

**Training Deaconesses the Manitoba Way!**

Manitoba College's Deaconess Training Program  
1920 to 1939

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Toronto is considered the historical centre for Deaconess training within The United Church of Canada. Toronto was the site of two denominational training schools prior to Church Union; the Methodist National Training School established in 1893 and the Presbyterian Missionary and Deaconess Training Home (also known as Ewart Training Home) established in 1897.<sup>1</sup> These two schools joined to create the United Church Training School Church after union in 1925, and the subsequent decisions of General Council of 1926 regarding the unified Deaconess Order and the future of the old training schools.<sup>2</sup> Housed in the former Methodist School, the United Church Training College became the United Church School for Deaconess and Missionary Training.<sup>3</sup> What is less commonly remembered is that this school was not the only school for Deaconess preparation at that time. Winnipeg, Manitoba was home to a Deaconess training school as well. This made-in-Manitoba program began in 1920 through the Presbyterian Theological School, Manitoba College. The Women's Department continued on until 1939, the year that Wesley College and Manitoba College officially merged into United College. At this time the Women's Department disappears from historical documentation.

The purpose of this paper is to uncover the life and death of the Manitoba College Deaconess training program. My personal perspective and agenda is part of this purpose. I was a woman who moved to Toronto to attend the Centre for Christian Studies (formerly United Church Training College and then Covenant College) in 1987. Although I was travelling to study theology to become a Diaconal Minister, at that point in my life knew little of Diaconal ministry and its history. I knew the Centre for Christian Studies was the only theological school for diaconal preparation in the United Church. This ignorance lessened as I continued my theological education. I went from knowing very little about my ministry's history to becoming rooted in the rich history and tradition of the deaconess and missionary movements of The United Church of Canada. The perspective of this tradition centered on the history of the Centre for Christian Studies. As someone from the prairies seeking to find an identity within this tradition where I recognized little, I felt in some ways a pioneer. I was very surprised to learn

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada, 1925 to 1964", (M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1987) 20.

<sup>2</sup> MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens", 20.

<sup>3</sup> MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens", 20.

some years later that Winnipeg had been home to a deaconess training school, that there had been made-in-Manitoba Deaconesses and that Manitoba was definitely a part of Diaconal history. Although I was the first Diaconal Minister to be commissioned in twenty years in my Conference, in no way was I a pioneer.

Diaconal history has been a largely unrecorded part of United Church history. This is true for many reasons. Deaconesses were not part of the ordered ministry of the Presbyterian, Methodist and early United Church; they were governed by national committees and associations. The General Council of 1926 created the Committee on Employed Women Workers in the Church to study the question of the place and treatment of trained women workers in the new United Church. At the same time, a Deaconess Association was established which combined into one Order those already connected with the existing Orders.<sup>4</sup> Diaconal history has always been a history of ministry at the margins of the institutional Church. It is a history of ministry by the marginalized of society to the marginalized; it is a history of ministry to those considered outside the mainstream by another disenfranchised group. It is a history of mostly single women who ministered to the impoverished, the new Canadians, the old and infirm, women and children. For these reasons it has been possible for Diaconal ministry to remain invisible to the mainstream historian. I believe it is Important to record this history in order to make it visible and to make it part of the collective history of the church.

Some efforts have been made to document this history. Mary Anne MacFarlane made a significant contribution through her 1987 thesis, "A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada 1925-1964". The Committee on Diaconal Ministry of The United Church of Canada published History of Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada 1925-1991. In both these works, however, only very brief reference is made to the Manitoba College Deaconess training program The purpose of this paper is to broaden these brief references into a fuller understanding of the program which "had traditionally been a second place for the training of Presbyterian deaconesses" and was allowed to continue as an alternate educational centre after Church Union,<sup>5</sup> My hope is that this paper will be a small contribution to the effort to enlarge our understanding of the place Diaconal ministry and Diaconal education has had across The United Church and in Canada. This paper attempts to record and remember this particular moment in the ongoing story of women's history and Diaconal history.

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<sup>4</sup> MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens", 20.

