drew directly on the work of European modernists, just as their male counterparts in the United States did. For instance, in some of the projects that Raymond executed in Dover, Massachusetts, for her most important patron, Amelia “Amy” Peabody (1890–1984), a granddaughter of the founder of the securities firm Kidder Peabody, her understanding of European Modernism exerted a powerful formal impact. Raymond composed designs from simplified geometric forms, avoiding the overt historicism that still dominated architecture, and she incorporated newly perfected materials like steel, concrete, and glass (fig. 1.6; see fig. 2.2). More often, however,



1.7. Florence Hope Luscomb in front of her cabin, Elk Horn Ranch House, Tamworth, New Hampshire, 1940. *Papers of Florence Luscomb*, Schlesinger Library, Harvard Radcliffe Institute.

women practiced a sort of Modernism that was less formally radical but nevertheless functionally and socially progressive. In some instances, they were practicing in regions where Modernism was unfamiliar or unacceptable to potential clients. Women typically tempered their uses of the forms and materials associated with Modernism with references to local architecture and culture to blend with, rather than disrupt, the existing built environment: vernacular adobe buildings in the Southwest and wood-framed buildings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Northeast, for example.

Even when their designs did not appear modern because they lacked signature formal elements, women nonetheless embraced some of the movement’s programmatic aspects. In houses and apartment buildings, women were apt to espouse a commitment to functionalism, an approach perceived as the opposite of so-called Victorian architecture, which ostensibly privileged aesthetics over practicality. For instance, in the modest cabin that Luscomb designed for herself in New Hampshire, she maximized the property, both in- and outdoors to ensure it could accommodate her numerous guests on their getaways (fig. 1.7).³⁵ The cabin can be thought of as “modern” (and its architect as a modernist) even though it

lacks Machine Age materials and visual severity. Similarly, Raymond was recognized for her penchant for functional design: as “a woman of today” dedicated to “making a house work properly,” a client reported, Raymond wanted “workable, no nonsense, architecture.”³⁶ No matter how progressive the programs were, buildings that failed to correspond to formal definitions of Modernism tended to be excluded; according to such criteria, Luscomb’s cabin and much of Raymond’s functionalism would not be considered modern.

The earliest Cambridge School architecture graduates would have entered a profession in which a small number of women had already demonstrated they could have a modicum of success and gain recognition, albeit within parameters established by men. The earlier generations of trailblazing female practitioners born during or just after the Civil War include Lois Lilley Howe (1864–1964), whose eponymous Boston firm, which eventually included her younger partners Eleanor Manning (O’Connor; 1906–86) and Mary Almy (1883–1967), produced designs for suburban houses and other building types, many inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement. All three studied under the historicist French Beaux-Arts system of design at MIT. Theodate Pope, on the other hand, was solely tutored by art historian Allan Marquand of Princeton University and also relied on the large collection of books on historic architecture that she assembled.³⁷ Despite their commitment to historicism in the broadest sense, these women established a precedent in the early twentieth century for the next generation of modernists by their career choices and styles of living. Doris Cole and Karen Cord Taylor observe in their monograph about the firm of Howe, Manning & Almy (1913–37) that “in their high standards for [domestic] design and in the confidence with which they pursued other projects, they set the stage for subsequent women architects.”³⁸ Similarly, in the article “The Modernism of Theodate Pope,” architectural historian James F. O’Gorman describes his subject as “thoroughly modern” primarily because she surmounted the expectations of her family, the traditions of her social class, and the status quo of the profession in order to join “the thin ranks” of trailblazing women fighting for a footing in male-dominated practices.³⁹ Pope Riddle’s work was informed by the Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts aesthetics, but she was also deeply committed to using architecture to achieve progressive social and institutional ends, a central tenet of Modernism.

Women architects like these often joined the profession by appealing to the conventional association of women with the home. Like their contemporaries Katherine Cotheal Budd (1860–1951) of New York and Hazel Wood Waterman (1865–1948) of San Diego, they did not limit themselves to domestic architecture; however, they did justify their practice as an extension of women’s inherent domesticity and published articles to that effect.⁴⁰ In contrast, Julia Morgan rejected this notion and instead promoted herself as an architect on the basis of her knowledge of building technology and engineering as well as her professionalism.⁴¹ She relied upon a network of female clients as she moved beyond domestic commissions to public buildings, including campus facilities at Mills College in Oakland (the first women’s college west of the Rockies) and buildings for such female-serving organizations as the YWCA.⁴²

The younger women architects educated in the interwar period knew their precursors not only through New England buildings but through exhibitions and talks. When in 1931 the Cambridge School mounted the exhibition *Houses and Gardens Designed by Women*, the firm of Howe, Manning & Almy lent examples of its work, and also that year each of the principals participated in alumnae activities as special guests.⁴³ At the annual alumnae dinner at the Boston Architectural Club, Manning was among the chosen speakers, observing in her toast, perhaps sardonically, “It’s easy to be an architect—all you have to do is to do it better than everyone else.”⁴⁴

Though Pope Riddle also participated in the Cambridge School’s exhibition, she was not present that year at the alumnae weekend. Had she been there, she might have cautioned that superior ability did not necessarily lead to commissions, nor did it ensure recognition for a female architect’s work. As O’Gorman shows, Pope Riddle hired the New York firm of McKim, Mead & White, known for its classical architecture, to make detailed drawings of the overall ideas she originated for a house called Hill-Stead for her parents in Farmington, Connecticut. Unfortunately, the plans were erroneously attributed only to McKim, Mead & White when published soon after the house’s completion in 1901.⁴⁵ The establishment was so reluctant to give credit to women architects that, in 1915, when Nugent Publishing was producing a directory of New York architects, it refused to print a photograph of Pope Riddle. The still unmarried architect wrote to her mother:

*You will be most amused to learn that I was called up by telephone ... and a masculine voice asked if I were really Theodate Pope the architect, and when I said I truly was, this voice apologetically explained that it would be impossible for them to use my photograph as they had just heard I was a woman. They had not believed the rumor, hence the incredulous voice over the telephone. So you see, although art has no sex, I am discriminated against, though on the merits of my work they had selected me as one of the architects whom they wished to mention.*⁴⁶

Pope Riddle was not personally active in Boston architectural circles, but her work was known to Raymond, in whose archive there is a postcard of the Avon Old Farms School (1918–27) that she built near Hartford, Connecticut.⁴⁷ The all-male school, like Hill-Stead, was funded by the Pope family's wealth; her investment in the school alone was about \$7,000,000, which included thousands of acres and buildings that were part of a larger effort to memorialize her father Alfred Atmore Pope, an industrialist who died in 1913.⁴⁸

The extraordinary financial and moral support Pope Riddle received from her family enabled her to breach the considerable barriers to architectural practice that women often experienced.⁴⁹ Yet even if women did not have support from their families in their pursuit of architecture, as men more often did, they could be adept at finding it elsewhere. Most male architects resisted employing and mentoring women, but a few took the opposite approach. George Washington Percy, a professor of engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, mentored Morgan and even offered to help pay her expenses to study architecture on the East Coast or in Europe. Another Berkeley instructor, Bernard Ralph Maybeck, involved Morgan in a small group of talented students to whom he offered special instruction as well as employment following their graduation in the spring of 1894.⁵⁰ Howe also benefitted professionally from the encouragement of established architects, including Francis Ward Chandler, a partner in the Boston firm of Cabot and Chandler (1875–88), who had designed a house for Howe and her mother following her father's death in 1887. Howe reminisced, "Always interested in houses, I had wanted to be an architect but had been suppressed by my pastors and masters on the ground that I could not be an architect because I was a woman."⁵¹ Nevertheless, just as Chandler was becoming head of its

department of architecture, she was admitted to MIT. After completing a two-year "partial" course in 1890, Howe worked as a draftsman for Francis Richmond Allen in Boston for about two years before accepting a position with Robert Swain Peabody, a leading Colonial Revival architect in the city who was also a family acquaintance.⁵² From him, she learned about the competition for the Women's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Howe placed second to Sophia Hayden (1868–1953), the first woman architecture graduate at MIT, but nonetheless won \$500, which funded an extended trip to Europe with her mother and sisters. When Howe could not find a drafting job upon her return, she established her own practice with commissions for houses from family friends. Subsequently, in 1901, with the support of her "old friend" Peabody, Howe became a member of the American Institute of Architects.⁵³

Male practitioners recognized Howe's talent and passion and were in positions to help her advance professionally. Even so, when she was successful enough to expand her own firm, Howe cultivated only female partners—Manning in 1913 and Almy in 1926. The arrangement stemmed from an early experience in her office, as she recounted: "By 1900, I had an office 'downtown' with two men. They left me high and dry at the end of a year—one of the best things that ever happened to me."⁵⁴ Not only did she surround herself with women, but Howe mentored other MIT graduates whom she hired to bring current ideas to her firm.⁵⁵ Her ability to create a network of like-minded women was a pattern that became more pronounced as women advanced in the field.

