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## Women at Middlebury: A Brief History of the Highs and the Lows

by Jan Albers

(Interviews by Karin Hanta and Rui Bing Zheng)



WOMEN'S  
AND  
GENDER  
STUDIES

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### Introduction

We have all heard the assertion that feminism was great in its day but, luckily, it's no longer needed. Before commanding a person with this viewpoint to sit down for a nice, long chat (I promise I'll let you talk soon), let's not gloss over the achievements of our forebears too quickly. The tenth anniversary of the May Belle Chellis Women's Resource Center seems like a good time to take a look back at some of the high points (↑), and the low points (↓), in the history of women at the College. Thanks to David Stameshkin's two-volume history of Middlebury College and David Bain, *The College on the Hill*, for most of this information.

### ↓ 1800–1883 A Long Stretch

During this very long stretch, women were not admitted to the College. They were here cleaning rooms, cooking food, running student boarding houses, tending to faculty husbands and so on. But they were not teaching or being taught.

### ↑ 1883 Women Admitted

The structure of this narrative is giving the false impression that women got admitted more quickly than they did. Please go back and ponder the Long Stretch for a while longer before proceeding.

In 1883, the College's precarious finances, low enrollments and a demand for female higher education from the townspeople of Middlebury, led to the acceptance of the first three female students: May Anna Bolton, Louise Hagar Edgerton and May Belle Chellis. (This was not unusual in the context of the time, as over 50% of American colleges were already letting women in by 1880). The catalogue said that the

College "offers the same privileges to young ladies as to young gentlemen." A churlish board member later argued that the Board had never meant to make women's degrees equal and it only happened because President Hamlin, who wrote the catalogue, was "hard of hearing."

### ↑ 1886 May Belle Chellis Beats the Boys!

The first woman to receive her degree from Middlebury was an overachiever named May Belle Chellis. She finished first in her class and created some degree of consternation when she walked away with the coveted Greek prize.

### ↑ 1886–1910 I'm Not Just Here for an MRS. Degree!

Over half the women who graduated from Middlebury in this era pursued a career, at least before they married. Another 40% never married. Admittedly, one-third of those who married found their husbands here.

### ↑ 1887 R-E-S-P-E-C-T

President Ezra Brainerd, nicknamed "Professor Brains," stated in his annual Report that, "The young ladies who have been admitted to the privileges of the college have so far conducted themselves with entire propriety, and have taken a high rank in scholarship."

### ⇄ 1889 First Sorority at Middlebury

The first sorority, Alpha Chi, was established, giving the women an organization meant to redress the imbalance caused by the powerful fraternities. Unfortunately, by 1894 they had begun excluding girls they did not want, thereby wreaking social havoc among the College's female contingent.

### ↑ 1891 Lock Up Your Daughters

Battell Hall, at the corner of Weybridge and College Streets, became the first women's dormitory. Much was made of how well it was chaperoned.

### ⇄ c.1895 With Nary a Pot to Pee In

The new women students gained a study room on the top floor of Old Chapel, but were not allowed to use any toilet facilities on campus. A discrete request finally got the trustees to grant them a toilet and sink, set up in broad view in their study. Mary O. Pollard, 1896 later wrote, "They stood alone in their splendor, in full view of whoever came to the door. In some attic the girls found a screen, and placed that around the seat, but I remember that the feet showed below the screen covering, and the flushing water resounded through the entire half of Old Chapel."

### ↓ 1896 It's Simple: You Do the Work, I'll Take the Credit

Helen P. Baird was told she could have the title of assistant editor of the *Kaleidoscope* if she'd do the work, while Frank Davis would be called editor-in-chief. He felt this was fair, because it just "didn't look well to have a girl in higher rank than a man."

### ↓ 1896 It's Simple: The Best Man Gets to be Valedictorian and the Best Girl Salutatorian

A rule was passed making this College policy, regardless of whether the best woman in the class had a higher average.

### ↑ 1899 First African-American Woman Graduate

The brilliant Mary Annette Anderson was the first African American woman to graduate from Middlebury, 76 years after Alexander Twilight 1823 became the first man of color to get a degree from an



American college. She grew up in Shoreham, Vermont, the daughter of a former slave who came North after the Civil War. The family was very distinguished. Her brother became a state legislator. Mary, the valedictorian of her class, became a professor at Howard University. She died in 1922.

### ↑ 1901 Women in the Majority

Middlebury proved so popular for women that they formed a majority of the incoming class. The fear that men would be scared away by this female stampede ran rampant on the campus. Male students urged the board to take action!



