

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### A LETTER TO MR. ORMES<sup>1</sup>

by Ruth Loomis

*Editor's Note: Ruth Loomis was the first full-time administrator appointed at Colorado College. President William Frederick Slocum named her Dean of Women in 1897. She had spent the previous nine years teaching English at Vassar College, her alma mater, in Poughkeepsie, New York.*

*Ruth Loomis was famous for bringing the social graces of an eastern women's college to Colorado College in the West. She sought to imbue the women students with "sterling integrity" and worked hard to elevate "the ideals of ... young women." As one of her former charges recalled: "She knew all the requirements for proper young women, and lest we forget, a list of reminders was tacked inside our closet doors."*

*Ruth Loomis retired in 1917 after 20 years of service as Dean of Women. Eleven years later, in 1928, she wrote this letter describing her early memories of her time at Colorado College.*

424 East 57th Street  
New York City

February 25, 1928

Dear Mr. Ormes:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Ruth Loomis to Mr. Ormes, February 25, 1928, Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.

<sup>2</sup> Manley Ormes was in charge of the library at Colorado College from 1904 to 1929. Although he did not write a history of Colorado College, he systematically gathered materials about the history of the institution. His son, Robert Ormes, became a well-known professor of English at Colorado College.

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It has taken a sprained ankle to free me from enough of the calls upon my time to make a space in which to try to keep my promise to you to rattle off on [my] Corona [typewriter] some of my memories of the days when I first knew Colorado College.

The first picture that comes to me is of a ragged little procession of students which I met on Tejon Street when I was taking a year off from my work at Vassar [College]. There were improvised banners with various slogans in all of which “The Pearsons Fund” figured.<sup>3</sup> The center of interest was President [William Frederick] Slocum, trying not to look too unhappy, seated in a high run-a-bout, drawn by students who were in cap and gown, and clasping to him a large money bag (made, I heard afterwards, of one of Mrs. Slocum’s sofa pillows) with \$150,000 on it in large figures. I said, “How amusing!” [I little realized] that I was soon to come into the group and be as quick as any to resent such exclamations.