<sup>5</sup> MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens", 20.

In 1908, the Thirty-fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada gathered in Winnipeg. After hearing the report from the Committee on an Order of Deaconesses, the court voted on and subsequently established a Deaconess Order.<sup>6</sup> According to the report, this committee was created as a result of two separate requests from the church courts. The Presbytery of Winnipeg and Synod of Manitoba had asked the General Assembly “to take steps to set apart an order of women who shall be known as *Deaconesses*, who shall serve the church as nurses, visitors, dispensers of charity, and in any other way that may prove to be desirable”.<sup>7</sup> The Presbytery of Toronto had asked the General Assembly “to express its approval of the changing of the constitution of the (Ewart Training) Home, with a view to the broadening of its scope and of its support and to approve at the same time of some method by which graduates may be specially designated by the Church when entering on their work”.<sup>8</sup> These requests came before the General Assembly prior to 1908, but the precise date is unclear.

The Report provided an excellent historical and ecumenical overview of the Deaconess tradition. It traced the Deaconess tradition historically to the beginnings of Christian church. The committee believed there were enough references to Deaconesses in the “Apostolic Constitutions’ that a “tolerably clear picture of the Deaconess and her work” could be obtained.<sup>9</sup> The Report identified the near demise of the Deaconess tradition with suppression of the order in the Latin Church in the sixth century, and in the Greek Church in the twelfth century. These suppressions were not the complete end of the movement, however. The report recorded that before and after the Reformation, there existed some groups of women living in Christian communities alongside their sisters in convents. It was not until a meeting of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches in 1885 that renewed efforts were made to order Protestant women’s work formally.

At the 1885 meeting, a committee was struck to consider the whole question of women’s work. In 1889 this committee recommended to the Churches in the Alliance, the creation of an Order of Deaconesses. The Church of Scotland had already established an Order of Deaconesses by this year. Their example was followed quickly by other Protestant

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<sup>6</sup> UCA MNO, “Report of Committee on an Order of Deaconesses” in *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada 1908*, 312-315.

<sup>7</sup> “Report of Committee on an Order of Deaconesses”, 312.

<sup>8</sup> “Report of Committee on an Order of Deaconesses”, 312.

<sup>9</sup> “Report of Committee on an Order of Deaconesses”, 312.

denominations: the Presbyterian Church (South), the Dutch Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church of the United States, the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States, and the Methodist Church in Canada. The Presbyterian Church in the United States (North) apparently adopted the order of Deaconess without using a title.

The General Assembly Report also notes that over 150 institutions were created to train Deaconesses in the fifteen years prior to 1908. Ewart Missionary Training Home had been established in 1897 under the auspices of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society to train women missionaries. In 1907, the Assembly approved broadening the scope of the Ewart Missionary Training Home and expressed its belief in the importance of developing women's work at home and abroad. The curriculum expanded to fit the needs of students training for Christian service in any sphere of the Presbyterian church.

In sanctioning the institution of a Deaconess Order, the Presbyterian Church decided against the Methodist Deaconess model whereby a home and support for life were provided for each Deaconess in exchange for a regular spending allowance.<sup>10</sup> The report recommended that Deaconesses receive a remuneration based on what was necessary for comfort and health and to make provision for old age. Remuneration and retirement regulations were similar to regulations applying to foreign missionaries. A Deaconess could retire from service for reasons of infirmity or age with the sanction of the Committee in charge of Deaconess Work. She was to receive a fifty dollar annuity after ten years service with five dollars for each additional year of service up to forty with no annuity exceeding \$200. These funds were to come from Church funds set aside for Deaconess work. If the Deaconess married, her annuity was cancelled. The Report to the General Assembly was clear that Deaconess designation was not to be regarded as ordination, nor as a pledge of perpetual service. Each worker was free to retire from her work with notice to the Committee.

Candidacy requirements were clearly outlined. Candidates entering training were to be between 22 and 35 years old, and have at least the equivalent of entrance standing in the High Schools of Ontario. They were to present a certificate of membership in full communion with the church and be of excellent Christian character. Candidates were also to undergo a medical examination to the satisfaction of the Board of Management of Ewart Training Home. A diploma was granted upon completion of training. Graduates were designated as Missionaries or

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<sup>10</sup> MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens", 18.