### ↓ 1902 Maybe You Girls Would Like a College of Your Own...

The board decides to nip female encroachment in the bud by getting the Vermont Legislature to pass a law establishing the Women's College at Middlebury. The first mandate was making sure that there would always be fewer women than men.

### ↓ 1904 Separate But Unequal, Phase I

New "coordinate system," or segregation policy, meant that men and women could no longer attend the same chapel services or recite on the same stage. Because women were winning what was thought to be a disproportionate number of the College's honors, the new system would, thoughtfully, "provide for them an independent system of honors and prizes."

### ↑ 1912 Never Let 'Em See You Sweat

The Women's Athletic Association was founded. For the first time female students were allowed to play interclass basketball games, with the stipulation that they could only be watched by, "women of the college, faculty wives and friends."

### ↓ ? 1912 Rap, Rap, Rap!

Rap music began at Middlebury when a senior woman, with the unintentionally humorous name of Pruda Harwood, wrote the music for the school song, "Gamaliel Painter's Cane." Thanks, Pruda.

### ↑ c.1915–1945 Women on Top

College historian David Stameshkin has noted that, in this period, “The admissions pool of women at Middlebury, since there were so few private co-educational colleges to which they could apply, was far superior to that of the men; the college could be more selective in its choice of female students, who tended to be wealthier and abler than their male classmates.” In the 1920s, 25–50% of the women applicants were accepted, while two-thirds of the men gained admission.

### ↓ 1915–1961 Student Governments

Throughout this period, Middlebury men and women had separate student governments. The women’s government got almost no coverage in the *Campus*.

### ↓ 1918 Separate But Unequal, Phase II

Alarmed that able men were being scared away by the formidable women of Middlebury, the trustees appointed a committee “to look into the matter of the segregation of the Women’s College from the Men’s College, and present...a practical plan, if possible, for a complete separation of the two colleges.” Trustee A. Barton Hepburn made it clear that he thought they should just stop taking women, but clearer heads realized they could not afford that option.

### ↓ 1920 Sounds Like a Duplex

Trustees to create a “semi-detached institution for women.” In this, the men’s and women’s colleges would be governed by a single board, and men and women would be taught separately as much as possible.

### ↓ 1921 Women Moody about Moody

The College’s new President, Paul Moody, stormed into office vowing to create a separate women’s college. He planned to start by segregating all freshman classes by sex, starting in 1922. Luckily, the College’s dicey financial picture made this dream difficult to achieve.

### ↓ 1923 Moody on the “With Whiches”

Moody continued to brood about the pernicious effects women had had on the College, saying that the institution had been making great strides until women were admitted. Since then, “In comparing the progress of Middlebury since that time with the colleges with which it should normally be grouped (Williams, Dartmouth, Amherst, and Wesleyan) you will see how it has stood still in many respects while those other colleges have gone on.”

### ↑ c.1923 Moody Might Be on to Something Here!

“It is not because we do not believe in the higher education for women that we would exclude them from the corridors of a men’s college. We would prefer to state it another way... We would build a college for them, in which men are the excluded aliens.”

### ↑ 1923 Famous Writer Strikes Back!

Irate female alums opposed to Moody’s plans circulated a questionnaire to alumnae and friends, infuriating the President. When the questionnaire reached the famous Vermont author Dorothy Canfield Fisher, she wrote to tell Moody the she was “wholly against the proposed segregation of women (if it is seriously contemplated) as a very great and lamentable step backward.”

### ↓ 1930 Can’t Stop Quoting Moody

“The average woman teacher is a greater problem than three average men teachers. They can be secured for less money, but that is not a distinct advantage. What I should deplore most of all would be a tendency to introduce by women teachers a development of a certain kind of feminism which we see at Mount Holyoke, which I think is the most unhappy of the larger women’s colleges. Of the two evils, I would rather have men taught by a woman than women taught by a woman.” —*President Moody to James Gifford, April 1930*

### ↓ c.1930 Women’s Spheres: Eggs and Basketballs

By the late-1920s, Moody was pleased to tell people that “We have practically eliminated women from the faculty, except in those departments like Home Economics and Physical Education for Women.”

### ↓ 1930–1931 Separate but Unequal, Phase III

Moody and the board finally voted to establish a totally separate women’s college, with all its own facilities, to be built on the north side of College Street. They even got as far as having an architect draw up a plan. There’s not a lot of good to be said for the Depression and World War II, but they did manage to render this plan unaffordable. By the time they were over, Moody would be out and the mood had passed.

