

**MAVERICKS, MENTORS, MODELS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN  
AT AUGUSTANA COLLEGE  
AUGUSTANA HERITAGE ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION  
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I have spent the last several years in the company of some astonishing women: women courageous and outrageous; women gentle and gritty; women giving, and sometimes giving up, for a vision; women making strides and standing firm. These are women who've shaped and been shaped by Augustana, and I'm thrilled to be able to share some of their stories with you today, as we celebrate the larger story of Augustana itself in this sesquicentennial year.

But before I tell you these stories, let me outline the historical journey we'll be taking. My focus here is the educational aspect of the Augustana heritage; the venue I'll be discussing is our meeting place here, Augustana College. So I'd like to begin by looking briefly at that venue. And by considering these questions: What is the educational heritage of Augustana? What visions planted, nurtured it? And what features of it relate particularly to its women?

I believe we can identify three interconnected ideals which Augustana's founders planted in this college: sound and rounded education; the creation of servant leaders from that education, and education that crosses class and financial barriers—in other words, democratized education. Let me discuss each of these briefly.

***A sound and rounded education.*** When the early Augustana Synod sent out its sons to preach and teach, it insisted that they be effective in these roles—and that meant effectively educated. Many of the first students, newly arrived from Sweden or fresh off a Midwest farm, lacked the background to tackle advanced Seminary studies, or to teach a full curriculum even to grade school children. So Augustana College was created to give them that background. In the early days there was even a preparatory school—a sort of advanced high school—which, as its name suggests, prepared them for college work. The basic curriculum set out in the first constitution of 1860 defined what a rounded education ought to be, and indeed forms the core of our liberal studies program today. It included, English, Latin, German, and Scandinavian, with introductory

Hebrew and Greek; history, geography, mathematics, and what were called the natural sciences—biology and botany.

This concern for a rounded education continued through the college's history. For instance, in 1929 Dr. Fritiof Fryxell, himself a graduate of Augustana, established the first full department of geology in any of the Lutheran colleges in America. At that time many church-related schools were shying away from geology because it seemed to challenge Biblical accounts of creation. But Augustana president Gustav Andreen declared that the young men entering the ministry needed to be fully informed about *all* the ways in which human beings had understood the world they lived in. Andreen's successor Conrad Bergendoff echoed this sentiment: knowledge, he declared, is a circle; any missing part would destroy its completeness. Similarly, the individual human being would be incompletely educated without the honing of all our abilities—intellect, imagination, and spirit. That understanding drives the college today, as new knowledge creates new ways of thinking, new forms of expertise, and new majors to train students in these developments.

**The creation of servant leaders.** What the college sought to create by these means was servant leaders—those who would teach and minister, in the service of a vision larger than self-promotion. The record of dedicated teachers and pastors—and physicians and business people—who graduated from Augustana speaks for itself. Today that emphasis has vital form in programs that specifically ask students to think about how they can serve in the world, and in majors that increasingly include a service component.

**Democratization of education.** Augustana has famously been a school not just for the social elite or the financially advantaged, but for gifted, diligent students of various backgrounds. And I believe this is so because historically the Augustana heritage has been one in which social justice is emphasized. As I've said, the early students often lacked the background to qualify them immediately for advanced studies. One of the college's founders, Erland Carlsson, had himself been discouraged from aspiring to the ministry in his native Sweden because he was a country boy, minimally educated and speaking in a low-class accent. Fritiof Fryxell, who rose to national prominence in scientific

circles, was the son of an immigrant laborer. True to this ideal, today's college actively solicits students of diverse backgrounds.

So how do women figure in these three commitments that create the educational heritage of Augustana? How were Augustana's women shaped by and shapers of this heritage?

Unfortunately I can't tell you about all the women involved. So instead reeling off lists of names or pages of statistics, I'm going to tell you stories. The stories of a few individuals, each of whom, in her way and time, represent the larger story, women who have benefited by and in turn extended those three features I've described. My selections are women who stand out as "firsts." But I invite you who know the college and its history to supplement my choices with your own—the women who shaped your Augustana experience. So now let's embark on our historical journey!