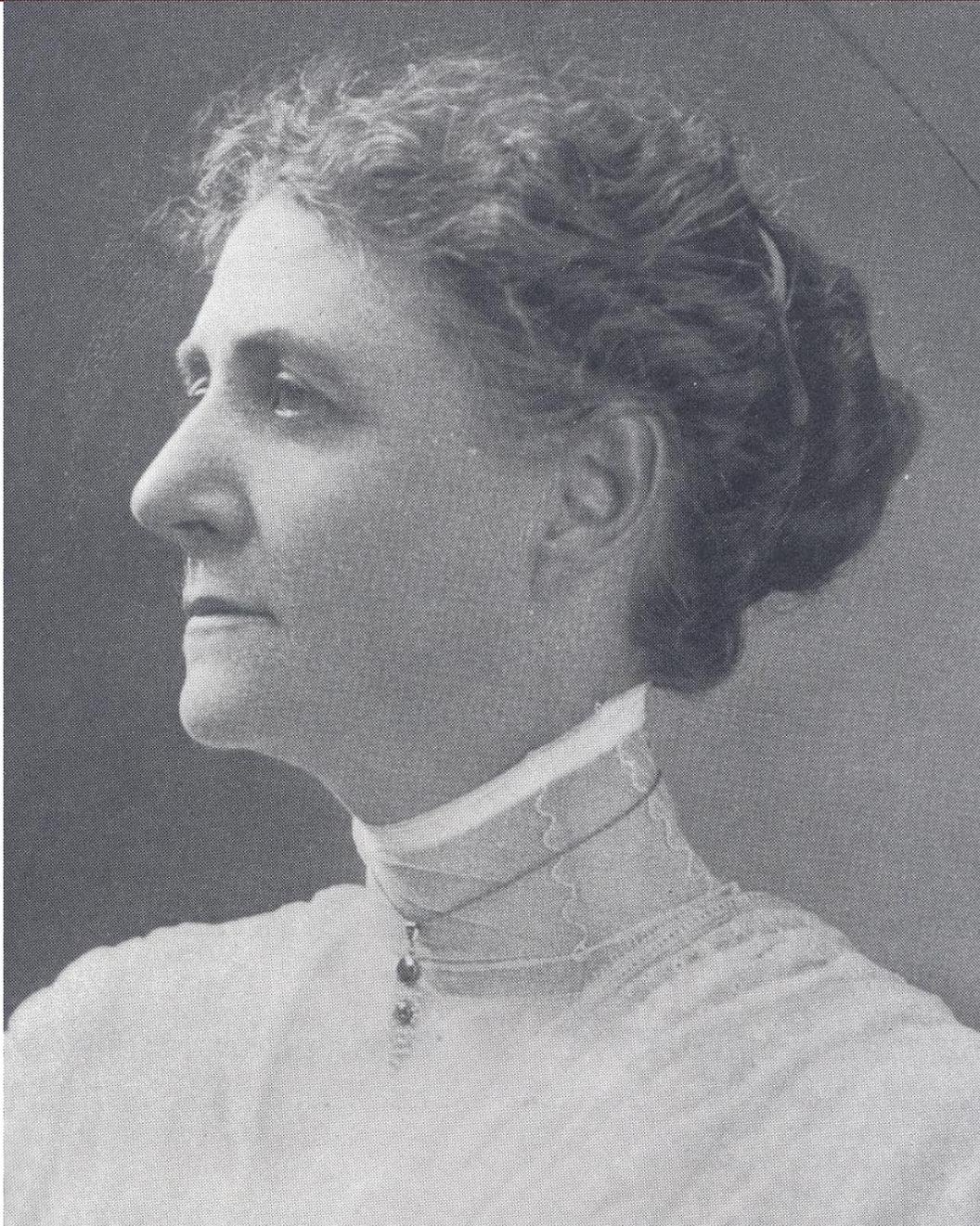
You [Mr. Ormes] had a part in that campaign for the first endowment of any considerable amount, and you know quite as well as I how everyone in the town hoped to “put it over” until there seemed to be no event that was not related to the fund. [You] probably remember the story of Florian Cajori, Jr., a very small boy then, who looked up when his mother was tucking him up one night, and asked where she was going, and when she said to have some fun, he asked sleepily, “Pearsons fun?”<sup>4</sup>

[The Pearsons Fund] was the first endowment campaign. I can see President Slocum’s expression as I met him on the campus on his way to the bank with a fat little book in his hand which held the pledges, and he said, “There is going to be no slip about this thing. I have had it all underwritten. There is nothing that Dr. Pearsons can take exception to.” Dr. Pearsons had had to withhold his offer in a number of cases, but it was characteristic of the President not to take chances in such matters.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. D. K. Pearsons, a medical doctor who made millions of dollars in Chicago real estate, offered to give Colorado College \$50,000 if the College could gather \$150,000 in matching contributions. Raising money for the Pearsons Fund began in 1893 and was successfully completed in 1896.

<sup>4</sup> Florian Cajori, Jr., was the son of Florian Cajori, who taught Physics at Colorado College from 1889 to 1918. Florian Cajori, Jr., attended Colorado College and was an active alumnus of the College.



**RUTH LOOMIS**

*She was the first Dean of Women at Colorado College and thereby the College's first full-time administrator. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*

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It was after that that Dr. Pearsons, who “liked that young man who was doing things out there in Colorado,” came to visit us. [He] became a daily purchaser at the rummage sale, the first in the West, which the women of the Educational Society were holding to raise money for the furnishing of what we called South Hall. [That was] the wing of the Plaza Hotel, which Mr. Atkinson had added to his plans on condition that the College would rent it for three years for the overflow from Montgomery and Ticknor Halls.<sup>5</sup>

It was a great sale. The merchants had donated from their inactive stock, and Dr. Pearsons was delighted to find a dozen collars of his old-fashioned cut for next to nothing.

I had the “art department” and was busy trying to persuade an English woman from an eastern ranch to buy two old silver cake baskets at fifty cents apiece. She had been attracted by them as they stood, one on top of the other, in the window, and I had explained that it was a table ornament, a sort of epergne, in which she could put fruit and flowers, all for one dollar. When I picked up the top one, [I] found what they really were [two old silver cake baskets]. It was a bad moment, and it took time to show her that they were even more useful as two pieces of silver than one. She loved a bargain, and came up to me as she went away, hugging her parcel, and patted me on the back with, “Go [to] it, Loomis. You are all right.”

