

## FANNY BORDEN

1876-1954

Fanny Borden, a New Englander from Fall River, Massachusetts, joined the freshman class of Vassar College in September 1894. The college discovered that she was a young woman of good parts. Her teachers liked the pleasure she showed in enquiry and knowledge, the respect she early acquired for scholarship. Student chronicles name her among officers of college and class organizations, on important committees, as chairman of a hall play, captain of '98's basketball team, holder of records for the 120 yard dash and the 220 yard run.

We who knew her later can also tell about a many-sided person. We saw her elegant skating, good horsemanship and tennis game, careful riding of the only Columbia chainless bicycle on the campus. Some of us recall a Founder's Birthday that under her direction became a lovely English May Day the whole day through, the campus over. We remember her as a poet whose pen could commemorate in ballad or free verse the quandaries that beset a college Faculty from time to time. We knew her concern with affairs of the world, and could count on her getting to the heart of a question in a few, quiet, undisputatious words. (When she had nothing to say on a topic, it was her habit to say nothing, a rare and disconcerting practice.)

The center of her life was the Vassar College Library for the thirty-seven years of her librarianship and through her retirement. She came to the library in 1908 after professional training at the New York State Library School and positions at Bryn Mawr and at Smith. Three years before, the library had moved from its small quarters in the Thompson Annex of Main Buildig to the Thompson Memorial Library. The Librarian, Adelaide Underhill, had already made the decision, so important in Vassar's history, to continue the "open shelves". F.B. joined her in the task of building the kind of college library that many of their contemporaries elsewhere believed could not exist. Professor Amy Reed wrote her observations of their work: "they had very large, very enlightened ideas about the future function of a college library, and very little money to work with. With almost incredible patience, persistence, FANNY BORDEN (Continued)

and determination they made the right decisions; with tireless industry they took the right measures to place the library in its proper relation to the students and the teaching faculty".

Our library reflects the labor and generosity of many

people. One of the persons it most reflects is F.B.: her knowledge of many fields of learning, the fine quality of her discrimination; her gift for perfection, her energy, her understanding of scholars, teachers, students. It hardly needs saying that Vassar's method of teaching from the sources depends on the kind of library she had so large a share in making. She found, often made, opportunities to build up rich collections of materials, valuable both to the mature scholar and to the undergraduate. A true scholar herself, she, with her colleagues, ensured to the students the freedom of a library where they could take their own first steps in independent research.

Her wise spending of funds, her success in securing further endowment, and in suggesting to alumnae and friends gifts that were no less appropriate to their interests than to the needs of the library, attest the high quality of her librarianship. Among gifts by Alumnae who shared her love of the library are the 1898 Fund, which her classmates wished to name in her honor; the manuscripts and rare and beautiful books that Rebecca Laurence Lowrie of 1913 has been giving in honor of her since her retirement.

But the interest in the college that she communicated to others encompassed more than the Library. To some of the alumnae she has been Vassar's best interpreter. Her classmates and friends are now supporting generously a project that they know she had much at heart; a chair in American History to commemorate the teaching of Lucy Maynard Salmon.

Miss Borden compiled two bibliographies that found wide use: one on Trusts and Monopolies in America, the other on College and University Government and Administration. Since her retirement in 1945 she has arranged and indexed the Library's collection of the papers of Benson J. Lossing, local historian, biographer of Matthew Vassar, trustee of the college. She has collected source materials for a history of the Library, and made indexes

FANNY BORDEN (Continued)

for early publications of the college. These are now ready or the Centennial historian.

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