

Project Proposal

Sydney M. Munnerylyn

February/26/2020

In order to make sense of our present, we have to come to terms with our past. And that means that we have to come to terms with M. Carey Thomas. Bryn Mawr College has always struggled with how to talk/understand M. Carey Thomas's legacy, while she was a pioneering feminist, she only focused on women of a certain class and race. So far, Bryn Mawr College has taken steps in order to grapple with its past concerning the second president, for example, renaming the Thomas Library into the Old Library in 2018. Thomas has had a profound impact on the college, as she was the first dean and the second president who served for 28 years. She has shaped Bryn Mawr College in many ways, influencing the culture and the academics that are still present to this day.

Both Haverford College and Swarthmore College, neighboring schools in the area, have a long history in connection to the Society of Friends, with Swarthmore having a separate library dedicated to that special relationship. Bryn Mawr College, however, after 1893, ended its relation with the Quaker community and since then has had no formal ties to that community. Moreover, as a result of that decision to become non-denominational there seems to be a lack of religious dialogue on Bryn Mawr College campus at all.

I believe that this project is more than ever relevant, due to the ongoing conversations about the influences of M. Carey Thomas on campus and how we should deal with that history. Work like the Black at Bryn Mawr, the Perry House Oral History Project, and the Community Day of Learning, has, in my eyes, been due to recent discussions over Thomas's racist past. Even though my project is focused on the influence of Quakers and religion on campus, I do believe that it regards the influence of M. Carey

Thomas nonetheless and how she still influences life on campus. It is necessary for more work to be done that centers around Thomas, and other presidents/influential people of BMC, in order to grapple with our present day atmosphere on campus.

Therefore, I am interested in the early affiliation of BMC with the Society of Friends and how the college became non denominational. I am also specifically interested in the influence of M. Carey Thomas in the decision to become unaffiliated with the Quaker religion. I found it especially intriguing that she was brought up in a highly religious Quaker family environment but has often been referenced in writings on Bryn Mawr College as being a person absolutely inimical to the Quaker ideology and the main reason why the college went in the direction it did.

For this investigation, I will have a variety of sources, primary and secondary centering both on the nature of Quakerism at Bryn Mawr College and sources centering around M. Carey Thomas's relationship with religion and insights into her decision to make BMC non-denominational. For example, one of the sources that I will be using information regarding M. Carey Thomas is from the book "The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas" by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. For primary sources, I will be looking into the letters of M. Carey Thomas, the College Calendars, and College reports between the start of BMC till 1893.

I was thinking about reaching out to a community member who is a Quaker and whose spouse is also a professor at Swarthmore. It would be insightful to see why she chose to teach at Bryn Mawr and if that decision was influenced due to the college's previous affiliation with the Society of Friends? How does her experience at BMC as a Quaker differ from the experience of her husband at Swarthmore?

At this point in my research, I have already encountered some obstacles to my investigation. Even though the college was intended to be a place of higher education particularly centered on educating

women from the Society of Friends, as stated in Taylor's will and testament, there seems, at this stage in the research, little commentary or perspectives on this event. Even though I anticipated that there would be challenges in trying to research a topic that took place more than one hundred years ago, I was still expecting to find more information readily due to the perceived gravity of a decision to become non denominational considering the will and testament of Joseph Taylor. This gap in institutional documentation not only highlights some of the limitations of our archival system but also proves that there is the need for a more detailed analysis on M. Carey Thomas's influence over Bryn Mawr College's affiliation with the Society of Friends.

One of the main skills that I want to work on this semester is finding and analysing primary sources better. Throughout my academic experience, the majority of the research papers that I've done have been mainly centered around secondary sources. Therefore, I'm excited for this chance to incorporate a variety of sources in this project, secondary and primary, and draw my own conclusions. Additionally, I've never been in a class that it's whole aim is to analyse its own institutional history. I believe that being able to separate oneself from institutions and look at things objectively is an important skill, and one that probably requires persistent work.

Another personal goal of mine, apart from my own project, is that I would like to become more aware and knowledgeable about how institutional histories, like Bryn Mawr College, affect our present day lives, and to use that information to help combat those social justice issues today. I hope that this class, by researching my own project and by listening to others, helps shed light on what ways we as a community can come to terms with our history and grow as people.