Deaconesses by a Presbytery, once an appointment was secured. Appointments were with the Foreign Mission Committee, Home Mission Committee, or to parochial work with the Presbyterian Church.

The training course itself was to be a two year program. The course outline included the following topics:

- the study and practical use of the English Bible
- Christian Doctrine, evidences and ethics
- the history, organization and agencies of the Church
- methods of work and their practical application in Sabbath School, Young People's Societies, district visiting, conducting a meeting, etc.
- physiology, hygiene, nursing domestic science
- philanthropic and sociological work (for Deaconesses)
- comparative religions and the mission of Christianity to the world (for missionaries).

Ewart Training Home in Toronto was reaffirmed as the official training institution for Missionary and Deaconess work for women in the Presbyterian Church. It also became a Home "under helpful Christian influences" intended for candidates during their period of training, for Deaconesses engaged in work in its vicinity or for times of furlough for women Missionaries and Deaconesses.<sup>11</sup> In 1908 there was no tuition fee but each resident was to pay \$3.50 weekly for board and lodging. Any woman who resided in Toronto and wished to continue residence in her family home was allowed to attend the classes upon payment of an enrolment fee of \$5.00. Such a candidate was required to reside in the Home for a least one year before she could be appointed to Home, Foreign or parochial work, unless she was one of the "godly women of mature years, sober-minded and thoroughly tested in the school of experience".<sup>12</sup>

Although it did not provide Deaconess training immediately following the establishment of a Deaconess Order within the Presbyterian Church, Manitoba College had a long history of providing education in the west. It was incorporated in 1874 as part of the Home Missions work the Presbyterian Church undertook in the decade following the 1869-1870 Riel Rebellion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Report of Committee on an Order of Deaconesses", 313.

<sup>12</sup> "Report of Committee on an Order of Deaconesses", 314.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Macdonald, "James Robertson and Presbyterian Church extension in Manitoba and the North West, 1866-1902, in Prairie Spirit: Perspectives on the Heritage of The United Church of Canada in the West, eds. Dennis L. Butcher, Catherine Macdonald, Margaret E. McPherson, Raymond R. Smith, and A. McKibbin Watts (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 87.

This was a time of great change in the west and great expansion for the Presbyterian Church and other Protestant denominations in Canada.<sup>14</sup> In late 1870, a small group of Presbyterian Missionaries centered at Red River, and gained authorization to form the Presbytery of Manitoba and the Northwest.<sup>15</sup> In 1871, the Rev. George Bryce was sent to found a Presbyterian College at Red River, and to assist in the growing home missions work of the new Presbytery.<sup>16</sup> Manitoba College was moved from Kildonan to a house on Main Street as it became clear that Winnipeg was the centre of population.<sup>17</sup> It was not until the 1890s, as the western church found it increasingly difficult to fill pulpits that the General Assembly finally allowed Manitoba College to teach theology and train western missionaries.<sup>18</sup> From the early 1890s Manitoba College worked cooperatively with Wesley College. In order to prevent duplication of services and in the spirit of ecumenical co-operation, Manitoba College stopped teaching arts to focus solely on Theology, and Wesley College shifted to primarily Arts in 1914.<sup>19</sup> Manitoba College's long history in the province portrays it as a constantly evolving institution willing to adapt in ways suitable to its community.

Why the training school was initially established is not quite clear. The College's adaptive ethos likely contributed to its creation. Declining enrolment of theological students (this is the term used by the college to refer to students training for ordained ministry) could have been a factor. In the Manitoba College Report to the Thirty-Seventh Synod of Manitoba (1920), Principal Mackay makes reference to the small number of students and encouraged the recruitment of young men into the ministry.<sup>20</sup> At a time when women were barred from ordination, adding a new program for women would have automatically doubled the pool of potential students. The addition of a Deaconess training program could have been part of an overall restructuring of the College. A few years earlier, the College had agreed to increase co-operation with Wesley College. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the College had given up the teaching of Arts in order to focus solely on Theology. At the same time as the Deaconess Training School was established, a new evening training program for Sunday School Teachers

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<sup>14</sup> Macdonald, "Presbyterian Church Extension", 85.