### ↓ 1931–1932 Calling Title IX!

Annual male athletic budget—\$21,000  
Annual female athletic budget—\$300



*Julia Alvarez '71 came to Middlebury from New York, to which her parents fled to escape the dictatorship in their homeland, the Dominican Republic. She knew early on that she wanted to be a writer, and was nurtured here by the English department and*

*the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. She graduated summa cum laude, spent years honing her craft, and returned to Middlebury to teach in 1988. While most of her time is now spent writing, she still retains ties to her alma mater.*

I can tell you that back then we didn't even have a vocabulary or consciousness about gender and diversity issues! The women's movement had yet to get underway especially on our sleepy Vermont campus. My friends tended to be mostly anti-war students as well as foreign students because I found more in common with them, more awareness and commitment to a world community.

I remember dropping a course because the professor made a racist comment about Latins being arrogant and having no sense of humor, but I wouldn't have thought to complain to anyone, nor was there a diversity person to go to! In fact, secretly, I thought that the professor must be right because here I was dropping the course and not having a sense of humor about a comment that made the rest of the class laugh.

As for now, I think there is a level of awareness and articulation of issues that was not there before. The community is more diverse, and the faculty more enlightened! Had this same incident happened now, I'd probably end up in Old Chapel talking to Leroy Nesbitt!

The challenge now is how to implement in curriculum, policy, campus population the issues that remain merely theoretical, academic. Let's do more than talk about diversity and gender issues: more courses, activities, maybe even a school-wide "retreat"!

### ↑ 1934 First Women's Intercollegiate Ski Meet

This was held in conjunction with the first Winter Carnival.

### ↑ 1933–1934 But Only If It's Thirty Below

Mary Brackett '36 reported that it was so cold this winter that the administration allowed women students to wear ski pants to class instead of skirts.

### ↑ 1940–1945 Rosie the Editor

With much of the male student body gone to the War, women were finally able to do the campus jobs from which they had been systematically excluded for decades. In 1943, for example, the *Campus* got its first female editor, Ruth Wheaton.

### ↑ 1948 Hey, If We Had a Winter Term...

The success of Middlebury's famous skier, Becky Fraser '46, led to the filming of a popular movie about skiing at the College. The film, seen all over the country, had the title, *Sno' Time for Learning*.

### ↓ 1950s Dorm Mother is Watching You

The list of regulations intended to keep women pure continued to be long. The Middlebury miss had to be in her dorm by 10 p.m. (12:30 on Saturday). If she ate with a man at a hotel, she had to have a chaperone. She could not smoke in public, or walk alone in the town after dark, or wear slacks in the Chapel or library (or in town!), play cards or dance on the Sabbath, visit boys' rooms at any time or walk anywhere south of College Street after 10 p.m.

### ↑ 1950s Where There's a Will There's a Way

Stameshkin records that female students still managed to snog with boys out in the fields, on Chipman Hill, in frat houses or in cars.

### ↑ 1954 Scholastic Domination Continues

In 1954, the Harvard Crimson wrote that, at Middlebury, "The scholastic averages of two-thirds of all the girls at Middlebury fall within 93.8 and 80.4 points. Out of the 502 girls and 693 boys in the undergraduate body, there are 162 women on the Dean's List and 58 men. This is practically a three to one ratio, and in a small community it has powerful effects."

### ↓ 1961 But Only If the Boys Run It

The separate men's and women's student governments finally merged into the Student Association, but with the stipulation that the President had to be a male. The same convention had traditionally been followed by the *Campus*, *Kaleidoscope*, and other campus organizations for many decades.

### ↑ **1960–1961 Think What We Could Do With an Extra Hour!**

Middlebury's women managed to get the College to extend their curfew until 11 p.m. This was extended to 1 a.m. on Saturdays and midnight the rest of the week in 1963.

### ↑ **1963 That's Why Your Parents Sent You to a Frigid Climate!**

An earnest student asked, "Where does one go to improvise, listen to music with friends, make love?" The editors of the *Campus* took up the cause: "There are no places where students can find privacy except outside in the grass or in cars. Sophomores and freshmen only have the grass, and the winters in Vermont are long and cold."

### ↓ **1966 It's Official!**

In this year, the National Institute of Mental Health released a study calling Middlebury, "a masculine college run primarily by men with women in the background."

### ↑ **1966–1967 It's Kind of Kinky with the Door Open**

Women are allowed to be in men's dorm rooms for a few hours a week, as long as there was no alcohol and the door was open.