Another amusing instance occurred when Mrs. Franklin Brooks, who had worked hard selling much clothing to a sturdy ranch woman, came to Mrs. Slocum to ask if she might not throw in “this bag, which, as you see, is really good for nothing; and this lady had bought so much; it would help her to get the things home.” The bag was one which the President had carried only a short time before, and which Mrs. Slocum, in her zeal to help the cause, had decided to put in, in any case.

Mrs. Ahlers managed the sale, which brought in over \$500. [There was] such success that everything had been sold by the last evening except a parrot cage. Just as she was closing the room, a woman came in disappointed to find that she was too late. When Mrs. Ahlers brought out the cage and explained its points, the woman said, “You know, I have always wanted a parrot. Perhaps I’ll get one if I have a cage,” and went off with it.

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<sup>5</sup> Montgomery and Ticknor Halls were women’s dormitories. The Plaza Hotel was purchased by Colorado College many years later and renamed Spencer Center.



**VASSAR COLLEGE**

*Ruth Loomis graduated from Vassar in 1885 and taught English there for nine years before becoming Dean of Women at Colorado College. She was said to have brought to a small western college the sophistication and sense of proper behavior typical of a fashionable eastern college for women. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)*

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The next picture [in my mind] is of the giver of Ticknor Hall. Dr. Slocum had said after the Pearsons Fund was completed that one of the things he most wanted to do was to bring onto the campus a small group of girls from out of town. [They] had been able to come to college only because the Woman's Educational Society had rented a house on North Weber Street and started a club in which they did all the work except the actual cooking, which was done by a woman who also acted as matron. The fees at Montgomery which kept them out were then \$6.00 a week for room and board.

The club was a poor makeshift. Miss [Elizabeth] Cheney, who had watched Dr. Slocum's taxing work on the Pearsons fund in addition to all the other things he was doing, put an envelope into his hand one day, telling him that it was for his private bank account. [When] he found that it was a check for \$5,000, he did not hesitate long.

That very evening he and Mrs. Slocum went over to the club to tell the girls that he had a plan to build perhaps a wing only of a building for them on the campus. When he told Miss Cheney, she said, "I'll make it ten thousand," and when he showed her the plans of what afterward became Ticknor Hall, she said, "Build it and I will pay for it." She was then in her early twenties, and it seemed best to her mother and herself that no announcement of her gift should be made.

My third picture [in my mind] is of a little figure, in mourning, on one of the blocks of stone near the platform from which Mrs. Slocum, as the President of the Educational Society, made the address at the laying of the cornerstone for Ticknor Hall. [The new women's dormitory was] named for Miss Anna Ticknor of Boston, whose friendship and counsel had meant much to Miss Cheney in her own undergraduate days.

Every one had been wondering who the donor might be, but while it was thought that possibly Mrs. Cheney might have given the Hall, no one suspected that young girl. And no one applauded more heartily than did she, when Mrs. Slocum said that knowing the desire among the audience to hear who the donor was, she was more than glad to be able, not to give the name, but to show a portrait. When she held up a large photograph of one of the Egyptian sphinxes, Miss Cheney laughed as heartily as the others and no more.

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That was the origin of the gift of the Braun photograph of the sphinx in the entrance hall at Ticknor, the first picture hung in the Hall, and placed where it would always be the first thing seen by everyone entering the Hall.

It was in the autumn following [1897] that I became Dean of Women at the College. I arrived from New York one week before College opened to find Ticknor not yet finished; that all the girls must be gotten into Montgomery, which had yet to be cleaned: that the kitchen range must be replaced at once; and that there was \$125,000 in the bank to the credit of [Montgomery] Hall.

The first thing was to buy a range. As Mrs. Slocum was still in the East, the President and I, who knew nothing about ranges, went downtown and bought a thoroughly good one for \$150.00. Fortunately the mail that day brought a check for \$100.00 from Mr. Trumbull (then of Denver, and one of the Trustees) to be used where it was most needed. Montgomery Hall seemed to be that place. That is the only gift, I believe, that the women's halls received in that way, and we were able to keep to the President's rule - not to spend any money until we had it.