<sup>15</sup> Macdonald, "Presbyterian Church Extension", 87.

<sup>16</sup> Macdonald, "Presbyterian Church Extension", 87.

<sup>17</sup> Macdonald, "Presbyterian Church Extension", 88.

<sup>18</sup> Macdonald, "Presbyterian Church Extension", 95.

<sup>19</sup> Calendars of Manitoba College from 1916-17 to 1937-38 all contain a Forward outlining the historical development of the college. UCA-MNO, "Calendars and Registration Information, Awards Lists" and "United College Calendars 1925-1967".

<sup>20</sup> "Report of Manitoba College", in *Presbyterian Church in Canada Minutes of the Thirty-Seventh Synod of Manitoba 1920*, 17.

is also mentioned in the Calendar. This program was a cooperative venture with Wesley College, with the Junior classes meeting in Wesley College and the Senior classes in Manitoba College. The vision and commitment of the Principal is likely another factor in the creation of the program. The Rev. John Mackay's commitment to Deaconess work and training will be explored more fully later in this paper. The combination of these factors resulted in the establishment of this second training site for Presbyterian Deaconesses. It continued until 1939 with the graduation of its final student, Rev. Marguerite Miller, and with the official unification of Wesley and Manitoba College into the United College.

In Manitoba College's 1918-1919 Course Calendar, the first reference is made to providing a School of Training for lay workers and Deaconesses. The calendar stated that "it is proposed to establish a School of Training for lay workers and Deaconesses with a view to preparation for church work of a practical kind".<sup>21</sup> By the next year the Calendar stated that Manitoba College had established such a school.<sup>22</sup> Until the establishment of the Deaconess course, the student body was composed of young men. Religious education was not taught by regular teaching staff but through visiting staff personnel provided by the General Assembly's Board of Sabbath Schools and Young Peoples Societies. For example, the 1916-1917 calendar stated that Rev. A.J. Wm. Myers of the General Assembly's Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies would visit the College each session to give a series of lectures on "the Organization of Religious Education" and "The Principles of Religious Education".<sup>23</sup> From providing base level religious education theory to providing training for lay workers and deaconesses a significant shift occurred to the College in terms of curriculum development, academic staffing and subversively removing the exclusive gender makeup of the student body.

By 1920-1921, the program was now referred to as the "Women's Department - for the training of women as home and foreign missionaries, social service workers, Deaconesses and church secretaries".<sup>24</sup> The program was a two year course of six months each. In terms of curriculum, the Women's course followed the same basic framework as the Theology course. Parallel courses included: the Bible - Old Testament and New Testament, Religious Education, Church History, Vocal Interpretation of the Bible, and Mission Studies. There were also some interesting differences. The women studied Christian Doctrine under the same professor

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<sup>21</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1918-19.

<sup>22</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1919-20.

<sup>23</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1916-17.

<sup>24</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1920-21.

who taught the Theology students Systematic Theology, Ethics and Apologetics. Their program included a Social Service course under the same professor who taught Social Ethics to the Theology students. There were also courses specific to the Women's course. These included Physical Culture, Medicine and Surgery Personal Work, and Stenography and Typewriting (optional). Included in the Theology Course and not the Women's course was Pastoral Theology. This area included the theory of preaching and sermon construction, church policy and polity, and what today we might call "ministry formation issues" - understanding the minister as pastor and administrator.