The circumstances of Marion Mahony were different in that she had already met success as the second woman architect to graduate from MIT, the first licensed female architect in Illinois, and the first employee, in 1895, of Frank Lloyd Wright. His son John recalls that Mahony and another woman architect, Isabel Roberts (1871–1955), sported "smocks suitable to the realm" as opposed to the five men in "flowing ties."⁵⁶ Unlike Morgan's San Francisco office, in which professionalism was everything, in Wright's office an artistic ethos set the tone.⁵⁷ Recognizing Mahony's superb graphic skill, Wright asked her to lead the practice during his absence with Mamah Borthwick Cheney in Europe, beginning in 1909. Although Mahony declined and the responsibility went to Hermann Valentin von Holst, she insisted on "a definite arrangement" with von Holst in which, as she explains, she could have

“control of the designing.” The house produced for David Moses Amberg and his wife Harriet Houseman Amberg at 505 College Avenue in Grand Rapids, Michigan, stemmed from this arrangement (fig. 1.8).⁵⁸ At the same time, the legendary two-volume *Wasmuth Portfolio* (1910), comprising drawings of Wright’s work, contains some signed by or attributed to Mahony.⁵⁹ She contributed far more than beautiful renderings, however; Friedman is certain that her “progressive, democratic example—as a feminist, artist, activist and intellectual—left a mark on Wright’s heart and mind that helped shape his vision for the future and for the community he hoped to create around him.”⁶⁰

Despite her talent and promising career, Mahony was eclipsed in the profession by her husband, Walter Burley Griffin, after their marriage in 1911.⁶¹ Their thirty-year working partnership may have facilitated her involvement in more large-scale work than Mahony Griffin would have had on her own, but she often did not take credit for her contributions.⁶² Not surprisingly, scholars have underestimated or misunderstood her role.⁶³ In 1984, Elizabeth “Betty” Bauer Kassler (previously Mock; 1911–98), a former curator in architecture at MoMA, wrote in a letter to a colleague about that “mysterious Mahony woman,” concluding that it was “too bad that more is not known about her.”⁶⁴ More recently, her pervasive influence has been demonstrated by Prairie School scholars including Thomas S. Hines, who contends that even though their designs were credited to Griffin, the couple, in fact, worked as a team with Mahony Griffin being a source of ideas, a design critic, and “always as the renderer and interpreter of his (and their) visions.”⁶⁵ Thus, Mahony Griffin had a significant role in the self-conscious development of an American modern architecture in the form of the Prairie style.

While the work of Wright and other Prairie School architects continued to exert an influence on American design in the 1920s and 1930s, not all women architects advocated for Modernism. Even though the Cambridge School, for example, increasingly embraced Modernism, there was never just one perspective; instead, students drew from a variety of sources and inspirations—from regional vernaculars (both in the United States and abroad) to avant-gardism (in France, Germany, and the Low Countries), to ubiquitous historical revivals. Still, a common thread united them: they demonstrated a commitment to using architecture as a means of engaging with the communities they created for themselves or their clients. In addition, when they moved beyond the scale of

the single house to lay out larger developments (a trend in the postwar period when suburbs and resorts were expanding), their programs fostered evolving lifestyles and functions, and they also facilitated tightly knit communities. When women architects addressed larger-scaled urban and housing issues, they frequently started with human needs rather than with abstract modern principles. Even when women built only a single house (commonly a retreat for themselves), they did so while keeping in mind the friends and relatives they intended to welcome.

This examination of twentieth-century women in architecture unfolds in eight thematic chapters. Chapter I examines their formative years by charting the dynamic evolution of education, including the establishment of the Cambridge School as a professional school for women. It focuses on the school’s innovative pedagogy, particularly its emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, which influenced the modernization of architecture school curricula elsewhere, including at Harvard.⁶⁶ Chapter II revisits the familiar account of Modernism’s arrival in the United States and revises it to include women. As it expands on the sources of Modernism, consideration is also given to the Mexican architecture and landscapes that women architects documented. It was not only the European-inspired concrete buildings but the traditional adobe architecture situated in dramatic, colorful settings that Victorine “Vicki” du Pont Homsey, a Cambridge School-trained architect, saw as beautiful in their simplicity (fig. 1.9). Inevitably influenced by the deluge of contemporary publications about Mexico, frequently penned by women, American travelers sent rhapsodizing letters home about their tours, just when, as Keith Eggener described, modernist Mexican architects “began to step away from the International Style toward a site-specific regionalism.”⁶⁷ Chapter III applies current network theory and computational methods to the activities of the Cambridge School architects whose networking patterns are represented in visualizations of their educational, professional, and social connections (figs. 3.2–4). Despite being excluded from male-dominated institutions, women developed associations that led to professional success, and Raymond and Power excelled at creating domestic spaces in which relationships could thrive. Women who practiced modern architecture often engaged in collaboration, the subject of Chapter IV. Though it often blurred professional and personal boundaries, a substantial number of women architects married and practiced with



I.8. Marion Lucy Mahony, house for David and Harriet Houseman Amberg, 505 College Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1909. *Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.*

men in the same or related fields. Personal and professional coupling, sometimes with other women, afforded women a quality of practice otherwise difficult to attain. Collaboration was also essential to the enterprising women architects chronicled in Chapter V who worked outside of their profession. Unlike male architects, whose professional trajectories were usually linear, women had to re-create themselves in multiple settings to achieve similar longevity. Arguably, through their work in related fields, they were able to disseminate Modernism to a larger and broader audience than they could have done in architecture alone. Chapter VI examines the extent to which women architects led the reinvention of the modern

American home—however much they may have objected to their relegation to the domestic sphere. Cambridge School women chafed against this affiliation, particularly those who insisted that the school omit the word *domestic* from its name. Their progressive contributions to residential design, which included solar heating, prefabrication, and innovative materials, countered the perception that Machine Age forms and materials were inhospitable.⁶⁸ In fact, women advanced modern concepts on a variety of scales—from an individual object to a city or region, as detailed in Chapter VII—about creating communities. Instead of private estate planning, they focused on urban plans with large housing projects and community

