

## V W A: Serving Victoria Since 1897

In looking back at some of the achievements of the VWA, we cannot emphasize enough the remarkable impact the Association has had on the education of women, particularly in the early years when it was especially challenging for them to attend university. Strong believers in higher education for women, Association members not only encouraged them to attend university but also aided them financially, whenever possible, and provided them with a “convenient and comfortable home” in Toronto. The group fulfilled perhaps a maternal function in its support of the younger women’s all-round development which was not only intellectual but also social, physical, and spiritual. Thus, these women could serve as the best Christian role models for contemporary society. In conjunction with its support of women students, the VWA assisted Victoria University by promoting it, organizing innumerable events over many years and contributing to its welcoming spirit and reputation.

**Vic’s Move to Toronto:** The group’s concern and involvement began when Victoria, a Methodist university, moved from Cobourg to Toronto in 1892 after federating with the University of Toronto. Finding safe and pleasant places to live in a large, crowded, and perhaps bewildering city proved difficult for out-of-town women students, partly because boarding houses preferred men. Among the most prominent of those aware of the situation were Margaret Proctor Burwash (Mrs. Nathanael), wife of Vic’s Chancellor-President and a former teacher, along with Margaret Addison, Vic 1889, who was then teaching at Stratford Collegiate. They began discussing the need for a women’s residence, evidenced in letters in 1895. Other women were interested in the women’s living arrangements and well-being: These included Margaret Hopkins Cox, wife of Vic’s treasurer Senator George Cox - she had the privilege of laying the cornerstone of (Old) Vic in June 1891, and the Masseys, who were strong Methodists. A year later, businessman and outstanding Vic philanthropist Hart Massey, who had attended Vic in the 1840s in Cobourg, bequeathed \$200,000 to Victoria, worth well over six million in today’s terms. Probably having been influenced by the women in his family, he reserved \$50,000 of this sum for a residence for women students.

**The Formation:** The following year in February 1897, Vic’s Board of Regents authorized the women to form an association and raise money through the press and personal canvassing for land and furnishings for this residence. In March, Margaret Burwash and a few influential women met in the Vic chapel with some Board of Regents members and Vic staff. Rev. Albert Carman, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church Conference and supporter of women’s education, served as the respected presiding officer. At first, he objected to the Chancellor’s wife taking the chair. However, backed by her husband, Margaret Burwash took over, and during this meeting, she became president, Margaret Cox, treasurer, while Rev. Albert’s wife, Mary Jane Carman became first vice-president of what was initially named the Barbara Heck Memorial Association after the United Empire Loyalist pioneer. The cause of a residence for women proved popular enough for the Association to attract new members – fifty by the end of 1897, including Vic alumnae, wives of professors and administrators, women from Methodist churches and others interested in the plan. The new Association also encouraged the formation of the Alumnae Association in 1898 to assist with fundraising for this new residence.

**Fundraising:** The women lost no time in writing a letter “To the Women of Methodism,” starting with the salutation “Dear Sister.” They stated that their mission was threefold: to celebrate their “most dearly beloved Queen Victoria” and her Diamond Jubilee, by the advancement of “the future queens of the homes of our Church and land;” to honour Barbara Heck “the Mother of Methodism in America” by naming the residence after her; and to build a residence for women students. They made clear that they wanted to raise \$25,000 for land and furnishings for this residence, plus an additional sum as an

endowment. They asked that public meetings be held in every church to create interest in women's higher education and to raise funds for this women's residence.

From the time of the Association's formation in 1897 until today, fundraising has been a constant. However, the difficulty of raising money in the early years should not be underestimated because there was a belief, not just on the part of some men but also on the part of more conservative-minded women, that university education for women was a waste and possibly a destabilizing influence on society. In addition, except for some wealthy women who remained invested in the cause, the average person did not have supplemental money. It is fortunate that these early fundraisers did not realize how exhausting and discouraging this activity would be. Yet, even with periods of disappointments and even depression, Association members persisted, and it was not unusual for some to pressure their wealthy husbands over and over again for donations. These feisty and formidable members had been speaking, writing hundreds and hundreds of letters, and visiting Methodist churches in Toronto and sending delegates to Methodist conferences to raise interest and, of course, financial donations. Indeed, support and money would eventually arrive from Newfoundland over to the west coast, and even from missionaries in Japan. By 1900, the Association had banked \$5,000 which they gave to Vic. They were also able to pay for gym classes for the women students in the basement of Vic.