We did not spend much, it is true. My salary that year was \$40.00 a month for eight months, my board, and the privilege of having my mother spend the winter in the Hall. We couldn't even afford a telephone. I went to the President's house to do all necessary telephoning until two years later, when the Women's Educational Society put in a telephone at Ticknor, which was soon after paid for from the income of [Ticknor] Hall.

The larger gift from Miss Cheney made of Ticknor a center for the social life of the college, instead of the small building which should make it possible to bring the girls off campus into the college life. At the same time, it enabled us to make different prices for different rooms, and to have two tables, one in Montgomery, run by the girls themselves, at which the board was \$2.50 a week, whereas the board at Ticknor cost \$4.00. And the rooms varied from one to two dollars a week. It thus became possible for students to live on the campus for \$3.50 a week. That was true up to the time when Bemis Hall [another women's dormitory] was finished. Then the minimum became \$5.00 with the very great advantage of the common table for every one in [Bemis Hall].<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Up until Bemis Hall was constructed, the women students took their meals in their individual dormitories. Bemis had a central dining hall for women.

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One of my early recollections is of one of those sudden changes of temperature in September. It was on the Sunday morning after College had opened, the thermometer had dropped, and Montgomery was pretty chilly. I was wondering how homesick the girls might be when there came the welcome sound of the fan which forced the heat into the rooms. As I looked out, there was President Slocum going back to his house from the boiler house, his hat a little back on his head, and holding his hands as if they were grimier than they really were. Afraid that the girls might take cold, he had opened the boiler house and started the fire himself. At that time of year there was no fireman in the boiler house. Indeed it was many years before we could afford to keep a man all the time.

In those days the campus had not been put into lawn, and the wild flowers of the plains were abundant. We counted thirteen varieties one day in the spring of my first year, between Montgomery Hall and North Cascade Avenue.

Back of Montgomery, where the tennis courts are now, we had what we called the Conservatory of Music, a tiny shingled building, just large enough to hold a piano, with a tiny veranda across the front. There Rubin Goldmark, the well-known American composer, now of New York, functioned as the head of the Department of Music of Colorado College. The coming and going of the students had worn a narrow, crooked path to the door [of the Conservatory], and I thought, as I looked out one spring morning, what a pity it was that the [students] had torn up bits of paper and dropped them along the path. The bits of paper were innocent little sand lilies.

In those days there was still just under the terrace to the west of the President's house, a small stable where the President's horse was kept during [the President's] first years there. It was there that Judge Matchett earned his tuition [caring for the President's horse]. He told us [stories], you remember, at one of the Commencement dinners. Lest you may not have been there, I will repeat [two] of his stories. This was long before my time [at the College].

[Judge] Machett and Tibbs and another student working under Professor Cajori, who had recently joined the faculty, felt that they were too hard-worked by this clever young professor. [They] decided, as one of them put it, that it was time to let him know that he needn't think he could come out there from Johns Hopkins and make his reputation off them!

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Judge Matchett also told of his appointment on the team to go to debate with [the University of Colorado at] Boulder. He simply hadn't the proper coat to appear in until Mrs. Slocum came to the rescue with one of the President's, in which he felt ready to win anything, and did come home victorious. He was ready to take better care than ever of the President's horse.

Ticknor Hall was furnished by the Woman's Educational Society. We moved into it during the Christmas vacation of the winter of '97-8. Mrs. Cheney gave the first hundred dollars toward the furnishings. That [money] we put into two good rugs for the large reception room. I believe they were there still [when I left], and Elizabeth [Cheney] sent a Morris chair, and her mother the hangings for both rooms.

That was all we had until just before the opening, when Miss Cheney came to me to say that she did not want to do anything that might hurt the feelings of the furnishing committee, but that she didn't think that the carpet we had put into the small reception room looked quite as well as the rugs across the hall, and that if we would not take it amiss she would like to give similar rugs in its place.