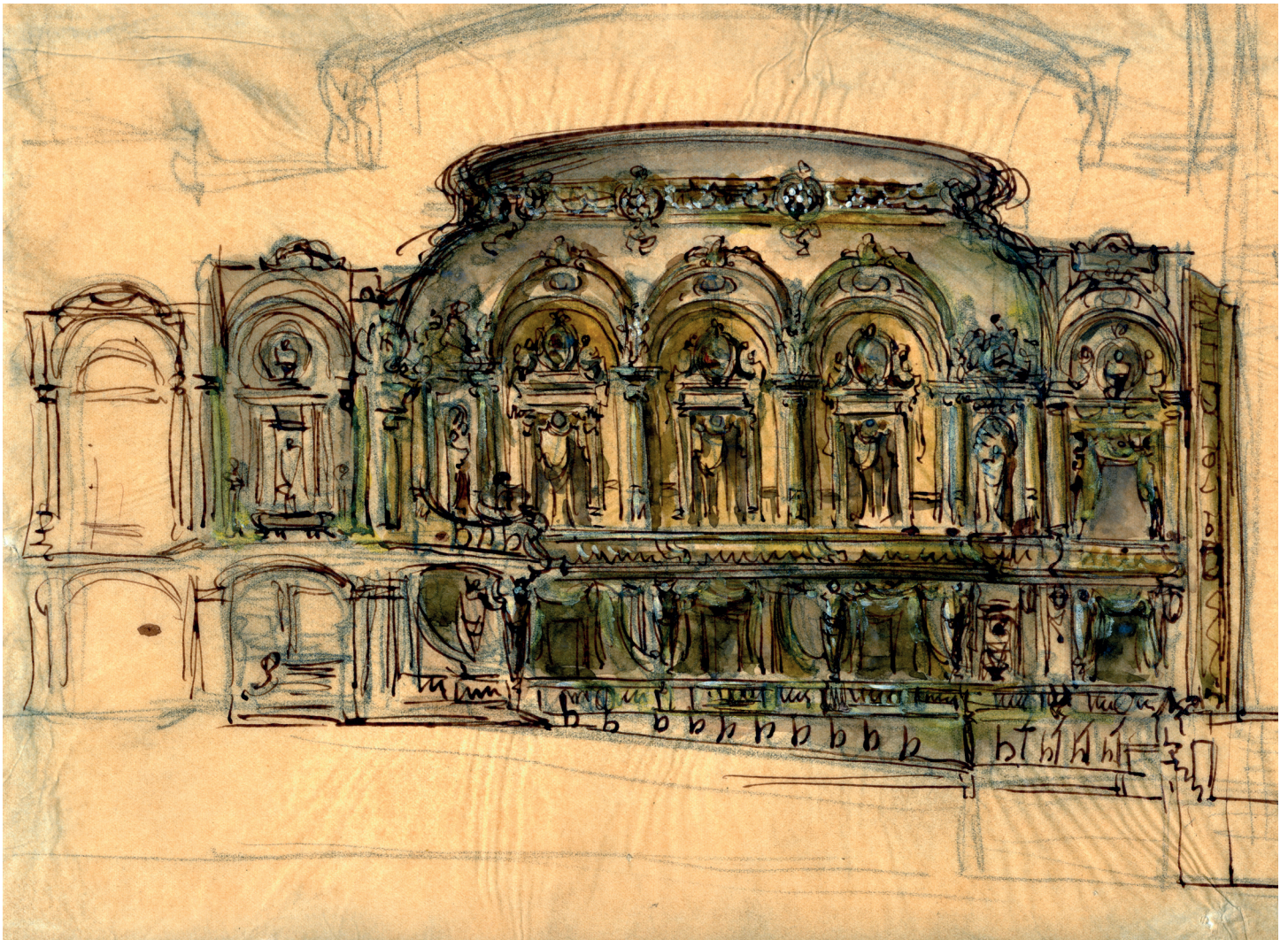


1.9. Victorine du Pont Homsey, *Women at a Pool, Mexico*, watercolor on paper, 1932. Private collection.

centers.⁶⁹ Their humane approach created designs that brought about community cohesion and supported family life. Chapter VIII addresses projects by women architects that serve as the salient (and sometimes lone) expression of their perspective on Modernism. Since most had limited commissions, these works provided nearly unique opportunities to invent a modern language in which to represent themselves as architects.

The conclusion is a response to the legendary two-part feature published in *Architectural Record* in 1948.⁷⁰ The title, “A Thousand Women in Architecture,” is both contradictory and paradoxical: on the one hand, it

highlights their facility with logical planning and ability to give a building distinctive character; on the other, it counterfactually asserts itself as proof that architecture is a profession in which women were accepted. The lack of opportunity to establish themselves in the prominent architecture firms necessarily meant they had to find alternative approaches. In the end, their work demonstrates an enthusiasm for moving beyond International Style formulae to an American Modernism engaged with the particularities of place. Their professional pathways were far from solitary rambblings but rather entailed deep engagement with the communities in which they worked.



CHAPTER I

Early Experience and Education

THE DYNAMIC EVOLUTION OF ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION for women is illustrated in a comparison of two student drawings: one was created in 1902 by Julia Morgan at the time-honored École des Beaux-Arts in Paris; the other was created by Suzanne Marjorie Stockard (Underwood; 1917–2001) as an art major at Bennington College in Vermont, from which she graduated in 1938 (figs. 1.1, 1.2). Each of them set a precedent for their time: Morgan was the first woman to earn a *certificât d'études* from the École des Beaux-Arts; Stockard was the first woman architect to graduate from Harvard University, in 1943.¹

Together, their drawings represent the aesthetic progression from Neoclassicism to Modernism as well as the expansion of educational opportunities available to women. While the pedagogy Morgan experienced at the École des Beaux-Arts emphasized mastery of the classical tradition with sophisticated composition and drawing skills, Stockard's training at Bennington, followed by the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture and then Harvard, was oriented toward the invention of design solutions using open plans, abstract forms, and new materials that could meet the needs of clients.

Historically, many Americans—including Morgan—considered their architecture training incomplete without



1.2. Suzanne Marjorie Stockard, student drawing, Bennington College, c. 1937. *Private collection.*

1.1. Julia Morgan, student rendering of a theater in a palace, graphite, ink, watercolor, and gouache on tracing paper, 1902. *Julia Morgan Records, Environmental Design Archives, College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.*

study abroad, particularly in Paris.² Not long after the Civil War, however, aspiring American architects also began to train domestically in institutions inspired by the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Small numbers of women such as Louise Blanchard Bethune—the first woman admitted to the American Institute of Architects—achieved professional status through the longstanding apprenticeship system, although this pathway largely excluded them until after World War II.

A common misconception is that women were not allowed or had to fight their way into the architecture schools in the United States.³ At the turn of the twentieth century, however, a range of geographically dispersed schools started to graduate women in architecture, beginning with Cornell University in 1871, Syracuse University in 1881, and MIT in 1885. By 1928, at least twenty-seven accredited coeducational institutions had charters requiring them to admit women into their architecture programs, although they could make up as little as 10 percent of the student body. Women are said to have been “distinctly unwelcome” and given little encouragement in either their studies or their professional development.⁴ For instance, at Columbia University, an announcement for the 1910–11 academic year stated, “Owing to the lack of suitable drafting room accommodations, women . . . are advised to do the work in design elsewhere, upon the same terms as students working in outside ateliers.”⁵

Between 1931 and 1940, nearly twenty women earned degrees (mostly bachelor’s) in architecture at MIT, but there were already exemplary figures from the school with significant output, among them Marion Mahony Griffin and the professional partners Lois Howe, Eleanor Manning, and Mary Almy, as well as Elisabeth “Betty” Coit (1892–1987).⁶ Despite having access to higher education in architecture, women could not always evade marginalization in residential design, nor did they necessarily gain familiarity with Modernism. In contrast to Harvard, at MIT the dean of architecture, Walter Roy MacCornack, reportedly did not permit “the first hint of the modern trend” until 1940–41, when he brought in the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto as a research professor.⁷ Even though MIT took on the issue of housing, the school’s 1940 catalog shows that architectural history and freehand drawing were still considered important, following the *Beaux-Arts* emphasis on aesthetics rather than real-world problems. The women’s theses in the MIT Museum demonstrate the ongoing concentration on programs disconnected from

the most urgent contemporary concerns, for instance, the watercolor of the Gothic-inspired private chapel (1923) by Ida Brown Adelberg (Webster; 1899–1983) and, even later, *A Beauty Establishment* (1937) by Lillian Polly Povey Thompson (1904–94).⁸

