

# A Nice Place to Lib & Learn

*Hunter College, established as Normal College more than 102 years ago, has always offered bold, educational opportunities to women...In fact, it's still a far from normal place.*

By Joan Dim

**G**LORIA STEINEM and Germaine Greer are impressive modern-day champions of women's liberation. But they are Janie-come-latelys when compared to some trail-blazing women who embarked on a college education more than one hundred years ago in what is now Hunter College.

One early Hunter graduate became the first woman to be a New York Municipal Court Judge, another founded the Lenox Hill Settlement House, still another became a "lady doctor" at a time when medical residencies for women were almost impossible to get.

These women succeeded, at least in part, because of Hunter. Then called The Normal College of the City of New York, Hunter opened Feb. 14, 1870, in a rented loft at 694 Broadway.

At the time, New York City was a lively, rapidly growing community with most of its population still living below 14th Street. Central Park had already been characterized as a "ruffians refuge where ladies, children and the unprotected are at the mercy of villians." Park Avenue, uptown at 68th Street, was still isolated, although occasionally a wild goat might be seen idling along the street. The Third Avenue Elevator train was being built. Cars were horsedrawn, and the Brooklyn Bridge spanned the East River.

Although the 1870's were ripe with change, women remained second-class citizens. It would be another fifty years before they would be allowed to vote. The only jobs available to women were as teachers, unless they wished to work in shops or as domestics.

So, in 1870 when Dr. Thomas Hunter founded Normal College, the first college

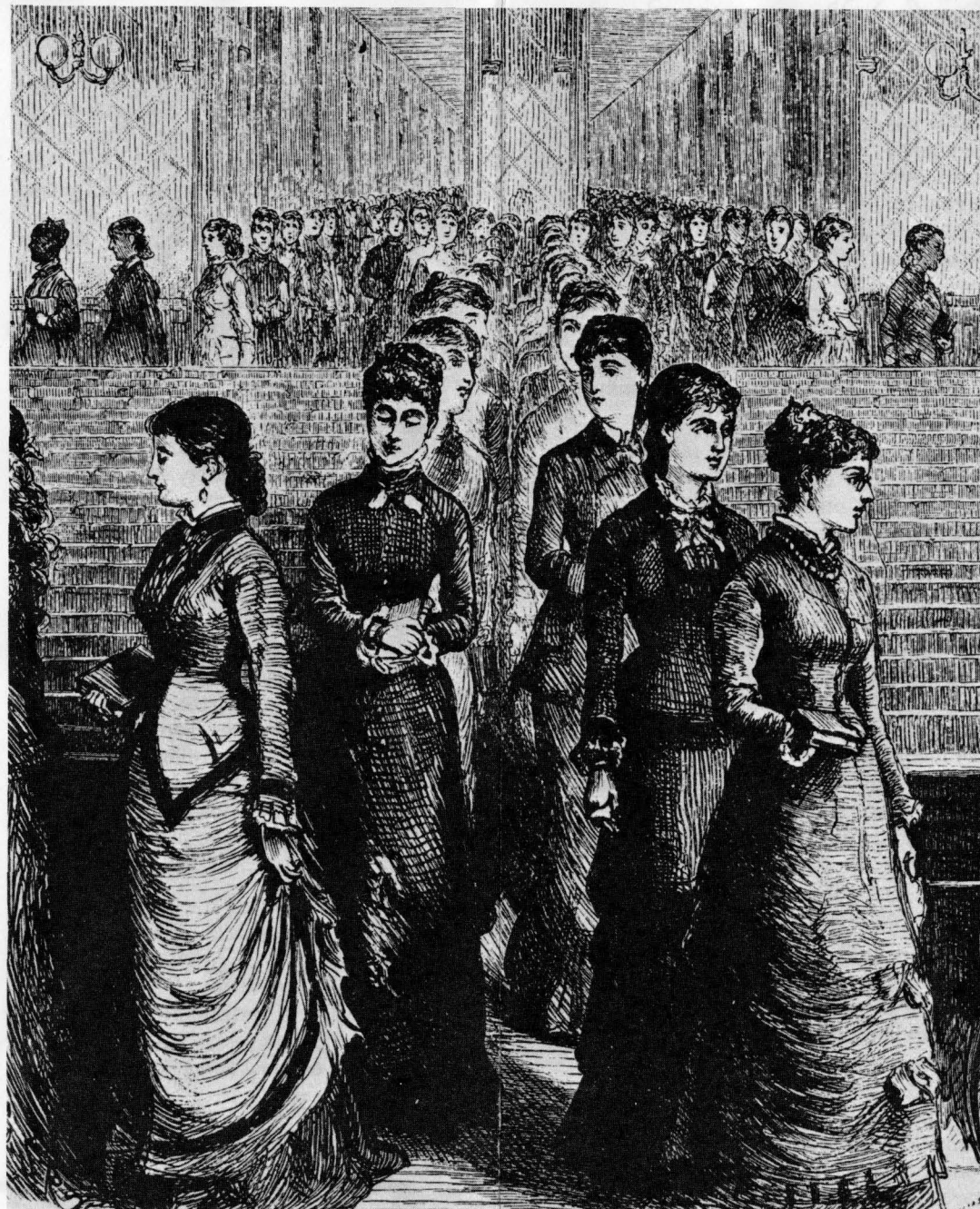
in the United States to provide a free higher education to women, he also helped scores of women to shatter the Victorian patterns of nineteenth century America.