### **ANNA WESTMAN, FIRST WOMAN FACULTY MEMBER**

In pursuing a democratized ideal of education, Augustana did invite women to enroll in its very early years. T. N. Hasselquist, Augustana's second president, made that invitation explicit. By doing so, he made himself something of a maverick on the educational scene—not in the more narrowly defined political sense we know it today, but in the sense of going outside existing boundaries. And that set a path for women to follow. But Hasselquist encountered some opposition to his egalitarian practices, not only from the culture at large but from Augustana's own immediate constituency.

Hasselquist was president 1863 to 1891—the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As you undoubtedly know, the nineteenth century wasn't an especially good time for women, especially for gifted and ambitious ones. Women had few legal rights; their spheres of activity were restricted; in America they couldn't even vote. They were largely excluded from higher education; the culture deemed them unfit, both psychologically and biologically, to engage in the more strenuous intellectual pursuits carried on by men in colleges and universities.

And among the Swedish immigrant community, the gender bias was deepened by being part of a general distrust of higher education. Dr. O. Fritiof Ander, former history professor at Augustana, has researched the period of Hasselquist's presidency. And Ander's findings have shown that many of the Swedish farmers who tilled the rich soils of the Midwest didn't have much use for book-learning. In fact, they feared it might render their sons unfit for the real work of the world—make them lazy and dreamy. And if that was true for their sons, it went double for their daughters. If a girl could cook, sew, sing (in the church choir, never on the stage!), and plunk out a simple one-finger tune on the piano, that was enough learning for her. But against this double background of gender bias, T. N. Hasselquist actually set out to recruit women students.<sup>1</sup> By 1885, a little over a decade after Hasselquist assumed the presidency, the first woman graduated from Augustana College.

And so women did come. How enthusiastic a reception they got, is problematic, as we'll see in looking at the account of Netta Bartholomew in a moment. But by 1888 there were enough of them that a special dormitory, descriptively—and prescriptively—named Ladies Hall was opened for them in the house of a former professor. At this time women accounted for roughly ten per cent of the collegiate enrollment, though more of them were taking courses in the Music Conservatory and the Secretarial School (both separate bodies). It was in this general period that Anna Westman enrolled at Augustana. She came to the Preparatory Department in 1886 and graduated from the college—the only girl in her class—in 1892. And she made college history by being the first woman faculty member at Augustana.

So let me tell you a little about her. She came from a large, working-class Swedish family who'd moved from Chicago to settle in Moline, the city just to the east of Rock Island. By the time she attended Augustana, she was living with her widowed mother, a seamstress described by her landlord as “very poor.” Anna was 23 when she enrolled in the Preparatory Department at Augustana. At that time the age of “typical” college students was about 23, so you can see that entering her pre-collegiate study at that age—and remember in those days

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<sup>1</sup> Church-related colleges were likelier to be organized as coeducational institutions than their secular counterparts.

women were considered old maids at 25—suggests that Anna Westman may have had a challenge to manage her college education. Money was undoubtedly one factor, but she may also have had to battle the reluctance felt by her Swedish-American community about educating women. Later she was described as having “struggled” for a college education.

But the point is: she got that education at Augustana. And she got it majoring in a field not traditionally associated with women—science and mathematics. That’s noteworthy because the ability of the “softer sex” to handle fields requiring “masculine” intelligence such as science and math was still being debated in the culture and the academy both. Yet Augustana seems not to have discouraged Anna from undertaking this program. Indeed, there’s evidence that she received positive encouragement to complete her studies. At a time during her junior year, when her finances were at an especially low ebb, the college offered her a job as head of the women’s dormitory Ladies Hall. And, the fall after she graduated in 1892, the college hired her as the first woman faculty member, in the department of mathematics. (Later she taught English and history as well. Augustana professors in those days were nothing if not eclectic.)