### ↑ **1967–1968 No More Hall Peeping Expeditions?**

President Armstrong's Commission of Student Life recommended a major overhaul of social conditions on campus: no curfews for upperclasswomen, longer hours for underclasswomen and students allowed to be alone in their rooms with the doors closed.

### ↑ **1968–1981 Female Varsity Sports Teams Organized**

Women finally got varsity sports teams at Middlebury: field hockey (1968), swimming (1969), lacrosse (1969), tennis (1971), cross-country (1975), track (1975), squash (1976), basketball (1977), soccer (1979) and ice hockey (1981).

### ↑ **1963–1975 The Times They are a'Changin' in the Armstrong Years**

Under President James Armstrong, the separate aspects of the women's college were finally dismantled. The College ceased to have separate men's and women's deans, admissions offices and physical education departments, among other things.

### ↑ **1965 Are Frats Really Good for Women?**

When Williams abolished fraternities, President Armstrong and Dean Reynolds began to ask serious questions about whether fraternities were playing a positive social role on the campus for men and women. Did fraternities reinforce Middlebury's masculinist tendencies?

### ↑ **1967 What's the Sexual Revolution and How Can I Join Up?**

A campus survey showed that 61% of men and 34% of women had gone all the way, proving it is possible to have sex in a dorm room.

### ↑ **1967 May I Have the Key to My Cage, Please?**

Editorial in the *Campus* urged abolishing the double standard in College rules, arguing, "We call for the only true "liberalization" of women's rules possible: an unqualified end to discriminatory regulations."

### ↑ **1970–1975 Why is He Always Asking Me to Help Him with His Laundry?**

Curfews came to an end and most dorms went coed. This did not necessarily mean that sex roles had progressed as quickly as the rule changes might suggest.

### ↓ **early 1970s: Some Tough Consequences**

Abortion and venereal disease rates soared on campus.

### ↑ **early 1970s Thanks, Dr. Parton!**

Dr. George Parton of the Health Service began to give out birth control information and devices. Students also took the initiative in this area, starting the Student Sex Information Service.

### ↑ **1971 The Women's Union Founded**

The women's movement got an official presence at Middlebury in this year, when sixty-five women of the College community (students, faculty, staff and friends), formed the Women's Union. They met every week to talk about the role sexism had played in their lives because, in the words of Torie Osborn, "We have fallen on male-created images of ourselves that are ultimately degrading and that deprive us of self-respect. Women need to build up self-confidence and pride in their own abilities and achievements." They hoped that their office in Hillcrest Annex would soon be replaced by a real Women's Center. Only twenty-three years later...

### ↑ 1975 Newsflash! Gay People at Middlebury!

In this year, a new organization called Gay People at Middlebury was formed for mutual support and consciousness raising. Chairman Trey Hunt explained to the *Campus* two years later, "There's something to be said for the meeting just being there, for the fact of knowing that other people here had gone through some kind of personal crisis or definition...in many cases personal anguish." When the group was discussing participating in the National Gay Task Force Blue Jeans Day, Hunt quipped, "We'll see how many people change into cords that day."

### ⇔ Minority Experience Muddled at Middlebury

Middlebury was making efforts to recruit more minority students in this period, though rural Vermont could be a hard sell. The new Black Student Union offered some support.

### ↑ 1970s and 1980s More Women Faculty Hired

The number of women faculty increased from 22 in 1976 to 66 in 1987.

### ↑ 1976 Marjorie Lamberti Made a Full Professor

In this year, well-known scholar and dynamic teacher, Marjorie Lamberti, was the first woman to attain the rank of full professor in an academic department. (The first had been Home Economist Professor Clara Blanche Knapp in 1925).

### ↑ 1988 Women in Old Chapel? That Next!?

Maggie O'Brien became Associate Provost in this year, followed by Ann Hanson a year later. In 1989, Chela Andreu was the first woman to be elected to the Committee on Reappointment, which determines who gets tenure.

### ↓ 1988 Bloody Mannequin the Last Straw!

The growing campus debate over the pernicious effects the fraternities had in setting a sexist social tone on the campus were brought into sharp focus when the frat boys of Delta Upsilon hung a bloody female mannequin with the words "Random Hole" from their house during a party. When the campus community reacted with outrage, one DU member replied, "It was not meant to be an effigy or a malicious message to women. It was a dummy." Nicole Gray, head of the Women's Union, issued a statement saying, "Unless the College is willing to publicize pictures of the tortured female torso in its catalog or explain to prospective

students that by coming to Middlebury they will relinquish their rights to feel safe and respected, the administration must take a stand." Another woman student told the fraternity members in subsequent hearings, "I have been afraid of you since my freshman year...why does the social space on this campus almost all belong to men?" It was the beginning of the end for the fraternities.