Modernism in Undergraduate Studies

The emergence of Modernism in the United States may have made architecture more compelling for women because it was connected to so many adjunct fields in design, planning, publishing, and education. The women’s colleges grasped that an understanding of its concepts could enhance opportunities for their graduates and, accordingly, promoted Modernism in their arts curricula, lectures, tours, and exhibitions. In 1934, the art department at Bennington College, which was established just two years earlier as a laboratory for women, wanted to recruit Josef Albers, a lauded alumnus and instructor at the Bauhaus (1919–33) design school in Germany whose avant-garde pedagogy would have tremendous influence in the United States.⁹ Albers declined the offer, despite encouragement from Philip Johnson, chairman of the nascent Department of Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and by an important school trustee whose daughter, Nathalie Swan (Rahy; 1912–83), had studied at the Bauhaus. Nevertheless, in 1935 Bennington did hire Lila Fairbairn Ulrich (Koppelman; 1910–84), a Bauhaus student between 1931 and 1933, who by then was living in New York and collaborating with another Bauhaus alumna, the German-born architect Hilda Reiss (1909–2002).¹⁰

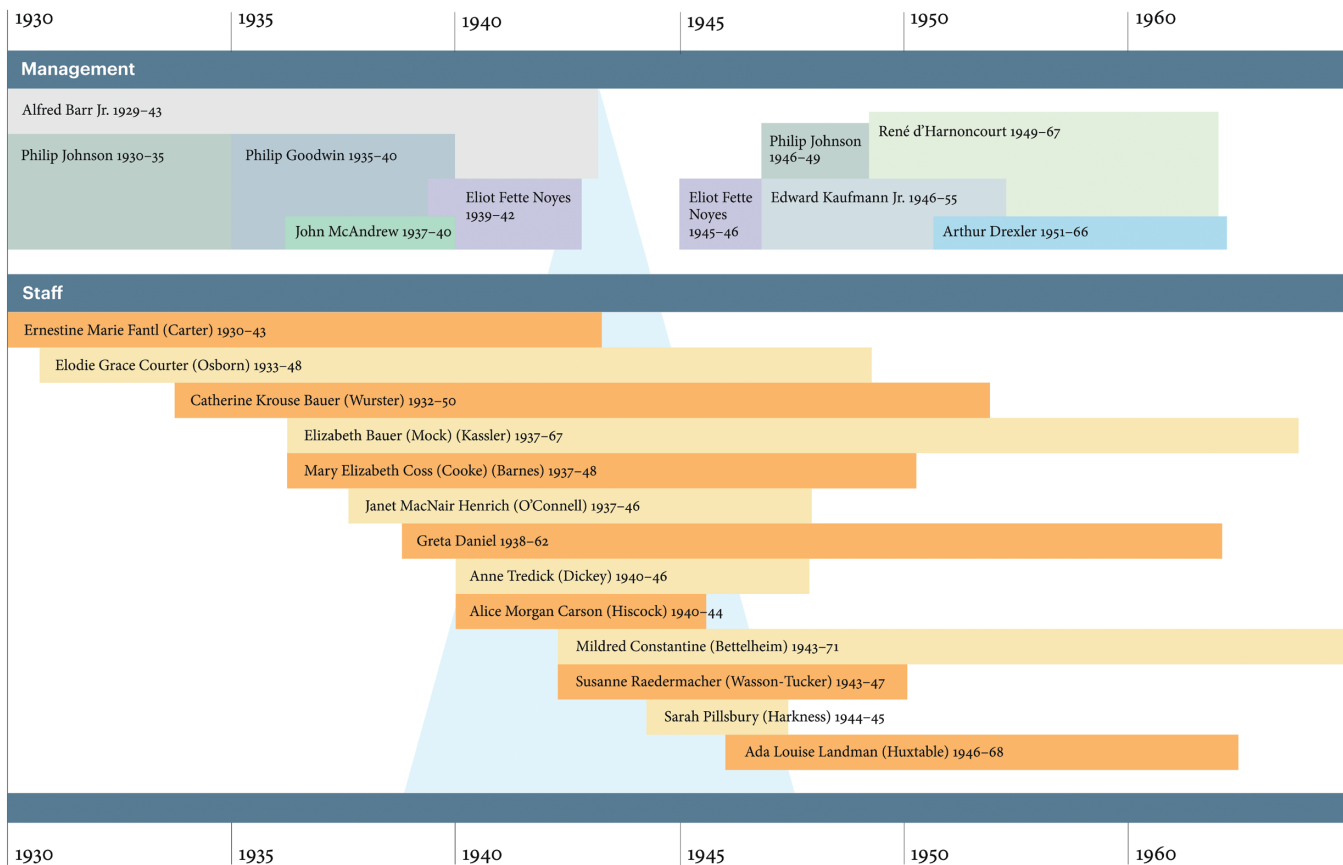
Several other institutions also hired faculty dedicated to Modernism. At Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, one of the earliest colleges for women, Esther Isabel Seaver (Burno; 1903–65) allegedly “swept” onto the campus in 1930 “with energy, unconventional ideas, and an almost evangelical devotion to Modernism.” As head of the art department and a professor of art, she relentlessly pushed for the construction of a modern building.¹¹ Although Seaver convinced the trustees to engage in a competition in 1938 for a modern art center under the auspices of MoMA and *Architectural Forum*, she could not muster the funding to support the winning design by Richard Bennett and Caleb Hornbostel.¹² Subsequently, when in 1946 it was announced that the more conservative firm of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn (1923–68)—responsible

for the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia—would design the building, Margaret “Peg” King Hunter (1919–97) fanned the flames of controversy with a telegram she sent to the *Wheaton News* accusing the college of violating a professional code of ethics.¹³ A Wheaton undergraduate who subsequently studied architecture at the Cambridge School and then at Harvard, King Hunter later explained in the *Wheaton Alumnae Quarterly* that it was through Seaver’s teaching that she first experienced the “creative thrill of good contemporary design” and that Seaver had “most certainly” influenced her decision to pursue architecture, which she found to be “the most satisfying career in the world.”

The Seven Sisters, to varying degrees, also took leading roles in the integration of Modernism into American undergraduate education. Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, hired instructors who would later become prominent advocates of Modernism—Alfred Hamilton Barr Jr. in the academic year 1923–24, Henry-Russell Hitchcock in 1927–28, and John McAndrew in

1932–37—each of whom eventually found employment at MoMA (fig. 1.3). Wellesley College outside of Boston also showed an interest in Modernism when the school newspaper gave front-page coverage in 1929 to a campus lecture by Barr on Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany.¹⁴ Barr had already made his mark at Wellesley as an associate professor of art with the legendary, all-encompassing art course Tradition and Revolt in Modern Painting, which he sometimes taught with Hitchcock’s assistance, in 1926–27 and again in 1928–29.¹⁵ Barr’s course was the first in modern art to be offered in the United States and included field trips to contemporary avant-garde buildings, for instance, the Necco candy factory (1925–27) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.¹⁶

Radcliffe College in Cambridge also participated in the discussion when in 1933 the continuing education committee organized a conference entirely devoted to modern architecture. Philip Johnson saw his talk there as an opportunity to decry the upcoming Century of Progress exhibition in Chicago, anticipating that most buildings



1.3. Timeline of the female staff in architecture and industrial design at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1930–68. Design by Anita Bassie, Group M.

would lack the influence of the International Style, which he had promoted a year earlier at MoMA.¹⁷ In addition, the occasion included a roundtable on the roles of women in modern architecture, headed by Eleanor Raymond, one of the few architects to have built a modern house by that date (see figs. 1.1, 1.6).¹⁸ As a result of their efforts, women's colleges gave students access to the most current thinking about contemporary design and a conversancy in Modernism that would open up opportunities.