So this is what the college did for Anna Westman. What did Anna Westman do for the college, to make it a more inclusive, more open place for women? Two things. First—and most astonishingly, I think—she negotiated terms for that campus job as head of Ladies Hall. Imagine her circumstances for a moment. Here she is, an impoverished college student barely able to scrape up the year’s tuition—at that time 41 dollars. And to add to her woes, her mother, with whom she lived, had just been killed in a tragic train accident in downtown Moline. So as a college junior Anna had to face loss of home and mother in addition to her own chronic poverty. She was vulnerable in almost every way. You’d think she’d jump at the chance of a job. But: when the college offered her the job in Ladies Hall, which brought with it free room and board, she refused it—until they added a tuition waiver and fifty dollars’ salary! The sheer chutzpah takes the breath away. Despite aspects that would minimize her claims to her own worth—her gender, her social class, her status in the college hierarchy—she insisted that she was worth more than the college had initially planned to pay

her. And the college listened. And notably, it was *after* this that they offered her the position on the faculty.

She didn't stay for very long—a total of three years—hardly what would amount to one student generation. (She actually had two teaching stints: in 1892-94 and 1896-97. That's another whole story.) But here's the second thing she did for the college. Her presence itself made a difference. How it did so can be suggested in a perceptive comment made by an undergraduate named Katherine Felton who was attending the University of California at Berkley in 1894 (the same year Anna finished her first stint of teaching at Augustana). Felton believed that having women on college faculties would create “‘an incentive’ affecting all students ‘indirectly.’” In other words, women faculty members would demonstrate their gifts as scholars, would provide models and mentors for women, and would show men their intellectual parity. Anna Westman did that at Augustana. She did it by what she was, but she did it also by *who* she was: a smart, caring, supporting teacher and mentor. We have touching evidence of this.

Several years after she left the college and moved away from the area—after her death in August of 1910—an anonymous donor created the Anna Westman Stipend. I'm quoting here from the college catalogue.

On February 10, 1911 [that's one year after Anna Westman's death], the sum of fifty dollars was received by the college faculty, accompanied by a communication from a lady who wished no public mention to be made of her name, stating that she obligated herself “to donate annually, for an indefinite period of years, a sum of money to be used as a benefit to one or more deserving, industrious lady students pursuing studies in the Collegiate department of Augustana College....”

It was further stated that “this fund shall be known as the ‘Anna Westman Stipend,’ being given as an appreciative memorial to Miss Westman, who was the friend and helper of young women struggling, like herself to obtain a college education....”

Indeed Anna Westman did what Katherine Felton predicted women would do. The fact that her presence endorsed the education of women, that she herself aided women, and that her stipend was awarded for a decade after it was established—the college newspaper gives us names of recipients—means that her influence stretched further than the years she spent on campus—has stretched, in fact, in a long beam of light down to the present day. She planted well.

### **NETTA BARTHOLOMEW ANDERSON, FIRST COLLEGE BOARD MEMBER**

But. However much the college officially fostered its women students, lines of demarcation between what they could do and what men could do were pretty clearly drawn in the early years. For instance: Ladies Hall, that women's dormitory over which Anna Westman had presided, in one way represented an encouraging development since it recognized the presence and presumed needs of women. But in another way it reinforced stereotypical gender differences. Women living in Ladies Hall during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led a carefully regulated life, with allotted hours for meals, study, prayers, and free time. And "ladies living in the hall were allowed no company of the opposite sex." Male students, on the other hand, weren't as rigidly controlled. And the distinctions went beyond living conditions to the academic life. Women were of course prohibited from going up the hill to the rarefied atmosphere of Seminary classes; they couldn't even sit in on them. And they were certainly encouraged, if not actually required, to be silent during class recitations.