**The Building:** Following some lively discussions, the name of Heck Hall for the residence was wisely rejected, and it would be called Annesley Hall after another admired woman, Susanna Annesley Wesley who gave birth to nineteen, including preachers John and Charles. This precipitated a name change for the Association in 1901 to Victoria Women's Residence and Educational Association, called here the VWA for expediency's sake; the words Residence and Educational were later dropped in 1912. While the VWA was continuing to fundraise and promote the cause of women's education, Victoria was involved in several years of frustrating negotiations with U of T to buy land for the building. Finally in 1901, U of T relented and sold to Vic four acres, a cow pasture north of Czar (later Charles) Street, for the residence as well as for a men's campus. A sub-committee of the Board of Regents took charge of the planning and construction of the building, having hired Canadian architect George Martell Miller who chose the Queen Anne Revival style; he would later design the Lillian Massey building to its north. Unfortunately, the planning for the residence was all without Addison's ideas which had been formed by her exploration of women's residences on her 1900 trip to Europe. In April 1902, following an impressive procession to the site, Hart's oldest surviving son, Chester D. Massey, in the absence of his mother Eliza Ann, laid the cornerstone of the first residence built for women on the St. George campus and indeed in Canada. There was a financial over-run, but the Massey estate would pay for the extra costs of construction.

**Annesley Hall:** In another letter to Methodist women in Ontario, Mrs. Burwash requested money to furnish this residence along with items such as linens, quilts, and feathers, either in pillows or in bags. Margaret Addison, having insisted on an appropriate salary and having moved to Toronto, became Dean of Residence. While not completely finished or fully furnished, the residence opened in the fall of 1903 and by October boasted fifty-five female students, forty of them Vic undergraduates and fifteen from University College and the Conservatory of Music. Eventually groups of church women furnished bedrooms, while Eliza Ann Phelps Massey (widow of Hart Massey) furnished the lower hall; Anna Vincent Massey (Mrs. Chester D. Massey, daughter-in-law of Hart Massey, and mother of Vincent and Raymond) the reception room; Margaret Wilson Eaton (Mrs. Timothy) the dining room, Margaret Cox the gym, Vic alumnae the library, and the VWA the remaining rooms.

**Committee of Management:** Formed in 1902 and called the executive arm of the VWA, it had eighteen members, six retiring each year, although most remained much longer. Nominated by the VWA and approved by the Board of Regents, these volunteers took over the huge responsibility for Annesley's furnishings and equipment, its administration and finances, and then responsibility for the subsequent annexes. The lines between the VWA and this Committee were often blurred because many of the women belonged to both groups. These industrious women dedicated themselves to their

responsibilities until 1920 when there occurred a significant upset. This lasted about a year during which time the Committee of Management lost most of its power, Annesley was re-organized, and Margaret Addison was moved out, and, no longer Dean of Residence, became Dean of Women, instead. A massive rebellion ensued, there were resignations and threatened resignations for it was felt that men were meddling in the affairs of the women. Finally, the turmoil subsided when the status quo was restored for a few more years. However, Vic having taken over the finances retained that responsibility.

**Activities:** With more out-of-town women students attending university, in 1906 the Association undertook the renovation and furnishing of the Drynan house, renamed South Hall (now site of Emmanuel College) for another residence for twenty-three women, and then of other annexes on Bloor and Charles Streets. Needing money to operate these residences, the VWA continued to fundraise by organizing lectures, readings, bazaars, auctions, musicales, luncheons, and dinners. Having been advertised in the Toronto newspapers, one fundraiser occurred in November 1907 when Charles Currelly, Vic 1898, later instrumental in the founding of the ROM, gave an illustrated lecture in the College chapel, 50 cents a ticket. After expenses that included \$6.00 for a lantern and \$1.50 for a carriage, the VWA cleared \$95.75 which was used for repairs and a furnace extension.

