

Yesterdays at Lindenwood: And The Morrow

The Girls' College at Quaint Old St. Charles Its Founders, History and Diamond Jubilee

BY OLIVER R. WILLIAMSON

IN the year 1764 the first throbs of the great convulsion that was to bring forth a new nation were agitating the little fringe of English colonies on the Atlantic seaboard of the newest of the continents. World-great events were in the making.

But to the far distant Illinois country only faint and tardy rumors of the impending struggle came. The traders at Fort Chartres disturbed themselves little with political mutations; could not the beloved and all-powerful mother France be trusted with such perplexing matters? So, whatever it meant to future history, there was no ulterior significance when Pierre Laclède sent August Chouteau to the west side of the Mississippi to establish a new post; it was simply to serve the convenience of trade that the beginnings of St. Louis were made.

Within the two or three years following 1764, St. Louis had become a village of several hundred inhabitants, and Blanchette—Blanchette the Hunter, whose choice was for the forests—became a weary of the chatter and rush of the lusty young village. So he fared him forth through the woods and wilderness to a well-remembered spot on the banks of the Muddy Water, where he bethought himself to establish a post which should not soon become so overcrowded. Blanchette's log cabin was built in 1768; a year later a number of his friends had joined him, a fort had been built, Les Petites Cotes (the later St. Charles) had come into being.

Nowadays quaint old St. Charles is but a quiet suburb of the other and larger city likewise of saintly title. The omnipresent trolley car picks one up in the heart of the metropolis, carries him swiftly over the twenty-three miles of hill and valley, through lingering bits of forest, past grain fields and meadows, across the turgid Missouri, and into the little city that clings picturesquely to the bluffs which border the north bank. Two steam railroads also give a choice of conveyance from St. Louis, or bring one directly from the North, East or West.

I suppose Blanchette, if he could see the outgrowth of his modest trading post today, would be driven by its modernity again to take to the woods—if he could find them in breadth to shelter him. To the writer, however, who discovered the interesting old town only the other day, the sedateness of the place and the leisurely disposition that seemed to characterize existence, were a marked and grateful contrast to the roar and rush of the largest city beyond the Mississippi, so short a distance away. Long ago the Frenchman has disappeared from the St. Charles district, and his place has been taken by the Teuton. But the former's influence has been perpetuated in the architecture of the houses that survive from the early days of the nineteenth century; in-

deed, in this respect it is still more than a memory, for I saw a house being constructed in the ancient model as we drove with becoming lack of haste through the quiet streets.

Up to and far beyond the recognition of Missouri as a state of the Union, provision for education was of the meagerness usually characteristic of pioneer settlements. Distances were great;

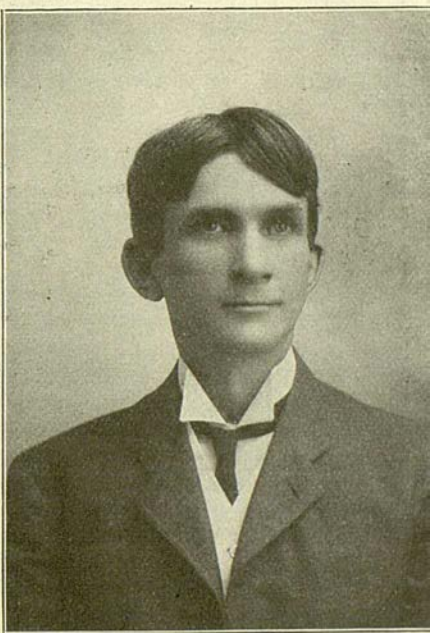
roads were mere trails; money was scarce; there was little demand for "book learning" when all hands were needed to conquer the obstacles that confronted the farmer. And even if other conditions had been favorable, there were no available teachers. Practically the only instruction was in mission or church schools, usually of very crude sort and under sectarian control. Early in the century the breakup of the Burr expedition had left stranded in the Missouri region a number of Easterners of some education, and these, driven by necessity to become itinerant pedagogues, are said to have made the beginnings of established schools. Still, the teaching was of the primitive sort suggested by the story of an applicant for the position of teacher who was asked by the trustees whether the earth was round or flat. "I ain't quite sure," he responded. "But," he continued, hopefully, "I'm ready to teach it either way." After solemn consideration it was decided that he should teach it "flat."

But there were drawn to this new country more and more people of education and refinement. Among these were Major

George C. Sibley, of the United States regular army, and his accomplished wife. Major Sibley was a skilled engineer, and in 1827, by order of President Adams, he conducted an expedition to survey a road from the Missouri River to Santa Fe, New Mexico. I have seen a copy of this report, written in Major Sibley's beautifully legible hand, which not only exhibits the full completion of his task under the greatest difficulties, but shows an almost prophetic vision in his estimates of the possibilities of the wild country traversed.

Perhaps it was the engineer's eye for site that led Major Sibley to secure for his home probably the most beautiful of all the many beautiful elevations about old St. Charles. Nearly a mile back from the river, and north of the village, was a commanding height over which spread a beautiful grove of linden trees; and here on the 120 acres of which he secured ownership, Major Sibley and his charming wife set themselves to create their estate.