The Educational Program of the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture

A close examination of the architectural education at the Cambridge School shows that its training prepared women not only to excel academically but also to navigate around the educational and professional strictures they would experience. Regardless of whether the women chose to pursue modern architecture, as many did, the recollections of past students repeatedly confirm what Frances Baxter Quarton recalled at age ninety-seven about her education at the Cambridge School: "You have never seen any group of people who were so enthusiastic about what they were doing!"¹⁹

The Cambridge School was never formally associated with Harvard as some have written; instead, in 1934, it became affiliated with Smith College so that in place of certificates those with undergraduate degrees could earn bachelor's and master's degrees, which the school believed would enhance their consideration in the professional fields of architecture and landscape architecture. Four years later, the Cambridge School was further integrated with Smith to lessen chronic financial trouble (after which the school worked under various names, frequently the Smith College Graduate School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture).²⁰ Nonetheless, the Cambridge School was intertwined with Harvard's enrollment policies, curricula, and faculty until the academic year of 1942–43, when the Cambridge School closed and Harvard allowed women to enter its Graduate School of Design (GSD)—consisting of architecture, landscape architecture, and regional planning—due to losing nearly two-thirds of its male students to military service (attendance, in fact, hit its low of forty students in 1940).²¹

Consequently, the Cambridge School has sometimes been overlooked in the biographies of women architects

who also attended Harvard's GSD. For example, in an account of Anne Griswold Tyng (1920–2011), an acclaimed modernist who worked her way up to associate in the office of Louis Kahn, one critic wrote, "[Tyng] got her undergraduate degree at Radcliffe College in 1942 and went on to study architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, as part of the school's first class to admit women."²² Yet, as Tyng herself remembered, after she discovered that she could get credit in her senior year at Radcliffe (1941–42) for studying architecture at the Cambridge School, she felt "called to architecture" in the design studio of Henry Frost, whom she "adored."²³ Tyng was actually introduced to the Cambridge School after her junior year when she completed an architecture science course in the collaborative summer school it held with Harvard; during senior year, Tyng completed three more courses (design and graphics) at the Cambridge School, which made it possible for her to graduate from the GSD at Harvard, which she entered in the fall of 1942, in just two and a half years with a master's degree in architecture.²⁴

The Cambridge School had a humble launch. In late 1915, a Radcliffe graduate named Katherine "Kitty" Glover Brooks (Norcross; 1892–1989) was denied entrance to Harvard's program in landscape architecture, and she was advised by its chairman, James Sturgis Pray, to be tutored at her home by Frost, a young architecture instructor at Harvard who had not yet completed his master's degree. Early in the following year, Brooks and a few other women wishing to study landscape architecture were tutored by Frost along with Bremmer Whidden Pond, a Harvard instructor in landscape architecture, in their shared office at 4 Brattle Street in Cambridge. Among the architecture students from MIT to join the group were Florence Luscomb and Abby Winch "Winnie" Christensen (1887–1969) of Beaufort, South Carolina, who sent letters to her mother in 1916 and 1917 describing the daily protocol.²⁵ As she explains, Frost viewed the initial effort as short-term tutoring, but to the students it already was a "little school" with strenuous requirements.²⁶

While a more formal curriculum—in design, construction, history, freehand drawing, graphics, mechanical plants, horticulture, and office practice—eventually took shape, the initial instruction was reminiscent of Beaux-Arts ateliers: the women were left to themselves for much of the day until Frost and Pond made their rounds to teach and critique construction, design, and horticulture. They also heard lectures, for example, by

Herbert Langford Warren, the founder of the School of Architecture at Harvard in 1912, whose teaching emphasized the mastery of the classical tradition and the design methods of the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Warren advised, “A point of departure there must be, and we think it better to found our work on the world’s highest achievements, rather than to take as a starting point an imported and debased modern tradition.”²⁷ Even after a modern wing had been built at the school, Frost, who had studied under Warren at Harvard, waxed lyrical about the “eloquence and inspiration” of the talks Warren gave at the Cambridge School during its early years.²⁸

According to Christensen’s letters, she had to supplement her Cambridge School education with freehand drawing twice weekly with William Felton Brown, a revered assistant professor at MIT, and clay modeling on Saturdays with the sculptor Johan Selmer-Larsen. Christensen’s work experience was limited to assisting in the drafting room and cataloging book illustrations in the school’s library. Nonetheless, she (like her fellow students) was encouraged by the faculty to question received notions and argue her ideas, an approach that would become customary at the school.

Surprisingly, by the academic year of 1917–18, the Cambridge School was able to offer twenty-two courses to its seventeen students.²⁹ Though an article in the *Boston Daily Globe* commended the investment of the school in launching their careers, its headline, “Let Women Plan Houses for Women: Mere Man Doesn’t Know Where to Put the Closets or Arrange for the Furniture,” assumed that women were primarily suited for domestic design because of their predisposition to homemaking.³⁰ Shaking off this label would prove an enduring challenge. Even so, interest in the school swelled, and by 1922 the thirty-five enrolled students forced it to expand the faculty and move from the small office to quarters twice the size at 13 Boylston Street in Boston, away from Cambridge but near the business district as well as the residential Back Bay neighborhood.³¹ The professional partnership of Frost and Raymond, which they formed after her graduation in 1919, was relocated nearby to the Raymond Whitcomb Building on Newbury Street, one of two major commercial thoroughfares in the Back Bay.³² When in 1928 the Cambridge School needed more space and moved to 53 Church Street in Harvard Square, it was more distant from the offices of many practicing architects in Boston but more convenient to Harvard, where many of the Cambridge School faculty also taught.

Since the education of women in architecture was not widespread, no two women arrived at the Cambridge School with equivalent expectations, much less preparation. Mary Cope Elkinton Duguid (1888–1975) enrolled in 1929, eighteen years after graduating from Wellesley College, so she could become an equitable working partner with her Scottish-born architect husband, William Morrison Duguid. Although federal regulations prevented her from collaborating with him in the mid-1930s at the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, she claimed to have assisted him in designing houses for the builders of Norris Dam in a community that she considered a forerunner of new town development.³³

Another student, Faith Bemis, was influenced by the prefabrication experiments of her father, Albert Farwell Bemis.³⁴ Her 1928 thesis on a suburban development specified that its fifty houses would utilize “one of Mr. Bemis’ new types of construction that would allow stucco finished walls” with colored and textured finishes being “the chief feature of the scheme.”³⁵ Although only briefly at the school in 1938, Anne Laurie Westbrook Gould (Hauberg; 1917–2016) was also inspired by her father, the Harvard-trained architect Carl Frelinghuysen Gould, chair of the Department of Architecture at the University of Washington in Seattle. Others who discovered architecture through family members include Anne Tyng, who remembered that when her family lived in China, she watched her father, an Episcopalian missionary, oversee the construction of a school and a church in Changsha, the capital city of the Hunan province; he also designed their brick home, which had interior walls of redwood salvaged from a temple, as well as their mountain cottage of granite in Kuling.³⁶ While it was not unusual for children of prominent families to be introduced to art and architecture abroad, Tyng was unique in that at age sixteen she traveled the world with her older sister, her most vivid memories being of the great monuments of the past.³⁷ Margaret Burnham Kelly (1907–95) continued the legacy of her family of architects—her grandfather Daniel Hudson Burnham and two uncles, Daniel Jr. and Hubert—by attending MIT between 1929 and 1933, after graduating from Vassar College. She went on to work as an architect in Rhode Island, both independently and in collaboration with the Columbia University-trained architect James Peter Geddes, whom she married in 1941.³⁸ At least in one instance a passion for architecture between a mother and a daughter developed concurrently; during

the four-year tenure of Mary “Molly” Duncan Weed Noyes (1915–2010) at the Cambridge School, 1935–39, her mother, Mary “Polly” Duncan Walker Weed (1876–1957) also took courses (though not for credit).³⁹

Cambridge School students could also have been inspired by the cultural vanguard in Cambridge, an intellectual community that spawned progressive ideas and avant-garde art across the media. Modernism took root there well before prominent émigré architects arrived in the educational institutions. In the Harvard Cooperative Building, for instance, women could have viewed the first exhibition in the United States on the Bauhaus, in 1930–31, organized by the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art (1929–36), a collaborative project of Lincoln Kirstein, Edward M. M. Warburg, and John Walker III, which is now recognized as one of the most important early venues for the presentation of Modernism in the United States.⁴⁰ Its pathbreaking exhibition program evidences the standing of Harvard as a cradle of Modernism on a par with the cities of London, Paris, New York, and Chicago.⁴¹