In 1908, the members decided that the men needed a residence, but their assistance proved unnecessary when the next year the Board of Regents received an offer from Chester D. Massey to build one, and Burwash opened in 1913. When there was no longer space in the residences, the VWA formed a boarding house committee to inspect and recommend rooms off campus. Since the members' standards were high, not many rooms made this list. In 1912, the VWA furnished a comfortable parlour with a piano for commuter female students in the College building and later in 1930, a women's staff room there.

**Wymilwood:** Vic students received a very generous gift in 1925 when VWA member Agnes Euphemia (Pheme) Wood convinced her husband Edward Rogers Wood to donate their home, worth then about \$150,000, at 84 Queen's Park to Victoria for a women's residence and student union; it was named Wymilwood after their children William and Mildred. Lady Clara Flavelle, who lived next door at Holwood in what is now the Faculty of Law at 78 Queen's Park, undertook its remodeling and furnishing. The elegant results were much admired at its high-profile opening in January 1926 and it received newspaper coverage. (It is interesting that York University started out on the U of T campus in this very Wymilwood, later called Falconer Hall; the Woods built their new home Glendon Hall on Bayview Avenue which later became the first location off the U of T campus of York University.)

**Church Union:** Among its many projects, the VWA decided to raise funds and at the same time to help Church Union: In 1925 Methodists, Congregationalists, and most Presbyterians, formed the United Church of Canada, and understandably this Union suffered difficulties. Therefore, in 1929 the VWA invited the women of the three Toronto presbyteries to Vic for tea at Annesley Hall and for tours through "their" college buildings. For three days, the VWA entertained more than 1,000 guests. The members may have helped consolidate church union, but they did not benefit financially making only \$8.96 after expenses. (Gradually over the years, the traditional church connection became less important, and now with Victoria College being non-denominational, some may not be aware of this tie. Of course, the United Church theological college, Emmanuel, founded in 1928, is still part of Victoria University.)

**Other Interests:** Important as Victoria and its students were to it, the VWA was not insular. In 1907, it became a federate of the local Council of Women, formed in 1893 and still active through addressing social, health, educational and political issues. Along with university women, it helped the first World War effort by working for the University Hospital Supply Committee. It also helped a Chinese woman, Doris Ding, return to China to teach in a new Chinese university for women; donated to Armenian relief in 1922; and joined the League of Nations in 1925, among other good works.

**A Change:** Dean Addison retired in the spring of 1931, and with over 220 women students in residence, more changes came, and by 1932, the Board of Regents had hired a warden to take over from the Committee of Management. This Committee had functioned from December 1902 to June 1932 when it merged into the Women's Council which was eventually disbanded in 1952. During those years, the Committee had only three presidents, Margaret Burwash (1902-13), Mrs. R. N. (Mary Jane Crossen) Burns (1913-30), and Mrs. A. E. (Florence Warner) Lang (1930-32); they gave periodic reports to the VWA. Among its members had been Lillian Massey Treble, daughter of Hart Massey, his daughters-in-law Susan Denton Massey (Mrs. Walter Massey), Anna Vincent Massey, and then after the latter's death, Margaret Phelps Massey, Chester's two wives. There is a very moving tribute to this Committee and its outstanding work in the VWA records of April 26, 1933.

**A New Purpose:** No longer involved with the administration of the residences and the student union, except in an advisory capacity, the VWA members followed the suggestion of Margaret Addison and of their president Maud Brown and found a new role as a link between Victoria and the parents of the students. Therefore, in 1933 the VWA decided to invite the mothers of first-year students to join the organization. In order to recruit new members, it hosted a reception in October which they advertised in the newspapers. This was the beginning of the annual October Open House for Vic parents and friends to meet the professors and tour the College. Then in the fall of 1994 Victoria began to hold "Open Vic." In October of the following year, the VWA took part in U of T Day, in the Clubs Tent, King's College Circle, and then it ended its participation in any open house.

**Another Wymilwood:** Vic decided to exchange Wymilwood at 84 Queen's Park (crossing the road safely had always been a challenge) with U of T for land on Charles Street West for a new student centre and food facility for Annesley; it was also named Wymilwood. Called one of Eric Arthur's jewels, it opened in 1952 and its design was praised even in Europe: No matter where one was in the building, there was always access to outdoor light. The VWA raised almost \$2,000 through teas and private subscription in order to furnish its Copper Room. The Association's afternoon programmes, some including reports from students, continued. Music, having always been important to the group, was part of the programmes whenever possible and took place in Wymilwood's Music Room.