Normal College, according to Dr. Hunter, provided the city with a "constant supply of trained and competent teachers." It would admit black and white students equally. At that time, New York's elementary schools were still segregated.

It would include the liberal arts—Greek and Roman classics, science, "intellectual philosophy"—when most normal schools provided only professional training for the "useful branches more suited to the young ladies' sex and prospective employment."

**T**HE NORMAL COLLEGE'S first class numbered 97 students, most of them as young as 14 years old, and graduates of the city's grammar schools. The "young ladies," as Dr. Hunter called them, were enrolled only after passing an examination with a minimum grade of 75 percent.

One of these girls, a member of the first Normal College class, was Harriet Rutter. Harriet, at 14, had sparkling eyes, light brown hair and enjoyed playing the piano. She had been handpicked for Normal College by Lydia Fowler Wadleigh, the school's first female superintendent. Harriet's father owned a book bindery on 14th Street. She had four younger sisters, all of whom also attended Normal College. After graduation, Harriet continued her education at Vassar College. There, she met and married William A. Eagleson, a gentleman who sold butter, eggs and cheese. The Eaglesons moved to Harlem, a fashionable neighborhood, and raised a family. One of their children,



Jessica, also attended Normal College. Today, Miss Eagleson is one of the oldest living Hunter alumnae.

At ninety-three, she is a sprightly, diminutive woman who has retained a biting sense of humor and a clear vision of the past. Miss Eagleson, who never married, enrolled in Normal College at age 14 in 1894 and took what was then called the classical course, graduating five years later in 1899.

Interviewed in her 79th Street apartment overlooking the East River, Miss Eagleson vividly recalled a New York City without skyscrapers and pollution. She described Hunter College's first permanent building, which was opened in 1873 and which burned down in 1936.

"The building at Park Avenue and 68th Street was spacious and magnificent," she said. "There was a playroom, a calistheneum, a library, 30 classrooms, two large lecture rooms, a drawing and art room, a physics laboratory and even a drying room for rainy days."

In those days, Miss Eagleson took the Lexington Avenue trolley from her home in Harlem down to Park Avenue and 68th Street, which was fast becoming an elegant residential neighborhood dotted with brownstones.

"Although I loved going to Normal College very much," Miss Eagleson said, "the times were very difficult for women. Very few women got jobs. In fact, women didn't attempt to do anything but teach. A woman just didn't think about going down to Wall Street and becoming a banker." After graduation, Miss Eagleson followed the fashion of the times and taught domestic arts—sewing and handwork—in public schools.