Through a conversation with the final graduate of the Deaconess Training Program, Marguerite Miller, it is clear that by the end of the program's life, the Deaconesses took classes alongside the Theological students.<sup>25</sup> Whether this had always been the case, is less clear. A comparison between the Subjects of Instruction for the Theological Department and the Women's Department in the 1920-21 Calendar raises doubts. The course descriptions for the women's courses are shorter in length and more condensed in language. In some courses such as the Biblical ones, the women studied fewer Biblical books than the Theological students. Other courses, such as Religious Education, are described quite differently for the Women's course than in the Theology section. In their Religious Education course, the women studied Child Psychology, Teacher Training and the Church School Organization, Management and Programs, for two hours a week for two years. In their first year, the Theological students studied History of Christian Education, Teacher Training and Practice in Religious Education. In their second and third years, they studied Aims of Religious Education, Child Psychology and The Church School, with an optional course on Church School Curriculum also offered. While the two courses are not so different in essence, the Theological course offers more theory and history, and is more extensive than the Women's course. As indicated earlier there were also some courses with different titles between the Theological Department and the Women's Department. For example, the women studied Social Service whereas the men studied Social Ethics. These differences again indicate that there was a lack of theoretical depth and an emphasis on practical application in the women's program. The differences in the programs are likely rooted in the belief that Deaconess training was not as academic or theological as the Theology program. It was understood to be short term practical work.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Taped interview with Marguerite Miller, January 30, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Anne MacFarlane's thesis "A Tale of Handmaidens", deals extensively with these issues.

It is clear that the women's courses were taught by the same professors as in the theology course. It is possible that the women were in the same classrooms as the men from the start but with modified course requirements. It seems more likely that given the differences in course descriptions and course titles, the women were in separate classes. Combined classes likely became a practical and pragmatic solution to the problems of increasingly low student numbers and the economic pressures that the Depression eventually placed on college resources. In the beginnings of the Program, however, there were likely enough Deaconess students and faculty resources to merit separate classes.

The 1921-22 Course Calendar for Manitoba College fully outlined the prerequisites for enrolment in the women's course. Under the title Women's Department, the women's course was described as "intended for the training of home and foreign missionaries, social service workers, Deaconesses and church secretaries".<sup>27</sup> The candidates needed to be between the ages of twenty and thirty-five. The educational entrance requirements had elevated since the Deaconess Report to the General Assembly in 1908. Candidates now required as a minimum University matriculation or its equivalent (such as a Teacher's Certificate, Nurse's Diploma, or Business Certificate, as long as such circumstances included three years of High School and successful experience). Other requirements included a certificate of membership of the Presbyterian Church in full communion and references to their Christian character and suitability and a medical examination. There was no charge for tuition for the Deaconess program, but there was a fee of \$1.00 for registration and an additional charge of \$3.50 for associated organizations. A Ladies' Residence had been purchased at 35 Kennedy Street to accommodate twenty-two deaconess students, other female students or Deaconesses. This residence was overseen by Miss Edna Sutherland, the Dean of Women and teacher of all Vocal Interpretation at Manitoba College. She also resided in the house. The cost for residing at 35 Kennedy was a reduced rate of \$5.50 per week for students in the Women's course.

In 1925, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches in Canada joined to form The United Church of Canada. The new United Church was faced with the task of merging two well-established Deaconess groups from the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations, each bringing very different histories, self-understandings, and denominational

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<sup>27</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1921-22.

training centers.<sup>28</sup> Under the provisions of the Basis of Union, both Wesley and Manitoba Colleges entered the United Church with the same status as prior to union with the long-term goal being the eventual unification of their governing bodies.<sup>29</sup> In the spirit of increasing co-operation, the two institutions published their first common calendar for the academic year 1925-26. In this Calendar, the Theological Department outlined their program in a new way. The calendar divided their programs into two parts; one for men and one for women. For men, educational preparation was offered for those seeking to do the regular work of the Ministry, to become Directors of Religious Education and Social Service or to be Sunday School Teachers and other Church Workers. For women, educational preparation was offered for those seeking to become Deaconesses and Missionaries, Church Secretaries, Sunday School Teachers, Junior Congregation Leaders and other Church Workers. There continued to be no charge for tuition, and the course outline remained unchanged.