Women at the Cambridge School flourished due to the vision of Frost and his faculty. After observing their capabilities, he altered his initial opinion that women were best suited to domestic design. In turn, he challenged and motivated them beyond their expectations: “He could tear your solution to a problem all apart and yet leave you on top of the world and ready to begin again with complete confidence in yourself,” Gertrude Elizabeth Sawyer (1895–1996) recalled, fifty-seven years after receiving her certificate in architecture.⁴² Indeed, Sawyer’s “complete confidence” morphed into her prosperous independent practice in Washington, DC, where she designed the boldly curved Junior League Building (1935; now owned by the Hungarian government) at 2001 Massachusetts Avenue NW, as well as the multibuilding Colonial Revival estate of Jefferson Patterson in St. Leonard, Maryland; she collaborated on the latter project with another alumna, Rose Ishbel Greely (1887–1969), a prominent landscape architect.⁴³

Greely and Sawyer were at the Cambridge School together before graduating in 1919 and 1922, respectively, just as the school was finding its way.⁴⁴ Since there was no formal precedent for an all-women’s architecture school, the curricula and related activities were structured to reflect current debates and evolving ideas about what a relevant professional practice could be in the interwar period. Significantly, the pedagogy was based not on a

specific model (though Frost and Pond were obviously versed in Harvard’s) but rather on the requirements and interests of the students themselves. Since the Cambridge School was the only professional school in the United States to unite architecture and landscape architecture under a single faculty, the students worked cooperatively rather than in isolation and in competition with one another, as was more typical of the pervasive Beaux-Arts-oriented programs.⁴⁵ That they learned to visualize their projects comprehensively gave them a broader perspective that could enhance their prospects for practice.⁴⁶

The school broadened its pedagogical approach in 1933 after Albert Evans Simonson, an instructor of history and design, visited the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, to observe its postgraduate program.⁴⁷ Simonson innovated something similar at the Cambridge School with an all-encompassing, five-month design problem in which about fifty students, under the guidance of some twelve faculty members, participated. Based on a 150-acre site in nearby Middlesex Fells, the hypothetical community they designed—with civic, business, educational, recreational, and housing units—concluded with a 1/20 scale model ten feet square. Published in *Pencil Points*, the award-winning practicum encouraged greater appreciation for three-dimensional studies, for authentic sites and realistic projects, and for collaboration between disciplines.⁴⁸

This emphasis on collaboration had lasting impact on students, as demonstrated by the architect alumna Louise Leland (1902–56), who graduated from the Cambridge School in 1933, and her professional and personal partner, Ann Bruce Haldeman (1903–93), a landscape architect who graduated two years later. Explaining the function of their seven-year “collaborative adventure” to fellow alumnae, Leland wrote, “If we know ‘our public,’ it is unnecessary to introduce the idea of collaboration between the professions of architecture and landscape architecture, for the School itself has taught the need and demonstrated the worth of this in professional training, in a way that none can surpass.”⁴⁹ The students enthusiastically embraced the school’s view of architecture and landscape as complementary fields, to the extent that some doubled up on their specializations. For instance, after obtaining her master’s degree in landscape architecture, Katherine “Katy” Charlotte Gibbs (Ericsson; 1907–91) was granted a scholarship to complete the architecture curriculum. In 1938, she declared: “Lest it should appear that I am wavering in

loyalty to my first love, landscape architecture, or wanting in devotion to my new love, architecture, may I say that I believe they are both different aspects of the same professions. The two are one, inseparable, and the one is infinitely greater than either of its parts.”⁵⁰ The Cambridge School’s guiding principles were in certain respects more experimental than at other schools, primarily because they arose from the requirements of contemporary practice rather than established traditions. Hence, the input of the students themselves increasingly carried weight as they forthrightly demonstrated through their ideas, conviction, and courage that they were capable of more extensive challenges than simple domestic problems, which was the school’s original mandate.⁵¹ Frost’s reminiscence reflects the steadfast determination of the women: “They drove us. They, not we, proposed steps to make the training more effective. . . . and then [they] came back with more demands.”⁵² Consequently, by the late 1930s, the school’s mission was expanded to provide more thorough technical training to prepare students to meet “the many and varied needs of civilization.”⁵³

Likewise vital to the success of the school was the faculty’s role in supporting the professional standing of the women. They helped students navigate the restrictions they faced, especially the tendency to marginalize women as house designers and interior decorators. When the discipline of interior decoration was added as a third curriculum in 1935–36, it was elevated to “interior architecture”—as it had been called since 1923 at the University of Minnesota—and only made available to those with advanced standing.⁵⁴ Recognizing that the field presented reasonable opportunities for women, the school advanced it as a profession closely associated with architecture, just as it had done with landscape architecture.⁵⁵

While the Cambridge School aimed to provide students with the skills and knowledge to establish themselves in the competitive work arena, at the same time, it drew attention to successful women practitioners in- and outside the school. For example, in 1931, it organized the exhibition *Houses and Gardens Designed by Women* to show their achievements so that “even the most skeptical observer” would realize that women were capable of professional success. Targeted at garden clubs, galleries, and schools, the exhibition highlighted the work of women architects from diverse educational backgrounds: from Elisabeth Coit (MIT, 1919) and Georgina Pope Yeatman (MIT, 1925) to Verna Cook Salomonsky (École Spéciale

d’Architecture, 1911–23; Columbia University, 1912–13) and Elisabeth von Knobelsdorff von Tippelskirch (Technische Universität Charlottenburg, 1911), and even Theodate Pope Riddle who lacked a degree.⁵⁶ Their presence would have argued against the familiar opinion that careers for women were incompatible with marriage, an alleged stumbling block to professional development. In fact, in 1932, the Cambridge School was able to report that 83 percent of its graduates were active in professional work as independent practitioners, office draftspersons, educators, or writers; of those married, 60 percent continued to work.⁵⁷ Given that two years earlier, only about 24 percent of women nationally were employed outside the home, women at the Cambridge School were ahead of the trend for women to obtain paid work rather than to labor for free at home.⁵⁸

The Cambridge School and Harvard

The two architecture schools in Harvard Square, each oriented toward a single gender up to 1942, became important centers for the advancement of Modernism. Although their histories intertwined, each was distinct: at the Cambridge School, students developed their knowledge of modern architecture by examining important examples at home and abroad and then formulated distinctive versions of it in school or professional projects; at Harvard, administrators and faculty, including prominent European émigrés, implemented an influential approach to architectural education that overturned the historicism that had prevailed there.

When Joseph Hudnut took over as dean of the School of Architecture at Harvard in 1935 and began modernizing the Beaux-Arts curriculum, he also visually updated Robinson Hall (1904) by McKim, Mead & White, where the school was housed. As the architectural historian Jill Pearlman notes, “He destroyed the plaster casts of antique building fragments and sculpture that had filled the interior and stripped the walls of Old Master copies and Beaux-Arts envois, repainting them a pristine modernist white.”⁵⁹

Hudnut joined the Cambridge School’s board of trustees just three months after he began his deanship at Harvard, as his predecessor, George Harold Edgell, had done. The connection between the two schools was further reinforced by the roles that at least twenty-five Harvard educators held at the Cambridge School at various times as instructors, lecturers, or critics.⁶⁰ Among the most

distinguished was Charles Wilson Killam, who taught his “tough and rough” construction courses intermittently for fourteen years; these were reputed to be among the most rigorous in the country (Edward Durell Stone failed his course at Harvard, causing him to transfer).⁶¹ G. (George) Holmes Perkins led design studios and taught history, which he compiled into the widely read *Comparative Outline of Architectural History* (1935).⁶² Charles Augustus Whittemore taught Mechanical Plant of Buildings (heating, ventilating, plumbing, and electrical installation), a course he had been teaching at Harvard since 1924. Walter Francis Bogner, whose first engagement at the Cambridge School in 1931 was as an architecture design critic, later taught Professional Practice (contracts and specifications) after he created that course at Harvard.⁶³