### ↓ 1989 We Want Something Better

Professor Margaret Nelson, a sociologist, said that women faculty and students, "are made to feel like they are not full-fledged members of the community."

### ⇔ 1988 Committee on Child Care Report

The good news was that the issue was finally being addressed. The bad news was that the College was not committing itself to starting its own daycare facility. As Provost John McCardell put it, the chance of the College opening its own day care center was "improbable," adding that then childless faculty would ask, "Where is my equivalent benefit?"

*Alison Fraker*



### ↓ 1989 Loss of Alison Fraker

A much-beloved, vocally feminist student, Alison Fraker, was tragically killed in a car accident, leaving the Middlebury women's community reeling. Her grieving parents offered to endow a feminist reading room in her memory. This would eventually become the beautiful library in Chellis House.

### ↑ 1990 Report of the Special Committee on Attitudes toward Gender

It was commendable that this study was commissioned by President Robison. Its findings were, however, pretty depressing. It seemed clear that junior faculty women were less apt to get tenure than their male

## Interview with Marjorie Lamberti



*Marjorie Lamberti came to Middlebury to teach history in 1964, retiring as the Charles Dana Professor of History in 2002. Lamberti is an internationally-known scholar of German history and is remembered by generations of students as a distinctively dynamic lecturer and teacher.*

### **What was it like when you first came to Middlebury? What was the campus like?**

When I first came to Middlebury, James Armstrong was the president, and the College was undergoing a very rapid transformation. Middlebury had been for a long part of its history a New England school; during the Armstrong era Middlebury was transformed into a national liberal arts college. President Armstrong had very high ambitions and began to improve the College's facilities and to strengthen the faculty. He was a scholar in the classics and was very interested in education and the curriculum. It was very exciting to arrive at Middlebury at this time. President Armstrong recruited outstanding faculty members so there was an infusion of new energy and intellectual vitality in the College.

### **How many women faculty members were there?**

When I arrived, there were a few women who were teaching foreign languages. In the years that followed, more women entered the faculty. Probably the biggest change came in the 1980s, when there was a greater effort to diversify the faculty, and women were included in the policy for diversity. I was a graduate student at Yale in the 1960s, and there were not too many women in the graduate school there. In the 1980s, the number of women who were completing graduate studies and entering the profession of higher education increased considerably.

### **Since you were one of the few female professors in Middlebury at the beginning of**

### **your stay, did you feel welcomed at the school? What was the atmosphere like before the 1980s?**

I felt very welcomed. I never encountered any sign of being excluded by virtue of gender. My colleagues always treated me as a professional and were respectful and appreciative. An important measure of professional respect is salary. When I raised this issue, my salary was brought up to the standard scale of the compensation paid to my male colleagues. As I recall, I wrote a letter and spoke with two administrators who understood my point of view. I think that salary is a mark of how a faculty member is assessed professionally and a mark of being recognized and rewarded as a

professional. In this respect, I think Middlebury was very fair and generous to me.

### **How has the climate changed over the years, and that's including professors and students?**

The critical mass of women on the Middlebury faculty that began to emerge in the 1980s made women feel very self-confident. Then women entered the College administration. Clara Yu was the Director of the Language Schools for several years, and now Alison Byerly is the Dean of the Faculty. When women enter very responsible positions in the power structure, it is really a

*Keep in mind that when I was educated, women's studies wasn't in the curriculum.*

—Marjorie Lamberti

mark that they have arrived. I had no ambition to be an administrator, but I admire women who hold these positions

and break the glass ceiling. Another factor to take into account is the day-care for children that is offered to faculty members. I think that the opening of day-care centers and the financial contribution to the maintenance of these facilities are another landmark in the recognition that professional women need some kind of provision for the care of their children while they work. All of these developments have made women feel that they're working in an institution that provides them with the maximum opportunities to be professionals and at the same time to be parents.

There is one other factor that I would like to add, and that is the

*(Lamberti, continued on page 9)*

counterparts, female staff members faced discrimination on the job and women students found Middlebury's social scene degrading.

### ↑ c.1990 Middlebury Brings Up the Rear... Over and Over

The history of the College suggests that most of the major social movements of the past century have hit here later and with less force than at other comparable schools. College historian David Stameshkin's explanation was that, "Middlebury students have traditionally come from conservative or apolitical families. One could also argue that the type of student who would choose to attend a small school in a beautiful and isolated setting is not as likely to be an activist in the first place."

