

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EDITH BRAMHALL¹

by **Robert D. Loevy**

Editor's Note: Edith Bramhall taught Political Science at Colorado for almost three decades. She was so notable and memorable that the Political Science Department's top prize for a graduating major is named the Bramhall Award. She also was an active participant in Colorado politics and was the first woman elected to the Colorado Springs City Council. This description of her life and teaching career at Colorado College is excerpted from a history of the Political Science Department written in 2004.

THE BRAMHALL ERA - 1920 TO 1946

Edith C. Bramhall was appointed Professor of Political Science at Colorado College in 1920. Bramhall mainly taught Political Science, and she remained at the College for 26 years, retiring in the 1940s. Her lengthy tenure saw the College through the changing social standards of the 1920s, the economic difficulties of the 1930s, and the great international struggle of World War Two.

Because of her key role in the development of Political Science at Colorado College, Edith Bramhall is often referred to as the founder of “modern” Political Science at Colorado College. The Political Science Department's top scholarly award, presented at the annual Honors Convocation, is named the Bramhall Award.

Edith Clementine Bramhall was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1874, the same year that Colorado College was founded. She was raised in La Porte, Indiana. By the time she was in high school, she was reading a translation of Herodotus as well as *Greene's History of England*. Her lifelong interest in

¹ Robert D. Loevy, “A History of the Teaching of Political Science at Colorado College – 1881 to 2004,” Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College, 12-21.

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politics was facilitated by her father, a building contractor, who took her to political rallies and presided over discussions of national and local politics at the family dinner table.

Bramhall went to the University of Indiana in Bloomington. Thanks to advanced credits earned in high school, she graduated from Indiana after only three years. She then did graduate work in Medieval History at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, getting her Ph.D. in 1898. Her minor field, however, was Political Science.

Edith Bramhall was the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in History at the University of Pennsylvania.² As a graduate student, she held a Joseph M. Bennett Foundation fellowship.³

After a year of post-doctoral studies at Bryn Mawr College near Philadelphia, Edith Bramhall taught briefly at Manual Training Hall in Indianapolis, Indiana. She then joined the faculty at Rockford College for Women in Illinois. During her 19 years teaching at Rockford, Bramhall made four trips to Europe to observe European governments in action. She attended sessions of the British Parliament at the start of World War I. When the fighting began in earnest, she cabled Rockford College to find a substitute for her while she threw herself into the Allied war effort.

Bramhall went to Le Havre, France, the ocean port for Paris, where she read to wounded soldiers and wrote letters home for them. Most of the soldiers she tended were Canadians. At the city of Rouen in France, she talked the local newspaper editor into helping her gather a truckload of books and magazines for the wounded troops to read. She was working as an assistant nurse in Paris when her substitute at Rockford College had to leave. Professor Bramhall returned to the United States and her teaching duties.

Following the Armistice that ended World War One, Bramhall spent a year at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Among the persons giving lectures at the New School that year were many of the leading figures of European politics, who came to the United States to explain what was being done to rebuild war-torn Europe.

² “Doctors Of Philosophy Of The Graduate School, 1889-1927,” *University Of Pennsylvania Bulletin*, Volume XXVIII, November 12, 1927, in University Of Pennsylvania Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

³ *Catalogue of the University Of Pennsylvania, 1897-1898*, 386, in University Of Pennsylvania Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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She was the first woman professor at Colorado College with a Ph.D. to make a career of teaching at the College. This photograph appeared in the 1922 College yearbook, two years after Bramhall joined the faculty and when she was about 48 years old. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)

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In 1920, Edith Bramhall left Rockford College for Women and joined the faculty at Colorado College. She turned 46-years-old that year. Although Bramhall was born into a Republican family, she regarded President Theodore Roosevelt as the last admirable Republican. After a brief flirtation with the Progressive Party, she became an activist Democrat for the remainder of her life. She particularly admired, and taught about, the internationalism of President Woodrow Wilson and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁴

There are many academic legends about Edith Bramhall's teaching years at Colorado College. One former student described her as having "beautiful red hair...piled high" and always dressed in "that beautifully tailored suit and the inevitable brogues, with the toes turned ever so slightly up." Bramhall was said to possess a manner so direct that "it might have turned me away but for the magnetism that held and fascinated me." Bramhall actively recruited the young women students at Colorado College to take her courses. She told one woman: "Now you must know, Letitia, that all too few women know anything about the political process. I have so few girls. I really need you."⁵

The first decade she was at Colorado College, Edith Bramhall lived in Ticknor Hall, a women's dormitory. She owned a cabin in the mountains west of Colorado Springs, but she did not own an automobile to drive up to it. She therefore invited co-educational groups of students to drive up to her cabin with her for the weekend. The men students would tend the fire while Professor Bramhall, an excellent cook, would direct the women students in preparing the meals. A former student recalled: "Dinner was always a joyous, festive occasion - appetites cared for shamelessly, joke rivaling joke," ending in a "crescendo of hilarity.... As Edith knew we would be, we

⁴ John Reubens, "Dr. Bramhall Still Likes To See Political Science In Action," (no newspaper name recorded), September 16, 1957, in file: Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

⁵ Letitia Finn Saunders Rehm, "I Remember Edith," Colorado College alumni magazine, June 1985, in file: Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

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were putty in her hands, ready for conversation and lively debate, deftly guided.”⁶

There was a legal requirement in the early 20th Century that corpses shipped by railroad had to be accompanied by a live passenger with a paid ticket. Professor Bramhall would arrange for Political Science students to accompany the bodies of deceased persons, who had passed away in Colorado Springs, to out-of-town funerals and burials. The transportation for the students was paid by the deceased person’s estate. While on such paid trips, the students could return home on vacations, or attend Political Science meetings in other cities, or conduct research in distant libraries. Edith Bramhall herself was said to use this free form of transportation when she needed to travel across the country.⁷

In 1929, a prominent feminist and Democrat named Lillian Kerr wrote a letter to a Colorado Springs newspaper lamenting there was no woman on the City Council. “I dismissed the thought,” Edith Bramhall later recounted, “but woke up the next morning saying: ‘Why don’t you do it yourself?’”

There was a problem. Colorado Springs at that time required City Council candidates to pay property taxes. Because Professor Bramhall lived in the Ticknor Hall women’s dormitory, she owned no real property to be taxed. On the advice of Ben Wendelken, a former student who had become a prominent attorney in Colorado Springs, she paid tax on the value of a large desk she had inherited from her father, the only thing she claimed to own of any value.

With the property tax technicality out of the way, Edith Bramhall was easily elected to City Council and served from 1929 to 1935. She spent much of her career on the Council fending off attempts by private interests to buy the City-owned Public Utilities (gas, electric, water, and sewer) in Colorado Springs.⁸

⁶ Letitia Finn Saunders Rehm, “I Remember Edith,” Colorado College alumni magazine, June 1985, in file: Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

⁷ J. Juan Reid, *Colorado College: The First Century, 1874-1974* (Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado College, 1979), 135.

⁸ John Reubens, “Dr. Bramhall Still Likes To See Political Science In Action,” (no newspaper name recorded), September 16, 1957, in file:

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Edith Bramhall was an outspoken critic of Adolph Hitler and the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, she joined with Thurston Davies, the Colorado College President at the time, in giving speeches and going on the radio to call for United States diplomatic and military action against Hitler.

The Political Science curriculum under Professor Bramhall was very much the same as it had been under her immediate predecessor, Albert Russell Ellingwood. *Elements Of Political Science* under Ellingwood evolved into *Introduction To Political Science* with Bramhall. The catalogs also listed during the Bramhall years off-the-shelf Political Science courses such as *Government And Politics In The United States*, *American Political Parties*, *Comparative European Government*, and *History of Political Theory*.

Bramhall demonstrated her interest in current political happenings by teaching a course in 1938-1939 labeled *Recent International Relations*. When asked her favorite course to teach, Professor Bramhall always named *British Social Politics*, a course listed as History rather than Political Science.⁹

Professor Bramhall's influence on her students was said to extend well beyond the classroom. One of her star students was Lloyd Edson Worner, the first graduate of Colorado College to subsequently become President of the College (1963-1981).