Now: at the same time that Anna Westman was leaving Augustana after her first teaching stint, a lively, aggressive young woman named Netta Bartholomew was graduating. And fifty years later, looking back on her Augustana experience, Netta—now Mrs. K. T. Anderson—had some pretty trenchant observations about the sexism she remembered: Here's what she has to say: "We [women] were frankly told that while [male students] loved us as girls, they did not care for us as students....They were so scornful of 'women's rights' about which everybody was then talking, and so given to the old world tradition of regarding education for women a waste of time....I very much

resented this male assumption of superiority....” Were the guys serious, you wonder? Or were they just having fun teasing the little protofeminist spitfire? Maybe it was a bit of both. At any rate, Netta took them seriously, and that fueled her contributions to the position of women at the college. Here's what she did.

Acting on a dare from one of her few fellow women students, Netta boldly breached the all-male ranks of the Adelpic Literary Society. (In those more innocent if not more intellectual days the various literary societies were the places to hang out and meet friends.) She describes the moment when

The President of the society came to me and gravely whispered that it was customary to initiate new members by requiring a three minute extempore speech...and at the proper time he would call on me...[N]o one can know what agonies of apprehension I suffered before my turn came....[M]y knees turned to jelly as I pulled myself out of my chair, the one lone girl in that room, went to the front and faced what seemed a limitless sea of boys' faces all grinning expectantly at me. There wasn't a vacant seat in that old history room [in Old Main] and even standing room was...taken for all who could crowd in had come to see the fun, a girl really trying to make a speech!

Turned out, she says, “the whole thing was intended as a joke, planned by some of the more mischievous fellows, for my discomfiture, who confessed to me afterwards that they never dreamed I would take the matter seriously and go through with it. So in my ignorance of the trickiness of college boys, I earned (and I *mean* earned) the distinction...of being the first hazing victim at Augustana....”

She also earned her place in the Adelpic.

She claims a more significant victory, however: the right for women to speak in chapel. When she submitted her name as a contestant in the first college-sponsored oratorical contest, she encountered a long-standing prohibition against women speaking from the chapel platform. The oratorical committee, the faculty, and ultimately the Board of Directors thrashed the matter out, and Netta was allowed to participate. “I have always felt rather proud of my part in this incident,” she reflects, because it “marked the end of the

prejudice and discrimination against women students....The men ceased to struggle against the tide of female demand for equal opportunity, our right to 'free speech' was settled, we would not be frowned down and from that time on we have been not only accepted but welcomed on an equal footing with men students." Her story may be a bit exaggerated, as she looks at it through the lens of a half-century. But she ended up being the first woman elected to Augustana's Board of Directors. And presumably in that capacity she exercised to the full the right to speak that she claimed to have won.

### **HENRIETTE C. K. NAESETH**

Now: fast-forward some three decades, to 1934. The first real female power player arrives on the Augustana campus. Her name is Henriette Christiane Koren Naeseth. As many of her colleagues have said, it's hard to overestimate her influence on the climate of Augustana College. And that, of course, affected women.

She was, to begin with, the first woman to teach at Augustana with what is now called the "terminal degree": she had her Ph. D. from the University of Chicago, about as prestigious a school and as rigorous an academic program as you can find in America. That, and her own personality, the sense she brought of herself, gave her a power unknown to women at Augustana before that time. By her highly visible leadership, she created that "incentive affecting all students indirectly" that Berkeley student Katherine Felton had envisioned back in 1894.

Naeseth was the cherished scion of a Norwegian family whose roots go back to the Middle Ages and whose current members include Norway's Queen Sonja. Through her family she was also a child of Norwegian Lutheran Church in America—her grandfather established that church. Her father was professor and librarian at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. Naeseth grew up prizing and supported by her ethnic, theological, and educational heritage.