### ↑ 1991-1993 Fraternities Join Dinosaurs as Part of the Past

By these years, it became clear that fraternities were on their way out. President McCardell made clear that they would be replaced by social houses and the commons. Male domination of the College's social system had been institutionalized for nearly two centuries, and was not relinquished without a fight. But the frats really went away!

### ↑ 1991 Drue Cortell Gensler Supports Opening a Women's Center

Agitations over the DU incident, day care, employment inequities and other feminist issues seemed to be making the time ripe for the College to create a space where gender issues could be addressed more explicitly. Trustee Drue Gensler '57 offered to put up \$20,000 for a women's center, if the rest could be raised. Her generous gift was to be only the beginning of her support for this project. The College was not initially forthcoming with any funds.

### ↑ 1991 Women's Studies Major Started

Years of debate finally resulted in the creation of a Women's Studies major and concentration, and the first introductory and theory and methods courses were offered. Women's Studies has since been broadened to Women and Gender Studies (WAGS).

### ↓ 1992 So Where Is It?

In November 1992, an editorial in the *Campus* castigated the administration for its lack of support for the women's center project. While Amherst, Williams, Bowdoin, Colgate, Hamilton and Dartmouth all had

provided women's centers, Middlebury students, faculty and administration had to scramble to raise the money. The editorial said, in part, "Some people argue that there is no need for a women's center and that the groups interested in gender issues deserve no special treatment. Nothing could be further from the truth, for gender issues are not special interests; they are universal interests." Fund-raising efforts were led by Tamar Meyer, Diana Henderson and many students, but still could not come up with enough. In the end, trustees Jane Bryant Quinn 1960 and Claire Gargalli 1964 made up the shortfall. It was starting to look like it might really happen.



### ↑ 1993 May Belle Chellis Women's Resource Center Opens!

More than a century after Middlebury's first women student had begged for their Brown Study, Middlebury finally got a women's center. Named after Middlebury's first woman graduate, it opened as Chellis House, in the former Tilden House on Proctor Road. Now known as the Women's and Gender Studies Resource Center, it includes meeting space, a classroom, a kitchen, faculty and administrative offices and the Alison Fraker Reading Room. It quickly became home to the women's union, the women's studies program, *Artemis* magazine, the Middlebury Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance, Feminist Action at Middlebury, students from the African-American alliance, Alianza Latinoamericana y Caribena and the International Students Organization, among others. It has also served a vital function as a center for planning Take Back the Night, promoting reproductive rights, sharing faculty and student research, and many other supportive activities.





*It is fair to say that the Middlebury community might still be waiting for a women's and gender studies center if it weren't for the generosity, and the leadership of Drue Cortell Gensler '57. She has been called a 'donor,' and that she most certainly has been, but her support has never been limited to writing checks. Drue has been the heart of Chellis House since its inception, always caring and making imaginative suggestions about how things could be. Drue says that, even as a girl, she didn't realize she was a rebel. Her courage and conviction have made Middlebury a better place for all of the College's faculty, staff and students.*

## **How was it different when you were a student here?**

I think our generation is the transition generation between the total dependency of woman on finding someone to support them and playing an indirect power role. They influenced, they manipulated but they didn't feel their strength and they didn't dare do a lot of things. We didn't even realize it, but very few women in the 40s and 50s had complete freedom. Then came the women's movement and most of the people I know never caught on. But some of us had a light bulb that went off really fast. This was at the end of the 60s.

Middlebury was particularly non-diverse. I didn't know people were prejudiced until I came to Middlebury. Isn't that bizarre? And I grew up in NYC! I thought prejudiced people were a very small, ignorant group and the majority of people knew better. But I discovered I was wrong. I also discovered that I was anti-fraternity and anti-sorority. They'd come down to a room in town for their meetings and they'd pick some people and exclude others. So there were none of the positives of sororities, such as living together and having a group of people who are supportive.

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*(Lamberti, continued from page 7)*

addition of Chellis House and the Women and Gender Studies Program. I think that WAGS stimulated a tremendous interest in gender in the curriculum. In my own teaching, I became much more inclusive in the selection of historical actors in the study of the European past. Keep in mind that when I was educated, women's studies wasn't in the curriculum. In the 1980s, however, feminist studies invigorated history and other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities; people discovered that the perspective of gender provided new answers and insights.