Worner owned a dog, a collie named Patti, who often came to Edith Bramhall's International Relations class with Worner. There were a number of times, however, when the dog came to class but Lloyd Worner did not. Apparently Bramhall was genuinely amused by the fact that it appeared the dog was taking the course rather than Lloyd Worner.¹⁰

Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

⁹ "Annual Catalog, January 1939," in *Colorado College Catalogs, 1935-1939*, Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College, 85-86.

¹⁰ Oral History Interview, Lloyd Edson Worner, Colorado College Special Collections, Tutt Library, January 28, 1985, 14-15.

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She was the leading teacher and scholar of Political Science at Colorado College from 1920 to 1946. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)

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On the serious side, it is important to note that, when named to the presidency of Colorado College, Lloyd Worner first conferred with his old Political Science professor, Edith Bramhall, to get advice on how to do the job.¹¹

During the later days of her teaching career and following her retirement in 1946, Edith Bramhall lived in a little white house on East San Rafael Street north of Palmer Hall. The first six years after she retired, she went to Washington, D.C., every winter to attend sessions of the US Senate and US House of Representatives and sit in on congressional committee hearings.

In retirement, Edith Bramhall stayed active in campus life and local politics. She continued her interest in the Democratic Party, avidly collecting money for the party through a fund-raising campaign named Dollars For Democrats. One professor recalled the day Professor Emerita Bramhall stopped by his office collecting money for the Democratic Party. Just as he was about to fork over a dollar bill, Edith Bramhall said pointedly: “Can you imagine that some people think Dollars For Democrats means one dollar?” The wallet was put away, the check book was taken out, and a check for \$5 was written.

In 1964, almost two decades after she retired, Edith Bramhall was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) degree by Colorado College. At the commencement ceremony, Bramhall was on the platform with Colorado Governor John Love, a Republican, who also received an honorary degree that year. Reportedly, “there was betting in the faculty that she was hitting [Governor Love] up for Dollars For Democrats.”¹²

Edith C. Bramhall died on March 4, 1965, just four days short of her 91st birthday. She had been a fixture on the Colorado College campus for almost 45 years, from 1920 to 1965. She was the archetype of the small liberal-arts college professor, devoting her life to her teaching and to the well-being of her students. Even in death she continued her commitment to education, leaving \$31,267 to Colorado College for student scholarships.

As with many beloved professors, Edith Bramhall had a nickname. By undergraduates and alumni alike, she was casually referred to as

¹¹ Worner Oral History, February 5, 1985, 102-103.

¹² Oral History Interview, Fred Sondermann, Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College, February 7, 1978, 5.

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“Brammy.”¹³ Two of her students who went on to distinguished careers in government service were Leonard Sutton, who became a Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, and John Kenneth Emmerson, who in 1957 was a member of the United States mission to the United Nations.

Although she never published a book, Edith Bramhall was a leading political scientist of her time. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, she served on the Executive Council of the American Political Science Association and was President of the Colorado-Wyoming Political Science Association. Her hobby, in which she displayed a great deal of talent, was landscape painting. It was her world travels and her political activism, however, that made her legendary.¹⁴

At the time of her death, Colorado College President Lloyd E. Worner, her former student, issued a moving tribute to her: “The history of any college or university will be brightened by only a few great teachers whose influence and inspiration have changed the lives of their students. Edith Bramhall was one of the favored few at Colorado College. Her work speaks for her.”¹⁵

¹³ Because “Brammy” was a nickname, there was no official way to spell it. Some references to Edith Bramhall in alumni letters to the College referred to her as “Brammie.” Letter, Leonard Sutton, Justice, Colorado Supreme Court, to Lorena Berger, Alumni Secretary, Colorado College, March 11, 1957, in file: Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

¹⁴ Edith Bramhall, Noted Springs Personality, Dies,” *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, March 4, 1965. “Prof. Edith Bramhall Dies; Services Set For Monday,” *Colorado Springs Free Press*, March 5, 1965, in file: Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

¹⁵ W. T. Little, “Dr. Edith Bramhall, CC Legend,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), March 5, 1965, in file: Bramhall, Edith, University of Pennsylvania Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.