By 1926-27, the two year women's course was no longer divided into Year One and Year Two, but came to be described as the Junior Deaconess Course and Senior Deaconess Course.<sup>30</sup> The Junior Deaconess Course included Old Testament, New Testament, Christian Ethics, Religious Education, Church History, Social Service, and Vocal Interpretation of the Bible. The Senior Deaconess Course included Old Testament, Religion and Ethics, New Testament, Christian Doctrine, Religious Education and Social Service, Vocal Interpretation of the Bible, and arrangements to also take Physical Culture, Stenography and Typewriting (optional), First Aid and Home Nursing courses (through Public Health and The Red Cross Society), Missions and Personal Work.

Course Calendars and Yearbooks are helpful in gaining a sense of the numbers of students enrolled in the Deaconess program. Beginning in 1922-23, the Manitoba College Calendar included the names of women students in their list of students provided at the back of their book. In 1926, The United Church Yearbooks began to carry reports of the theological colleges. In his reports on Manitoba College, the Principal Rev. John Mackay reported regularly on student enrolments. From these reports we also glean insight into the changes that the imminent amalgamation with Wesley College brought to Manitoba College.

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<sup>28</sup> MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens", 18.

<sup>29</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1925-26.

<sup>30</sup> Calendar of Manitoba College, 1926-27.

We learn from the course calendars that sixteen women were enrolled in the Women's course in 1922-23, thirteen in 1923-24, and by the 1927-28 academic year, the number had dropped to five. From the United Church Yearbook reports, we find that 1926 showed 11 women in the Women's course. The 1928 Manitoba College report indicated that there were seven students in the Women's course "all of whom acquitted themselves well in practical work, as well as in class".<sup>31</sup> By 1929, the Women's course was down to five students.

In 1930, 35 Kennedy Street was sold and the College's female residential students moved to Wesley College's Sparling Hall. The 1930 Yearbook report stated that "the residence was originally purchased as a home for Deaconesses, but as most of those in training have either lived at home, or boarded with friends in the city, our residents have been mainly University girls".<sup>32</sup> Again only five women were enrolled in the Women's Course.

In 1932 Manitoba College sold its buildings and site and the College moved to the second floor of the Wesley College building. Six Deaconess students were reported to be in the Women's course at this time. The 1933 Report told of the serious financial difficulties that Manitoba College was facing. The crisis was due to nearly half of their funds having been invested in farm loans. The College had to reduce salaries and other fixed expenses. The number of women enrolled in the Women's course had risen to seven that year. In 1934, nine Deaconesses were reported to be in training. Two of these Deaconesses had B.A. degrees and took the full Theological course. The numbers were down to three in 1935, and four in 1937.<sup>33</sup> In 1938, when Manitoba College submitted its sixty-sixth and last report to the courts of the Church, no accounts were given of the number of Theology or Deaconess students. Manitoba and Wesley College merged June of that year. In the 1939 Yearbook, the first report of the new United College was given. Twenty-eight students were reported for the Faculty of Theology, but no mention is made of the Women's Department. The Report stated, however, that "a radical reorganization" of the Faculty of Theology had been necessary.<sup>34</sup> As we can see from the numbers, the Women's course flourished from the early to mid twenties, but experienced a slow decline following the time of Church Union.

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<sup>31</sup> *The United Church of Canada Yearbook 192*, 238.

<sup>32</sup> *The United Church of Canada Yearbook 1930*, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Manitoba College Executive Minutes Nov. 1920-April 1937, 98.

<sup>34</sup> *The United Church of Canada Yearbook 1939*, 44.

The principal of Manitoba College played a key role in the development of the Women's Department. There is evidence that he was a great supporter of Deaconess work within the United Church, at least. Executive minutes of Manitoba College indicate that Principal Mackay was appointed to represent the College at a meeting of the Deaconess Board of the Church in 1926 and 1927.<sup>35</sup> In 1937, the Rev. John Mackay was noted as a founding member of the new General Council Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers.<sup>36</sup> The support the Deaconess training course received at the College is also evidenced in Executive minutes. A Manitoba College Executive Report to Winnipeg Presbytery, March 3, 1924, stated that

*“the financial depression and the fear the church might not be able to utilize the services of any more Deaconesses cut down the attendance in that Department to five. Here, too, there is need of every minister doing all he can to recruit qualified young women for this most important work”.*<sup>37</sup>

A similar worry was also articulated in the Report that the number of young men pursuing ministry preparation in Manitoba and Wesley Colleges combined would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the United Church. This report shares equal concern for the Women's Department as for the Theological course. Presbyters were encouraged to recruit both men and women. It is impressive that a theological school would support a Deaconess program so publicly.