The two schools inevitably shared similar points of view about the professional development of students, especially after 1936, when Hudnut reorganized the curriculum and designated the preparatory courses (basic sciences, history, drawing, and theory) as undergraduate courses in the department of Architectural Sciences at Harvard College; this allowed the newly created GSD to concentrate on preparing students for professional competency. The Cambridge School did not have this option, but it did create an architecture curriculum that in many respects paralleled that at Harvard. As an example, in 1940 the schools had comparable requirements for history, graphics, construction, mechanical equipment, and professional practice, and both addressed such contemporary challenges as multiunit housing, social and economic implications of design, and new construction technologies and materials. The two diverged in that Harvard put more emphasis on city planning and the Cambridge School on landscape planning. While the introductory design courses were almost identical at both, intermediate and advanced design at Harvard was taught in three rotating studios, each headed by a different professor so that students could benefit from varied perspectives. Harvard also insisted on three months of practical experience in the building industry; such opportunities were not readily available to women, and so the Cambridge School did not require apprenticeships. On the other hand, the Cambridge School mandated five terms of freehand drawing while Harvard had none at the graduate level. In retrospect, the acquisition of this fundamental skill most likely worked to the advantage of women since they sometimes had no other choice but to seek employment in allied design fields.

A major concern of modernist architects internationally was in housing. While MIT did not put multiunit housing on its agenda until 1934–35 (as part of a course in city planning) and Harvard not until 1938, when Hudnut hired Martin Wagner (at the behest of Gropius) as assistant professor of regional planning, it was a focus earlier at the Cambridge School, illustrated by the subjects of some of the theses.⁶⁴ Frost considered the Cambridge School as the first educational institution “to give serious thought to the problem ... of housing, individually and collectively.”⁶⁵ Though he said it was only by “chance” that the Cambridge School focused on housing in advance of other architecture schools, it is possible that his interest evolved from his own experience in World War I, when he served in the federal emergency war housing program.⁶⁶ In addition, in 1927, Albert Bemis, the industrial entrepreneur engaged in low-cost housing research, began his nine-year tenure as a trustee at the Cambridge School, where his daughter Faith was still enrolled. The interest of Bemis in housing may have influenced the curriculum, given that he was later recognized by Frost for providing “judgement, foresight, and generosity” to the institution.⁶⁷

A New Modern Wing at the Cambridge School: An Inspiration

Such broadminded modern thinking was put into play at the Cambridge School as early as 1928, when it vacated its small, shabby space filled with dust, dirt, and noise on Boylston Street and moved to an early nineteenth-century wood-frame house on Church Street. The building was purchased by Faith Bemis, who also worked on the remodeling of the house and the design of a two-story brick wing at the southwest corner of the original building (fig. 1.4).⁶⁸ The new flat-roofed, rectangular mass (seventy feet long by twenty-eight feet wide)—united with the older house by means of the ochre-colored paint chosen by Raymond—is dominated on the north side by industrial steel sash windows, painted black in order to read as large spans piercing the planar walls.⁶⁹ Inside, white ceilings and pale gray walls contributed to a sense of openness in the upper and lower drafting rooms, each fifty feet long by twenty feet wide.⁷⁰

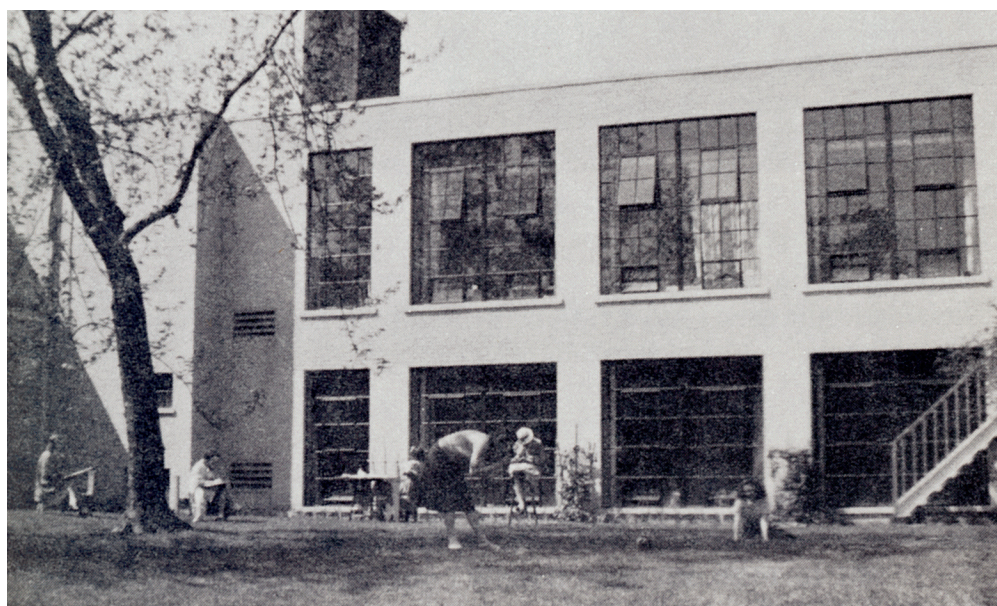
The design process itself modeled the collaborative relationships the school promoted: Frost and Raymond were the architects of record, Bemis created the plan and

blueprints and was on site for supervision along with Laura May Cox (1896–1986), an alumna who had been working for Frost and Raymond since 1925 (and would be the only associate in Raymond’s own firm); and Edith V. Cochran (1886–1989), an alumna instructor at the school and a frequent collaborator with Raymond, did the landscape plan.⁷¹ The drafting room addition made an impression on students even ten years after it was completed: an example is Elizabeth-Ann Campbell’s sketch of the junction of the new and the old buildings as well as of the metal-framed awning windows (fig. 1.5). Her water-color of one of the two drafting rooms similarly focuses on the windows and piers between them as well as the penetrating light (fig. 1.6).

