CHAPTER THREE

Part IV: Female Faculty and the War

If inflation, adapting the campus to military training, illness and quarantine weren’t enough, Dr Keith waged a constant battle to keep employees, faculty and staff. In fact, at times the inability to retain faculty and other staff at the school sometimes reached crisis levels.

In a letter written in the fall of 1918, Keith expressed his frustration:

“*We indeed have a merry time trying to get enough labor to run this institution with all its boarding and housing facilities. Before I started in on the year I expressed the expectation that by the end of the year every one of my few scattered hairs would be white and with the way things are piling up I see no reason to change this judgment.*” (October 20, 1918)

Low normal school salaries and high demand for manual laborers in the area made it hard for him to keep even relatively unskilled laborers. Letters in the presidential papers document Keith’s attempts to find kitchen workers from outside the area, only to be informed that wartime salaries put professional cooks out of reach of the school.

Keith reported losing two kitchen workers from his already understaffed kitchens in a single day because they could find better paying work elsewhere.

Young female faculty members were often tempted by the wide range of wartime job opportunities, which appealed to their sense of patriotism as well as adventure. This temptation was exacerbated by the relatively low salaries paid many of the female instructors.
Marion Spencer wrote to her mother concerning the disparity in pay between the professors in the Math department. One particularly ill-used woman had a full teaching load and was suddenly told to move to a student room with no running water to supervise a hall of students because another woman felt she was having a nervous breakdown and had to be relieved. With six classes to teach, she was given this responsibility with no additional compensation. At least one male professor in the same department taught three classes, had no hall duties, and made almost three times as much as she did. On this occasion Miss Leonard heard of the situation and “got her spunk up” went to Dr. Keith in the woman’s defense. (April 18, 1918).

Spenser was paid $500.00 for her first year of teaching. When she heard of the availability of well-paying government jobs, she was tempted to apply for one. She wrote:

“The government has sent to the colleges asking for the names of graduates (women) within the last five years, who, without previous business ability, are
willing to apply for work in the Supply Division of the Ordinance Department in Washington. The salary is $1000 to start with $100 raise at the end of the first three months, and increases of 100 until $1800 is reached... Miss Stephens and I both would like to know what you think about applying for it. I don’t think the pay here is so attractive, nor would a teaching position be apt to give quite as much nor have perhaps as much opportunity.” (January 27, 1918)

In the *Normal Herald* (November 1918) they would have read of successful former faculty members who had found more appealing employment in war work. For example, Margaret Moore was a former Critic Teacher at the Training school who found a “lucrative,” “important and interesting position in Washington, D.C.” as first assistant to the Head of the Department of Naturalization. Marion Colcord, who had been an ISNS English instructor, was being trained to work for the YMCA’s overseas. Such information might have encouraged female faculty to take advantage of opportunities that offered better pay and at the same time allowed them to assist in the war effort.

While female faculty departed to take advantage of better paying and more promising opportunities, other female faculty came. By 1919, the percentage of female faculty had increased again. In that year there were only 12 male and 38 female professors.

*Miss Leonard and the Great War*

Jane Leonard, still serving as Preceptress, was eager to support the war effort when the conflict was declared. In her late 70s by 1917, she could hardly go into active
war service. Still, she felt that the work she did was also essential. She wrote to a former student:

“For myself, I am old and tied down, but we have to have educated men and women, the President says, to direct American life after the war. So I console myself by doing the very best teaching I can and keeping order among more than seven hundred girls. “(March 14, 1918.)

Her work was further limited by a fall which resulted in a broken hip in May of 1918 shortly after the war was declared. Doctors were sure she would never walk again, but they underestimated her.

Marion Spencer visited her in her sick room and found her blanched and in terrible pain. Spencer remarked on how changed Leonard was, and how old and frail she looked. Leonard rebounded though. By November 17, 1918, Spencer reported that Leonard has been walking again for nearly three weeks and declared. “She certainly is remarkable old lady.”

As many of her current and former students went for military service and war work, Leonard is likely to have cheered them on. In a letter to Helen Wilson Luzadder written in March of 1918, Leonard told the 1887 graduate, who was then in her 50s and teaching in Alaska that she should be doing more:

“I cannot answer your letter now. In fact, I could not answer it if I had a long time to do it in. I am just hurrying to tell you that there is so much to be done and you ought to be here doing it... The idea that a woman of your capacity, character and ability to move things at this tremendous hour, being hid away up in Alaska. Take the first boat and turn your face homeward, and never stop until you get home.... And here you are, with all of your endowments, hiding yourself away in Alaska. You are a slacker and nothing else. If you were not so far away we would either hang or imprison you... Expecting a letter telling me you have turned your face toward civilization and duty, I am, loving you more and more, always your friend. “ (March 1918)