"When my mother graduated from the first Normal College class," said Miss Eagleson, "it was like graduating from high school. But, by the time I graduated, Normal College offered women a truly advanced education."

Miss Eagleson taught for forty years and said with a twinkle in her eyes, "I enjoyed every minute of it."

Since she has retired, Miss Eagleson busies herself by going to the opera regularly, traveling, meeting with members of the Hunter College Alumni Association, and taking a lively interest in Hunter's activities and future plans. "My pet project is contributing to the Scholarship and Welfare Fund," she said. "I want to help Hunter as much as it helped me and my family."

**W**ITH THE turn of the century, life for women began to be slightly less restrictive. By 1900, Hunter's "Normal Five," the college's first basketball team—dressed in bloomers with their hair piled demurely in buns—had already traveled to Staten Island and Southampton to play.

In 1906, Miss Annie E. Hickenbottom, a warm-hearted, merry and sympathetic woman who wore a pince-nez, was appointed superintendent. Soon afterwards, her duties were enlarged and she became the first dean of students—a post she held until her retirement in 1934. The college was growing and rapidly gaining status in the community. In 1909, the faculty marched in full academic regalia. The march was considered an outward sign of the college's growing scholastic distinction. In 1914, Normal College was renamed Hunter after its founder.

About the same time, students assumed greater responsibility for themselves and established the first student council. The council's goal was to work for the good of the college. Soon afterwards, a literary annual was published, and *The Normal College Bulletin*, which later became *The Envoy*.

While the country roared through the twenties, Hunter celebrated its 50th anniversary, organized student hops and "sings," presented Christmas plays and established the Nu Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. By the mid 1920s, registration soared and the city assigned to Hunter the Jerome Park Reservoir as the site of the Bronx campus.

As Hunter grew, so did its list of distinguished alumni.

Agnes Craig, a 1901 graduate, became the first woman to be a New York Municipal Court Judge.

Irene Brandon Graff, who graduated in 1898, founded the Lenox Hill Settlement on East 72nd Street while she was still a student. With the help of assistant Mary A. Wells, a graduate of the 1890 class, the settlement founders provided day care for the children of old Yorkville residents plus social and health services for their families. Today, the number of people served by the settlement, now called the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association, is so great that many other groups have been incorporated into it.

Georgia Reid, class of 1916, became the first Hunter College graduate to be ad-

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## Fame Is Highlight Of Alumni Homecoming

The annual Alumni Homecoming, featuring the first alumni-sponsored film "Once There is 'Fame'. . . There is Hunter," will be held on Thursday evening, Oct. 26, at Roosevelt House, 47 East 65 St. Film showings will be at 5:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

"Fame," premiered at last April's Birthday Luncheon, interweaves material from the Alumni Association's archives with interviews with 12 notable alumni: Jessica Eagleson, 1899; Meta J. Schechter of the Diamond Jubilee Class of 1912; Mina Rees, recently-retired president of CUNY's Graduate Center; Lenore Hershey, managing editor of *Ladies Home Journal*; N.Y.C. Deputy Police Inspector Gertrude Schimmel; Congresswoman Bella Abzug; actress Ruby Dee; Gunther Marx, director of corporate communica-

tions at American Standard; N.Y.C. Councilman Barry Salman; Rita Robinson, assistant to the publisher of *Time* and *Life*; Frederic Brandes, '70, of the CUNY Student Senate; and Mauro Casci, '72, former student body president.

An added attraction will be a short film of the Hunter Alumni-Broadway Show League softball game.

Chairman of the 1972 Homecoming Committee is Enid Gittens Foreman.

Come and meet with friends, some of the notables above, and the newly-elected alumni officers and directors. Send \$3 for each reservation to the Homecoming Committee, Alumni Association of Hunter College, 505 Park Ave., N.Y.C. 10022. Graduates of the Class of 1972 will be admitted free of charge.

