

Caroline Morris Galt—1875-1937

By Sara A. Immerwahr

Caroline Morris Galt will be remembered especially as a teacher par excellence of Classical Archaeology to undergraduates at Mount Holyoke College, many of whom went on to achieve graduate degrees and enter the profession. Surprisingly, she accomplished this feat with only a B.A. degree from Bryn Mawr College which she received in 1897. She later took graduate courses at the University of Chicago (1903), at Columbia as a summer student in 1907 and 1908, and as a graduate student in 1917-1918. She also spent the year 1910-1911 at the American School of Classical Studies in Rome (later as part of the Academy), and in 1926-26 was Annual Professor at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, the first woman so appointed. Why she did not pursue a Ph.D. is hard to explain, for her scholarship and her training of students were universally admired. She taught a range of courses that would have been a credit to any department offering a graduate degree. In addition to the standbys of Greek Sculpture, Greek Architecture, Aegean Archaeology, she taught Roman Archaeology, the Topography of Rome, Greek and Roman Numismatics, Greek Vases, and perhaps many others. She was also the senior professor of Greek, teaching the course in Greek drama whenever there were available students.

Caroline Galt was born in Aurora Illinois on November 6, 1875, and entered Bryn Mawr College in 1893 where she majored in Greek and Mathematics. Her first teaching assignment was at the Pennsylvania College for Women in Pittsburgh where she was an instructor in Greek and Latin. From there she went in 1903 to Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, moving up the ranks from Reader in Latin (1903-4), Instructor in Latin (1904-10), and after a year's leave of absence in Rome, Associate Professor of Latin (1911-13). In 1913 (after the retirement of Louise Fitz Randolph who had established the department of Art History and Archaeology) her title changed to Associate Professor of Archaeology. In 1923 she was both Associate Professor of Archaeology and Greek, and after her leave of absence in Athens she was appointed Professor of Archaeology and Greek, her title until her death in 1937. She was thus involved in two strong departments at the College—Classics and Art—and was universally admired as the marshal of the academic procession, where she walked proudly in cap and gown and her ermine-trimmed Bryn Mawr hood.

Her headquarters were in Dwight Hall, at that time the Art Building, where in addition to her teaching she presided over the galleries with their well-chosen small objects of ancient art, some of which had been part of the collection of the Egyptologist, Caroline Ransom Williams, while others she had acquired abroad or from a reputable dealer (this was long before the UNESCO Convention). There was also a large collection of plaster casts acquired by Professor Fitz Randolph, which it was my responsibility as a bursary student to dust weekly. These objects were used in her teaching, and several of the originals formed the basis of her few but significant scholarly articles (see bibliography).

The most important of her acquisitions was a small bronze statuette of an athlete of the Severe Style of ca. 470 B.C., the so-called “Mount Holyoke Bronze,” which has often been loaned to outside exhibitions (See her article, “A Bronze Statuette,” 1929). The intensity of her scholarship in pursuing the investigation of an object, even an apparently insignificant one like the small fragment of a grave stele from Aptara in Crete, to its ultimate source, both geographically and chronologically. This rigorous treatment combined with her love for ancient objects was something she communicated to her students and was perhaps what made her such an excellent teacher.

She was not a particularly dynamic lecturer, all admired and loved her. With her straight carriage, her white hair pulled back tightly, always impeccably dressed and always well-prepared for class, she gave a sense of dignity to the profession and earned the respect not only of her students but of more scintillating scholars, e.g., Professor Rhys Carpenter of Bryn Mawr, who declared that “Miss Galt produced the best prepared students.”¹ She spent her summers with her brother and sisters at a farm in Elkton, Maryland, and the academic year at the College Inn in South Hadley with a female companion, with whom she also traveled abroad. She belonged to that earlier generation of feminists who quietly earned her place and respect of her male colleagues.

Her untimely death from cancer in 1937 was a great loss to the College, and in 1941 a special exhibition of Ancient Art was held in Dwight Hall in her memory. It also celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Friends of Art which she had founded in 1931 to bring outside loan exhibitions to the college. This ambitious exhibition, organized by Professor Lucy Shoe, brought together all the ancient pieces acquired for the college by Galt as well as objects from a distinguished list of lenders (museums, other colleges and universities, and private collectors). Its 126 objects covered the whole range of ancient art from Egyptian and Mesopotamian through Greek, Etruscan and Roman, those fields which Galt had taught and inspired her students to study. Unfortunately Classical Archaeology as a major and as a distinct field of study at the College died soon after, perhaps in the belief that this was too specialized a field for undergraduates. However, in its heyday it was a great success.

Among my memorabilia from College, I discovered a letter from Galt to my mother who had inquired about the advisability of my pursuing a career in archaeology — this was in the depths of the Depression! In her answer Galt gave a very judicious appraisal of the possibilities, noting the students she had placed, and emphasizing the importance of studying Greek, for which she was training students in Classical Archaeology.

Galt was a member of the Managing Committee of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, on the Advisory Council of the School at Rome, as well as a member of the Archaeological Institute of America, the American Philological Association, the Classical League and the Numismatic Society.

Caroline Morris Galt—Select Bibliography

- 1911 "Some Corinthian Staters and Myron's Athena," BerlPhilWochenschrift, July 8, 1911.
- 1917 "A Marble Fragment at Mount Holyoke College from the Cretan City of Aptara," Art and Arch, September, 143-154.
- 1928 "Moonlight on the Acropolis: a Remarkable Night Photograph," ILN April 14, 629 (her own photograph).
- 1929 "A Bronze Statuette," AJA 33, 41-52.
- 1931 "Veiled Ladies," AJA 35 373-93.

¹ In preparing this biography I would like to thank Patricia J. Albright, Archives Librarian at Mount Holyoke College, who has supplied me with Xeroxed material and has answered my queries about Louise Fitz Randolph and her niece Caroline Ransom Williams, both alumnae of Mount Holyoke, classes of 1872 and 1896 respectively. The former was instrumental in establishing the department and the construction of Dwight Hall, and the latter, who was inspired by a trip to Egypt with her aunt, had a distinguished career as an Egyptologist.