**Membership:** The VWA would expand its membership from time to time, by advertising in the newspapers or holding receptions for the College, students' parents, or the public. In 1965, under the presidency of the first woman who was not a Vic employee or wife of one, Marguerite Fidler, expanded its membership base in 1965 by inviting men to become part of the Association. Meetings were held at least once a year in the evenings so that men could attend. However, evening meetings were discontinued as they had been in the past when attendance declined. Current members, some of whom joined the VWA in the 1980s, have been very faithful and generous with their time and money.

**Anniversaries:** Celebrations for the anniversaries have been held over the years, but the most important one occurred in 1997 for the 100<sup>th</sup> with a dinner, special lectures, and a fundraising evening with Mary Lou Fallis starring in *Primadonna on a Moose*. In April 2023, a delayed celebratory lunch for 125 years took place in Alumni Hall. Rick (Massey) Somerville, Hart Massey's great great great grandson, spoke about his family's relationship with the VWA and Victoria while Pratt archivist Jess Todd gave an overview of the VWA exhibition in Pratt Library that accompanied this milestone.

**Financial Assistance:** The VWA has assisted Vic students, foreign and domestic, informally and formally, through the Ethel Bennett and Margaret Addison Scholarships, and the Endowed Bursary Fund which made its appearance as a scholarship fund for needy students in 1909; it changed its name to a bursary fund in 1911. The VWA has also been able to contribute to bursaries or scholarships honouring the following: our former Executive member Prof. Sheila Cook, former Victoria President William Robins, retirees, such as Alumni Affairs Executive Director Larry Davies, Vic Presidents Emeriti Paul Gooch and Eva Kushner, Registrar Susan McDonald and Bursar Ray deSouza. It contributes to the VUSAC BIPOC Leadership Award and to the Judy LaMarsh annual lecture. It should also be noted that in 2011-12, the VWA contributed \$5,000 to the expansion

of Wymilwood which was renamed the Goldring Student Centre.

**Current Times:** Now, having realized that there is still a place in the community for informative and entertaining lectures that do not involve a significant time or financial commitment, the VWA feels confident in continuing to offer several lectures during the academic year, usually presented by Vic or U of T staff and faculty who willingly donate their time and expertise. Through these afternoon programmes, the April luncheons, the annual newsletters, and the invitations to students' families, the VWA maintains its role as a liaison between Victoria and the alumni, friends and relatives of past and present students, and members of the public. Of course, the Association also continues to raise money for bursaries for Vic students in financial need.

**FYI:** In 2007, the VWA became a lifetime member of U of T's donor recognition society, the Presidents' Circle, and in 2013, it received a U of T's Arbor Award because of "the generosity and dedication of its members." The Association also became a member of the Victoria University's Ivy Society which honours those donors who have contributed a minimum cumulative total of \$100,000 since 1903.

**VWA: 125 and Counting:** For over 125 years, through many transformations, the Association has remained flexible and has been able to adapt to Vic's changing needs. No matter what the required transition, the VWA has remained committed to Victoria and Vic students. We look forward to continuing our service with dedication, honour and enthusiasm for many more years.

**NOTE:** The history of the VWA is much richer and more complex than the overview above. The Vic archives; Ethel Granger Bennett's 1970 history of the VWA; Anne Ford's *A Path Not Strewn with Roses: One Hundred Years of Women at the University of Toronto, 1884-1984*; Dr. Chaviva Hošek's "Women at Victoria" in *From Cobourg to Toronto*; Prof. C. B. Sissons' *A History of Victoria University* and most of all Dr. Jean O'Grady's 2001 biography of Margaret Addison and her 1996 "A History of the Victoria Women's Association" along with her suggestions about this history have all been very useful. See also *Vic Visionaries: Donor Newsletter*, November 2021, for Mary Heinmaa's article and photos, "Extraordinary Support of Vic Students for 125 Years," pp 6-8.

Diane Dyer, VWA President, 2004 -