## Scholarship and Welfare Sponsors Art Show

Twentieth Century American artists will be featured at the Scholarship and Welfare Fund art exhibit, to be held at the Kennedy Galleries, 20 East 56th St., on Saturday, Nov. 11. The show, the second art exhibit sponsored by the Fund, will run from 4 to 7 p.m.

Mrs. Ira Goldenblum is chairing the art show committee. Sponsors are President Jacqueline G. Wexler, Mrs. David Klau, Commissioner of Consumer Affairs Bess Myerson and Metropolitan Opera soprano Regina Resnik. Mrs. Mordecai Rochlin is president of the Scholarship and Welfare Fund.

Tickets, at \$15 each or two for \$25, are available at the Fund's office, 505 Park Ave., Rm. 1902, telephone 360-2860. All proceeds will be contributed to the Second Century Fund, earmarked for student aid.

## CULTURE LINE

Starting this month, New Yorkers will be able to call a single number for information on cultural happenings within all colleges of the City University. The new "Culture Line," (212) 360-2834, is a community service of CUNY's University Student Senate.

## HUNTER ELEMENTARY MOVES TO 53rd ST.

The campus elementary school has a new home this semester. Rental of 50,600 square feet of space at 425 East 53 Street was approved by the City University of New York Board of Higher Education during July. The building was formerly the United Nations School.

The new site, which is under contract for the next ten years, is viewed as "superior to where we are now," by Dr. Bernard Miller, director of the campus schools.

The elementary school has moved twice in two years, and the current temporary location at 329 East 63 Street is inadequate for the needs of the school. Approximately 350 students attend the grammar school.

Instead of traditional classrooms, the building, originally a warehouse, has been partitioned into 3 large areas. One will be used for each of the three new divisions—preprimary (nursery and kindergarten), primary (first to third grades) and intermediate (fourth to sixth grades).

The children work at their own speed within each of the new divisions. There is a large area which will serve as a gymnasium, and facilities for science laboratories are also available.

## Lib and Learn (Cont. from page 7)

mitted to the Cornell Medical School. She became a doctor of obstetrics and was named professional woman of the year in 1955.

Dr. Reid, an active woman in her mid-seventies, described the difficulties of being a "lady doctor" in the early 1900s. "Even as late as 1916," she said, "it was very difficult to get started. All the good hospital residencies automatically went to men." Now retired after 50 years of practice, Dr. Reid serves as a consultant in gynecology at the Beekman Downtown Hospital.

For a school that was initially created to educate only teachers, the career accomplishments of Hunter graduates make a heady list. Hunter produced the first woman, Soia Mentschikoff Llewellyn, appointed to the faculty of Harvard Law School; Miss America, Bess Myerson, who gracefully moved from a career in show business to the world of politics, where she became New York City's Commissioner of Consumer Affairs; the dancer, Pearl Primus, whose work and life link Africa to the United States; a Congresswoman, Bella Abzug, who fought for civil rights long before it was fashionable and has become a symbol of the women's liberation movement; a journalist, Judith Crist, whose criticism makes her one of the country's major authorities on films; a vice president of Bonwit Teller, Helen Galland Loewus; a syndicated columnist specializing in finance, Sylvia Porter; as well as one of the top female educators in the United States, Mina Rees, who retired last June as head of the Graduate Division of CUNY.

In 1940, at the dedication of Hunter's Park Avenue building, the poet Robert P. Tristram Coffin composed an ode called "The Palace of Park Avenue." Two lines from that poem sum up Hunter's role in yesterday and today's world:

"Here in a college for a sex set free  
Sits the hope of our humanity . . ."

## HELEN LUCKEY SIMIS

We note with sadness the passing of Helen Luckey Simis, president of the Alumni Association from 1938 to 1944. Her death came shortly before the association's Birthday Luncheon at which she was to be honored as a member of the Hunter Hall of Fame, in recognition of her years of service to the association.