Reactions to and public grief for the sudden death of Rev. John Mackay in May of 1938 reflect the kind of commitment and leadership he offered to the Deaconess community specifically, and to the wider church in general. The 1938 General Council Report of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers stated its appreciation for the leadership of Mackay:

*“The death of Principal John MacKay of Manitoba College in May, 1938, removed from us one who was deeply interested in the training of women workers. The Committee joins with the whole Church in expressing its gratitude for his many years of distinguished service”.*<sup>38</sup>

The College Executive minutes indicate the deep sadness the Executive felt by the sudden death of their principal and leader.<sup>39</sup> The loss of such a leader on the cusp of the final

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<sup>35</sup> Manitoba College Executive Minutes, 66 & 69.

<sup>36</sup> *The United Church of Canada Yearbook 1937*, 146-7.

<sup>37</sup> “Report to Winnipeg Presbytery”, in Manitoba College Executive Minutes.

<sup>38</sup> “The Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers” in *The United Church of Canada Yearbook 1938*, 164.

<sup>39</sup> Manitoba College Executive Minutes, 100.

unification of two distinct Colleges into one United College, was felt profoundly by the Church community.

Without the presence of the “one who was deeply interested in the training of women workers”, the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers soon forgot the second training centre for Deaconesses. Their 1939 report to General Council included an account of five United Church Training School graduates being received as Deaconess candidates that year. No mention was made of the Deaconess graduate from the (newly named) United College from that year. Marguerite Miller went on to become a Deaconess two years later, following not one but two years of satisfactory Church service.<sup>40</sup> This omission occurred despite the fact that one of the duties outlined for the committee in 1937 was “to cooperate with the Boards of the Training Centres for women in defining courses of training”.<sup>41</sup> The reference to the Training Centres is plural to include both the United Church Training Centre and Manitoba College. Without Principal Mackay’s presence, the Deaconess Training Program in Manitoba was forgotten; neither the final graduate, nor the demise of the program was noted in the appropriate church reports.

So, what happened to the Women’s Course, the Winnipeg Deaconess Training Program? It could be the elimination of the Women’s course was part of the institutional reorganization that impending amalgamation between Manitoba and Wesley Colleges brought. To date have found no mention of any such discussion in Executive minutes, College reports to General Council or reports of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers. It is more likely that the combination of declining numbers of Deaconess students since the time of Church Union, the institutional chaos and complications of the merge between Manitoba College and Wesley College, along with the sudden death of Principal Mackay, a strong leader and advocate of Deaconess programs, together rang the death bell for the Deaconess training course. History has a fascinating way of repeating itself. This story is being revisited today in Winnipeg, as preparations are being made to move the Centre for Christian Studies here from Toronto. Out of the ashes of the memory of this Deaconess program rises the phoenix of another. The story will continue.

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<sup>40</sup> Taped Interview with Marguerite Miller, January 30, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> *The United Church of Canada Yearbook 1937*, 146-7.

## APPENDIX ONE

Chart showing number of women enrolled at Manitoba College Women's Course  
(and number of theological students for comparison)

YEAR	STUDENTS in the WOMEN'S COURSE	STUDENTS in the THEOLOGICAL COURSE
1922-23*	16	8
1923-24	13	5
1926*	11	19
1927-28	5	13
1928	7	17
1929	5	15
1930	5	10
1932	6	20
1933	7	20
1934	9	10
1935	3	8
1937*	4	20
1938	no account	no account
1939	Marguerite Miller graduated, but no students listed.	28

\*Blue – Numbers from Manitoba College Calendars

\*Green – Numbers from The United Church of Canada Yearbooks

\*Red – Numbers from Executive Minutes of Manitoba College

**NOTE:** *These numbers are full-time students and do not include occasional students.*

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