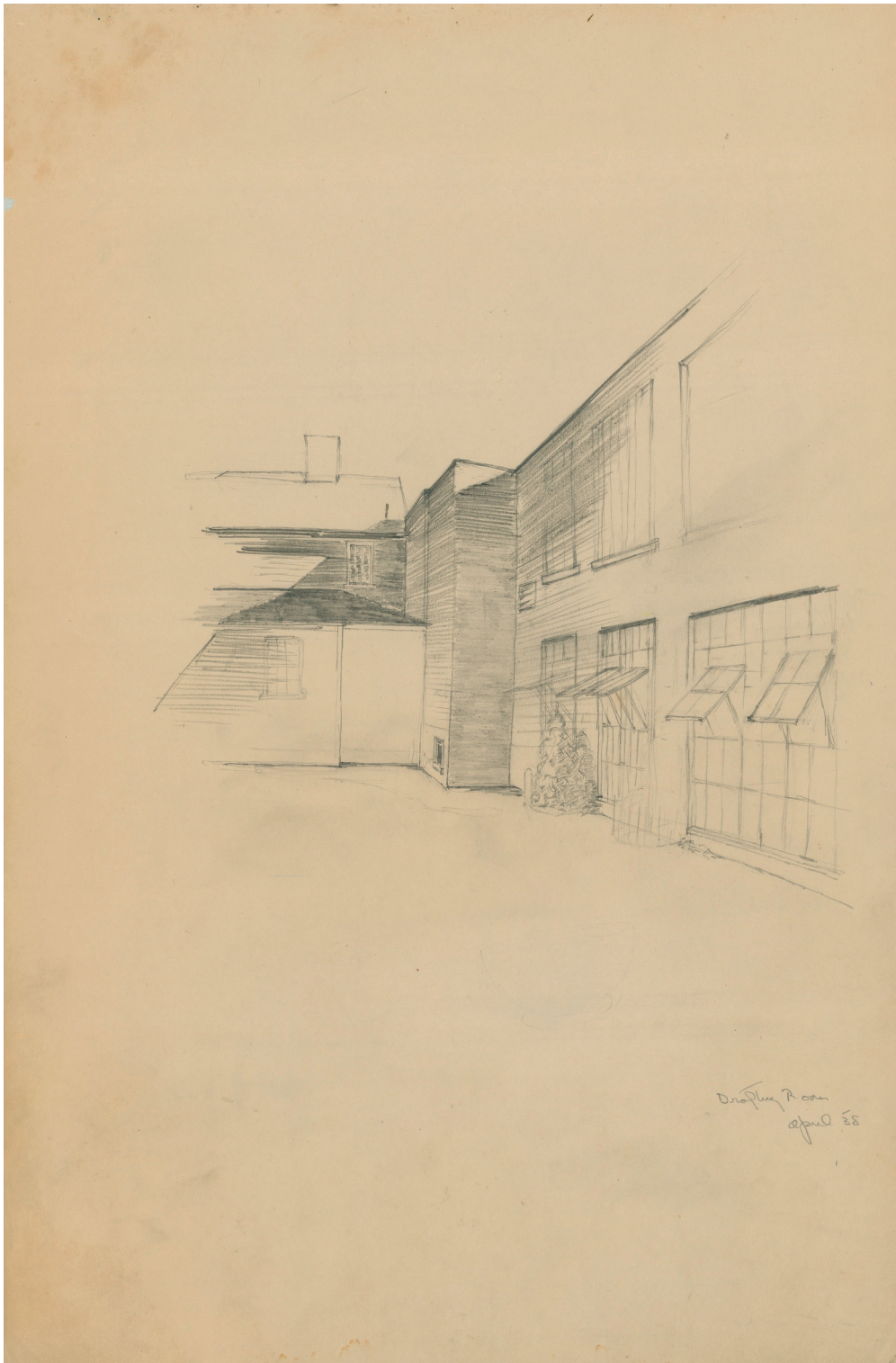
Frost reported in the first issue of the *Cambridge School Alumnae Bulletin* that some had feared the modern tendencies of the new wing could dwarf or even clash with the Colonial tradition of the older house, but the need for an economical and functional space allowed the group to utilize modern concepts way before the school itself embraced modern design.⁷² It would be another year before Modernism was mentioned again in the *Bulletin*, when a tri-city promotional lecture tour on “modern tendencies” in garden design, architecture, and decoration was organized by the Cambridge School.⁷³ Much was made of the “unusual and interesting” upcoming lectures, but because Modernism was so novel in the United States, no one at the school had much practical experience of it other than the design and construction of the new wing.

Thus, the lecture tour was led by Fletcher Steele, a respected Harvard-trained landscape architect and school trustee, and Jean-Jacques Haffner, a French émigré architect and Prix-de-Rome winner who was a professor of architecture at Harvard and a visiting instructor at the Cambridge School.⁷⁴ Given his own Beaux-Arts education, Haffner was surprisingly amenable to Modernism; in one lecture, he paid homage to the functionalism of Europeans Le Corbusier, Auguste Perret, Robert Mallet-Stevens, J.J.P. Oud, Bruno Taut, and Walter Gropius, and even more to the American work of Frank Lloyd Wright, whom Haffner considered a superior architect, writer, engineer, and poet. Acknowledging how powerful the modern movement was becoming, Haffner nonetheless expressed his apprehension about its rapid pace of development in methods and materials, preferring instead to rely on tradition.⁷⁵

During this critical introductory period, modern concepts were not easily grasped: in April 1930, the *Bulletin* declared, “The School apparently has ‘gone modern’—whatever that may mean.”⁷⁶ The lack of understanding about the principles underlying the modern movement is reflected in two thesis titles in 1931: “An Island Estate—Modern” and “A Modern Estate.”⁷⁷ In both, it is as if the word *Modern* were tacked on to suggest a superficial style rather than an entirely new way of planning and building. It was too early for students or faculty to fully comprehend that modern architecture was not merely a transitory, stylistic mode of building, but a program for an enduring, straightforward approach to design with positive social implications.



1.4. Cambridge School drafting wing, 1928. *Cambridge School Alumnae Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (December 1928), *Cambridge School Records*, *Smith College Archives*.



1.5. Elizabeth-Ann Campbell, student sketch of the Cambridge School's modern wing, pencil on paper, April 1935. *Private collection.*



1.6. Elizabeth-Ann Campbell, watercolor of one of the Cambridge School's drafting rooms, c. 1936. *Private collection.*



1.7. Walter and Ise Frank Gropius house, 68 Baker Bridge Road, Lincoln, Massachusetts, 1938. HABS.

The faculty, many trained in the classical tradition, initially seemed unsettled, based on a comment Frost made in 1931 to Paul J. Sachs, the director of Harvard's Fogg Museum and a Cambridge School trustee, saying that he was "disgust[ed] at the somewhat hysterical attitude" toward the modern.⁷⁸ Frost came around, however, likely with the encouragement of his enthusiastic students and later his younger colleagues, I.M. Pei and Philip Johnson, reportedly frequent guests at his home.⁷⁹ In fact, Hudnut recognized Frost as the most sympathetic to modern architecture of the senior faculty at Harvard.⁸⁰ Frost's shift in attitude toward Modernism, and assumedly the school's as well, is substantiated in a lecture he gave in 1936, when he advised Smith College alumnae "to look favorably on the prefabricated house, upon the steel, the concrete, the glass materials of the 1930s, and away from the 'archeological' and 'academic.'"⁸¹ If Frost's advocacy of prefabrication, modern materials, and anti-historicism indicates the broader acceptance of Modernism at the Cambridge School, it is notable that his transition to Modernism occurred soon after Hudnut began making changes at Harvard and in advance of Gropius's arrival there.

Of course, a few adhered unremittingly to academic historicism. Among them was the Cambridge School alumna Constance "Connie" Mumford Warren (1903–87). Even though she built near the modern houses designed

by Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer as well as Walter Bogner in what is now known as the Woods End Road Historic District in Lincoln, Massachusetts, the house (1938) that she designed for John F. Loud and his wife Mary at 1 Woods End Road is modeled on a Federal house (c. 1800) in Yarmouth, Massachusetts (fig. 1.7).⁸² More often, however, established historical and archaeological dogma gave way at the Cambridge School to modern pedagogy. Consequently, the faculty's stance progressed from initial skepticism—when Modernism was simply viewed as a "phase similar to the Gothic or the Tudor"—to an embrace of its programmatic underpinning.⁸³

Despite the polarized attitudes regarding traditional and contemporary design, the Cambridge School constituency felt a responsibility to engage with Modernism. One architecture graduate, Anita Rathbun (Bucknell; 1902–83), then working for Cross and Cross (1909–42), a New York firm recognized for its Colonial Revival work, advised readers of the *Bulletin*, "Whether one likes the Modern style or not ... we must be attune[d] to all new phases both here and abroad." She explained that at first she had found it hard to believe that Modernism was prophetic of future domestic architecture, but ever since Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House had been brought to Harvard (in 1929, by the Harvard Society of Contemporary Art), she had become more open to modern experiments—even collapsible houses whose positions were to be controlled by radio.⁸⁴ Her naive but enthusiastic impression was echoed by the nine students who, at Bogner's prodding, entered a *Pencil Points* competition in 1930. For five weeks, each was engrossed in designing a modern eight-room house, and though none of their submissions placed, the one by Marion Spelman Walker (Bailey; 1908–82) was published (fig. 1.8).⁸⁵ Consisting of stiff, unadorned volumetric masses inspired by European models, the tallest with a roof terrace, the design illustrates a widespread ambiguity at the time about how best to articulate Modernism in small house design.

The wide range of student work by Katharine "Kay" Frances Wilson (Rahn; 1915–92) into the 1940s documents her understanding of Modernism, exemplified by her drawings for a school, civic buildings, houses, and community developments as well as parks, gardens, and even a badminton court.⁸⁶ As a "rare" and "brilliant" student with a remarkably fine capacity for design and construction, she was considered "especially good professional material." After Wilson attained a master's degree in landscape

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