In her three-decade tenure at Augustana Naeseth deepened and broadened those three aspects of Augustana's educational tradition that I

outlined at the beginning of this talk. First, commitment to a sound, rounded education centered in the liberal arts. In her own teaching she introduced students to the big names of the British, American, and Scandinavian literary canon as it then existed. Naeseth taught Shakespeare, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, James, Cather, Undset. As her colleague Roald Tweet has said of her, the “big” courses were up to her and she was up to them. Rigorous, scholarly, demanding, and encouraging, she was a formidably effective teacher. She was an excellent administrator as well; she chaired the English Department and the then-Division of the Humanities for her entire tenure—the first woman to do so—and her leadership was no name-only *laissez-faire*. While encouraging innovation on the part of her staff, she kept a firm rein on both policy and practice. She devised the then-Junior English Examination to test upperclass students and transfers in their command of written English—an exam, by the way, that was picked up and introduced into schools across the country. And her influence went beyond one department. She sat on college committees like Educational Policies that shaped curricular matters, and she didn't simply sit; she spoke, and people listened. She was instrumental in Augustana's successful application for a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Her own scholarship, thorough and meticulous, modeled what women in the academy could do. For her leadership as an educator she was included in *Who's Who in America*.

And she continued and extended Augustana's tradition of democratized education. She encouraged first generation and non-traditional students. I know from experience. A first-generation student myself, from a modest home, I found myself with a full-ride fellowship to the University of Chicago because of her influence, a course I'd never imagined when I first enrolled in college. Naeseth took special care of women entering college perhaps for the first time, or perhaps as returnees, after marriage and family. She looked after veterans embarking on new lives after a stint in military service. And she was endlessly patient with students of modest ability, struggling with the demands of college work. Aristocratic as she was—she never let you forget that distinguished family background—her politics were liberal, inclusive. So in her own way, she showed us all how to be a good servant leader. Of course, many women before her had demonstrated servant leadership, and admirably, in unobtrusive, self-effacing

ways. But Naeseth showed us, men and women alike, that women could be servant leaders also in official and highly visible professional capacities. And that their presences could matter.

And oh, what a presence she was! Utterly unforgettable. She brought not only intellectual and academic rigor, but glamour to Augustana. She'd sweep across campus on long graceful legs. In a school still couched in pietism, distrustful of the evils of dancing and alcohol, she drank martinis, smoked small cigars, and as a graduate student had gone to dance halls on the south side of Chicago. In her heyday in the forties she sported red lips and nails, an upswept hairdo, enormous rings, and always, always earrings. Bracelets jingled on her wrists. In those years you could sometimes see her wearing a hat to class Friday mornings, and when she closed the day's text she went straight down to the Rock Island depot to catch the train for exotic weekends with her high-powered university friends in Chicago. Even at the end of her tenure, her stride shortened a bit by age, she was commanding. If your class failed to perform to her exacting standards, she'd storm out the door, head high in righteous dudgeon, while you cowered in terror—and prepared extra carefully for the next session.

She didn't suffer pomposity gladly. The story is told of a speaker at a faculty meeting who went on and on, long past his allotted time. When finally he announced, "I have just one last word," Naeseth was heard to drawl loudly from her seat in the back row, "Any word will do!" She not only made a statement, she was one.

And you loved her. Couldn't help it. Loved the smile that melted severity to real affection; loved the gravelly smoker's voice, the delighted, raspy laugh, the signature "Well *REALLY!*" And you knew she made you better than you ever imagined you could be.

### **DOROTHY PARKANDER**

One of the many women Naeseth influenced returned to Augustana to plant her own seeds of vision and wisdom in the lives of students and institution alike for almost five decades.

When this young woman graduated in 1946, having copped all the accolades Augustana had to bestow, she shyly touched the sleeve of Naeseth's doctoral robe and said, "I want one of those." She got one—with honors—an accolade rarely accorded graduates of the University of Chicago Ph. D. program.

Her name, of course, is Dorothy Parkander.

Her presence at Augustana was very different from Naeseth's. She didn't chair important committees; she refused the offer of English department head after Naeseth's retirement. She didn't want an administrative post, with all its prestigious headaches. She simply loved, and lived, her teaching. But she shared Naeseth's passion for the life of the mind. In the classroom she was incandescent. No student can forget the glorious Parkander smile.