## **Was there open sexism in the classroom?**

It was always a surprise if a woman spoke out. The women were much quieter than the men. It did me in completely. I really should have been in a school that encouraged me to talk. It was something I accepted willingly. But I shouldn't have.

## **How did you become involved in Women's and Gender Studies?**

In the 1980s, I found out that Middlebury was trying to establish a Women's and Gender Studies Program. Then Chellis was being established. All of the things that were supposed to have happened, as far as I'm concerned, at least a decade before were just beginning to happen here. That piqued my interest. I got involved in both women's studies and Chellis as an alum who wanted to know more about it and support it financially. And then I was asked if I would like to serve on the Board of Trustees and I told President McCardell, "I'm gonna be trouble." And he said, "That's all right." So that's why I ended coming back to Middlebury. Otherwise I never would have.

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Now, for the second part of the question. Women students at Middlebury were always intelligent and poised. What has changed about them? Women students today feel empowered to define their own identities and to chart their own paths in life. Women in the 1960s were in a transitional period and had not yet been exposed to the liberating forces of the women's movement. They still felt the weight of social conventions. Today women students feel empowered very early in their adolescence. And, increasingly, that sense of empowerment is moving to women in the natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics.

### ↑ and ↓ **1997 The Task Force on the Status of Women at Middlebury College**

In 1997, the status of women faculty, staff and students got a thorough appraisal by a twenty-one person Task Force. The study was commissioned by the Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees and chaired by the first Director of Chellis House, yours truly.

The good news: Chellis House now existed, there was a Women's and Gender Studies program, fraternities were gone, sexual harassment policies had been developed, the benchmark system had been instituted to equalize pay and working conditions, progress had been made on equalizing treatment of women athletes under Title IX and the board had its first woman president, Claire Gargalli.

There was still a lot to be done. In the 1997-98 school year, all of the top nine administrators at the College were men. While numbers of female faculty were growing, a lower percentage of women were in tenure-track jobs. On the staff, only 23% of supervisors were female. Women students did not feel safe walking on campus at night. Women of color and gay and lesbian students felt the campus community was not well-educated about their issues and concerns. Eating disorders continued to be a major concern among the student body. The report provided many suggestions for future action.

↑ **1999 Parental Leave Instituted for Faculty**  
Faculty gained the right to one term off from teaching with full pay when they gave birth or adopted a child. It was also available to fathers in some circumstances. This benefit has not yet been extended to the staff.

### ↑ **1999 Position of Associate Provost for Institutional Diversity Created**

Men and women of the campus community whose color or sexual orientation differed from the majority have often found Middlebury to be a challenging environment, leading the College administration to create a new position of Associate Provost for Institutional Diversity.

### ↑ **Post 1970 More Up Arrows**

Note that since around 1970 there has been a slow, but steady trend toward more up arrows.

### ↑ **2000 Child Care Consortium**

The College organized the Child Care Consortium, consisting of three existing centers and a newly-created fourth facility, the College Street Child Care Center.

### ↑ **2001 WAGS Gets Full-Time Faculty Position**

Women and Gender Studies finally got a full-time faculty position.



### ↓ **2002 Middlebury Grieves the Loss of Mary Smyth Duffy**

Mary Smyth Duffy, former Director of Chellis House, tragically passed away on September 17, 2002. "Mary was a true force at Chellis," Chellis Director Deborah Grant said at Mary's memorial service. "Despite the health problems which she struggled with

over the years, Mary had seemingly boundless energy. Not only did she work on a myriad of social justice issues herself, she also supported the students and staff in their activist efforts. Her dedication to Chellis House did not end once she left the position. She continued to be a resource for me and the students and staff who knew her."

### ↑ **2004 Women Moving Up**

Middlebury has not yet had a woman president, but there are more women in the top nine positions of the administration now (3) than in 1997 (0). Women are also better represented throughout the senior staff.

### ↑ **2004-Onwards**

Women's slow, but steady, movement toward world domination continues. (Domination of Middlebury may lag slightly behind). Keep up the good work!

## May Belle Chellis

The Women's Center is named after May Belle Chellis, Class of 1886, the first woman to graduate from Middlebury College. Chellis would have been worthy of the honor even if she hadn't been the first. She came from Meriden, New Hampshire, where she was disappointed to find that she could "...not expect to go to a college such as Dartmouth, eleven miles from my home, which did not admit girls."