Our feelings were not hurt, and when Miss Cheney realized the night before the opening that we had no money for furniture, [she] told us to furnish the rooms and send the bill to her. Mrs. Goddard was deputed to select [the furniture]. It was delivered while the exercises of dedication were going on in the chapel, then under Coburn Hall. After a characteristic address by Mr. Washburn, practically the whole audience came to the luncheon at Ticknor. [By then] the reception rooms were complete. The Woman's Educational Society gave the luncheon.

It was one of the members of the Woman's Educational Society Board to whom we were indebted for the first resident nurse. In those days I was housekeeper and nurse as well as Dean of Women, and Mrs. Skelton, seeing the need for relief, raised enough money to pay for the services of a practical nurse for the remainder of that year. After that the numbers had grown sufficiently for us to cover the salary of a nurse by asking a small fee from each student living in the halls.



**RUTH LOOMIS**

*It was said that she imparted “sterling integrity” to the women students and elevated “the ideals ... of young women.” (Photograph of a painting from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*

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As the numbers grew, we had to rent, first a house on North Weber Street, for the over flow. It was in that house that the present Dean of Women, Mrs. [Mabel Barbee] Lee, passed her freshman year. Then [we rented] the wing of the Plaza Hotel for three years. It seemed as if, if we could afford to pay rent, we ought to be able to pay interest on money put into the building of a hall on the campus, if we could find anyone to lend it to us. The President was not willing to ask for a loan until he had raised something by gifts.

It was there that Miss [Marion McGregor] Noyes, who had done such devoted and able work in the early days of the College, helped to make McGregor possible by securing several gifts. For many other reasons we wanted to name the hall for her and were glad when she consented to let us use the name of her mother and her own middle name.

Our great need was for as many rooms as possible for our money, and at as little expense as possible, since we were putting a mortgage on the hall. [There had been] a mistake in the estimate of the amount of the Peach Blow sandstone available for Palmer Hall, which was building at the moment. Also, President [Slocum] was absent in Europe for the first vacation he had had since coming to the College in 1888. [Inferior] stone had been brought to the campus to complete Palmer. [When President Slocum returned from Europe, he refused to let Palmer Hall be finished with the inferior stone.] The President had not embarked on the building of Palmer without being sure of his stone, and on his return went at once to the quarry, where he found plenty of [the good] stone. Palmer was saved, and McGregor Hall profited because the contractor was ready to sell the already-cut [inferior] Manitou stone at a low figure.

The furniture in South Hall had been bought with the proceeds from the rummage sale, and Mrs. Slocum had secured gifts for [the furnishings] for the public rooms. That made it possible to open McGregor in September, and the girls were thankful to get onto the campus. When the increasing numbers made it necessary again to lease the wing of the Plaza Hotel, four of the finest of the juniors volunteered to go over there to set the pace for the new students, and make them feel that they were a part of the campus life. The interest was always paid on the mortgage and year by year something on the principal.

It was a great relief to every one when, after three more years of enduring South Hall, Bemis became a possibility. It was after General

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Palmer had made a very handsome gift for the hall that Mr. Bemis became interested and virtually finished it. The architect, Mr. Biscoe, made a careful study of our needs and our desires. We wanted a great common room in which we could easily seat many people, and yet we did not want it full of chairs. He proposed a bench around the room, and when I feared the atmosphere of a railway station he said he would make it look like the Council Chamber of the Doges Palace in Venice.

We wanted an English dining hall with an open wood roof, which he managed to give us without making it too expensive. We wanted a great window in the living room of the Dean of Women, which he did not want to give us. He had not been in Colorado long enough then to realize that we never want to be out of sight of mountains. And he only gave us the window under protest. But Bemis is present history, not past.

I have no idea, Mr. Ormes, that you can make any use of all this. But I hope that you may glean a few facts. The rest will do well in the waste basket. I am sorry to have been so long in sending it to you, but the moment I could get about again there were things piled up that had to be done. New York [City] has far too many things for the willing dog, I find. I am hoping to run away from it this summer by putting the Atlantic between myself and it.

With greetings to Mrs. Ormes, I am

Sincerely yours,

Ruth Loomis (signed)

Thank you for letting me rattle along with the knowledge that it is only substance that you want, not form.