Here's what one student remembered about a course that featured Homer's *Odyssey*:

What I'd Like to tell Dorothy

If I could  
Is that she made me sit up  
And pay attention, stretch  
My spine and open my mind

As if I were riding on the crest  
Of an extended simile, battered  
By allusions and ideas I rarely  
Understood but determined

To hang on until washed ashore  
By wave upon wave of words  
Meted out like lifesaving veils  
And rugged rafts to a traveler

Who in that damp Old Main  
Classroom began to witness  
A rosy-fingered dawn unlike any  
Either she—or Homer—had ever seen.

*--Janice Bowman Swanson*

This woman went on to become a distinguished poet and professor at California Lutheran College.

Parkander didn't push boundaries; rather, they fell away before her demonstrated ability. So in her nearly half-century tenure at Augustana she racked up an amazing list of firsts: the first woman to deliver the prestigious O. N. Olson lectures at the Augustana Seminary (before women were admitted to seminary studies); the first person, male or female, to occupy the first fully-endowed academic chair at Augustana, the Conrad Bergendoff Chair in the Humanities; the first and only faculty member at Augustana to have been awarded the Illinois Professor of the Year distinction by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education in Washington, D. C.; the first woman at Augustana to have an academic chair named for her: the Dorothy J. Parkander Chair in Literature—created not by some overfunded organization anxious for tax relief, but by her own often underfunded former students anxious for her to be honored as highly as possible.

These "firsts" affirmed both Parkander herself and the Christian humanist perspective she brought to her teaching. And that perspective came from the core of her own Augustana heritage. She was literally a child of the church—her father, Pastor Joseph Parkander, was a beloved and influential clergyman on the south side of Chicago during the twenties and thirties. Like Hasselquist a generation before him, Pastor Parkander held egalitarian views on education for women. Like his contemporary and friend Conrad Bergendoff, he believed in the necessity of education for the examined life. It's only out of such a life, both men held, that true faith can come. (I knew Pastor Parkander only in his age, but his warmth, intelligence, love and authentic charisma were as apparent then as they'd been throughout his life, and I will never forget the privilege of that friendship.) So from that Augustana tradition, made real and personal in her upbringing, Dorothy Parkander drew both spiritual and intellectual inspiration. She drew the courage and clarity of mind to examine long-held beliefs, to probe to their central strengths. She drew the humility to delight in God's ever-new, ever-surprising creation. And she drew, as well, the strong sense of social justice that Augustana's heritage promotes.

Parkander had the advantage of studying at a time—the Second World War—when women were thrust into new prominence and new responsibilities both in and out of the academy. With men on the battlefields, women necessarily took over many of the jobs previously done by those men. At Augustana gifted women like Parkander and her contemporary Betsey Brodahl were supported in their educational and professional aspirations. And this support was not, as Dr. Bergendoff made clear, a default option; it was given fully because the college saw in women the preservers of the liberal arts tradition so important to saving and healing a war-torn world. And I believe this positive, clearly articulated encouragement came from Augustana's long-held ideal of democratized education.

This is what Augustana gave Parkander. It's a gift she has never forgotten.

But her gifts to the college are ones neither her students nor the institution forgets. They enhanced all those three aspects of Augustana's educational heritage. Like Naeseth, she challenged both men and women with her intellectual rigor and encouraged them with her support. But perhaps her profoundest gifts were to her women students. One story will illustrate this, and serve for many like it. It's about a woman who ultimately became a best-selling writer of thoughtful nonfiction works that examine some questions of social justice. As a naïve seventeen-year-old she registered for Parkander's freshman English class and was told "with your grades you should plan to go graduate school." "It rocked my world," the woman, a member of this year's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary class, still recalls. "No one had ever suggested grad school for me. Dorothy gave me a way to see myself as I never had before."

And that is what the educational heritage of Augustana has grown into. Giving people a way to see themselves as they never had before, and by that light, seeing themselves in the world as never before, and going into that world, and planting new seeds of vision and service. It's a great heritage. It's what Augustana continues to do today. And the women who came to see themselves through the lens of that heritage, and then turned that lens on the world, have been some of its brightest stars, its finest blooms.

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