She was an excellent student, and later wrote that one of the things she remembered "vividly" was "the library where I could handle books, of which I had heard, but had never read." May Belle quickly made friends with her fellow female pioneers, May Anna Bolton of Cornwall and "Daisy" Edgerton of Rutland. Together, they faced ambivalent faculty members, like Dr. Hamlin, who, she recalled, "was always kind and fair, but I had a feeling that he did not really care to have us there." Some of the local girls were also being allowed to take classes, and May Belle noted that, "They all seemed to find it great fun to stroll along those walks, and go to class in the old grey buildings, heretofore used only by men."

The College had let women in, but it had supplied nowhere for them to study. May Belle described their first great coup:

"We soon found that the girls needed a room in which to study between classes, so we asked if we could furnish one in the chapel building. Our friends gave us twenty-five dollars, some chairs and a mirror. We earned more money by a Dickens' entertainment, including in its attractions scenes from his books acted, and a parade of all his characters that we could find costumes for. We atoned for our high-priced wallpaper by papering the room ourselves, except the ceiling, and we painted the woodwork, put down a square of ingrain carpet, bought cushions and curtains, and a felt cover for the long table. We were so proud of our handiwork that we gave a reception, with Mrs. Brainerd as chaperone."



They called this special place the Brown Study. May Belle would have understood the importance of the women's center that bears her name.

After her Middlebury career, May Belle went on to teach at schools in Vermont (where Calvin Coolidge was a student) and Minnesota, then, with an M.A., she taught Classics at Gates College in Nebraska. She married a fellow teacher, Joseph Doremus, and saw that their five sons and daughters had excellent educations. Looking back at her time at Middlebury many years later, she wrote that the subjects that, at the time, just seemed like a course of study now struck her as "invitations to joining the group of thinking men and women who, by reason of their study of the past, are able to interpret the present and look forward hope-fully to the future."

May Belle Chellis Doremus died of a stroke in Aurora, Nebraska in 1937. Her laudatory obituary in the local paper said that,

"In those communities where Mr. Doremus was superintendent of school, Mrs. Doremus was ever a potent factor. She loved to work in women's clubs. Her education and training fitted her for leadership and she was ever a leader... Thus closes a life to which the Master of the Universe might well say "Well Done."

## WAGS Alumnae

Since 1991, 46 Middlebury students majored in Women's and Gender Studies.

In their theses, they have investigated fascinating topics: from the symbolism and feminine imagery in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist traditions to the feminist history of campus culture at Middlebury College in the 1920s.

1991 Katherine Ferrier  
Elizabeth A. Butts

1992 Lisa M. Darak  
Vranna L. Hinck  
Katherine H. Mead  
Tracey A. Merrill  
Hillary A. Miller  
Lelia N. Senter

1993 Brooke A. Feder  
Laura K. Wells  
Aimee K. Young

1994 Amanda L. Baker  
Elizabeth B. Bales  
Kathryn W. Becker  
Phoebe M. Folger  
Linda A. Herel  
Nancy G. Lord  
Virginia Reel

1995 Julie Fisher  
Claire C. Martin  
Susan M. Meagher  
Ashley G. Nill  
Maya M. Vanputten

1996 Jennifer Kuperman  
Kendra A. Muelling  
Jennifer L. Murray  
Amy M. Villagio

1997 Katherine M. Lynch  
Jullie A. Rains

1998 Katrina E. Klaus  
Julia E. Noguchi

2000 Amelia F. Berry  
Lenna Cumberbatch  
Amanda Perla

2001 Amanda C. Cecil  
Laurie E. Koh  
Amanda C. Mendel

2002 Erica A. Regan  
Jordan C. Rutledge

2003 Rebecca M. Adams

2004 Christen B. Adkins  
Elizabeth A. Brookbank  
Kathryn M. Kellogg  
Catherine E. Milne  
Justina D. Ngo  
Gillian R. Wood

The May Belle Chellis Women's and Gender Studies Resource Center is located at 56 Hillcrest Road (right behind Proctor Dining Hall). It is open from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. every day. Inside Chellis you can peruse internship and graduate program opportunities dealing with women's and/or gender issues or venture upstairs and study in the Alison Gwen Fraker Reading Room. The reading room contains two computers and a small but comprehensive library.

Whether you choose to study upstairs in the reading room or make yourself some tea in the kitchen and settle down in the living room to chat with friends, Chellis is a friendly alternative to the library and dorm. Chellis House can also be scheduled for a meeting of a student organization.

For further information please contact:  
Deborah Grant, *Chellis House Director*  
Phone: 802-443-5937  
e-mail: [dgrant@middlebury.edu](mailto:dgrant@middlebury.edu)