The major and Mrs. Sibley were devout Christians; in taking up the exacting work of creating their home they relaxed no whit in their strictly governed course of life. They were Presbyterians, also, and it was in keeping with the traditions of their



Rev. George Frederic Ayers, Ph.D.

church that they should have a concern not only for the spiritual but for the intellectual welfare of those about them. The splendid oil-portraits of this couple which look down upon one from walls of which I shall soon speak, reveal the features of a woman of much beauty, and a man perhaps not handsome, but with an appearance of distinction. The painter has admirably caught the light of soul that shines in the eyes of both; and standing there, one feels no surprise that even before the Sibley estate had progressed beyond the log-cabin stage, its fair mistress had progressed to the willing husband that something should be done, if possible, to lift the girls of the frontier above the plane of ignorance to which their isolated homes so generally condemned them.

The log house in which the school opened was scarcely a step beyond the few humble schoolhouses that had begun to afford elementary instruction in the backwoods regions. The Sibleys were not wealthy, but what they had, they gave, and what they could do, they did; and so the school began. Modestly naming it from the characteristic feature of its environment rather than for themselves, they called it the Lindenwood Female Seminary; and with the more ambitious title of the Lindenwood College for Women, this institution will bring together its friends next October to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of its humble beginning. Humble though it was, it had marked the foundation of the first Protestant girls' seminary west of the Mississippi. Even

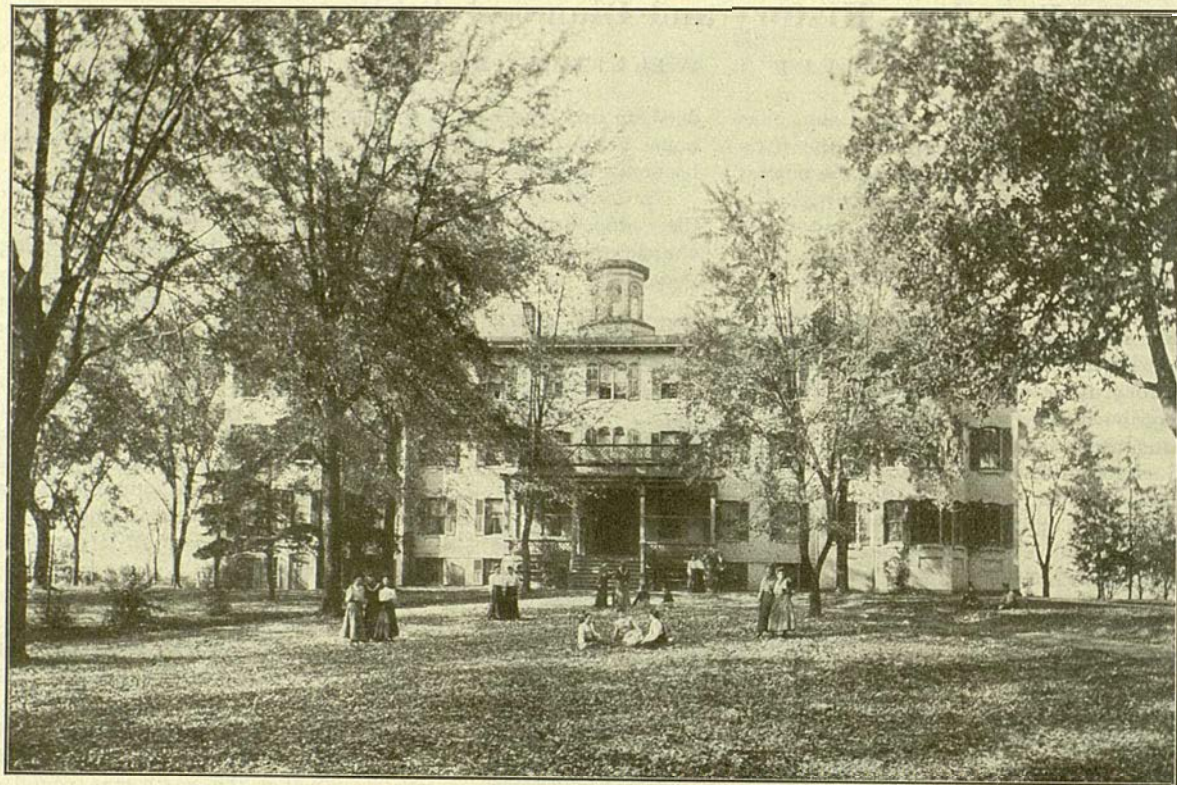
edly—with Lindenwood, that its indebtedness to him is scarcely measurable.

Lindenwood's founders could give it no lavish wealth of financial endowment, but nature itself provided a permanent investiture of beauty that money could not have created. From "The Point," where the original school edifice stood, one may gaze over the distant reaches of the Missouri; but the rich farm lands of the original estate are far above the riotous rush of the restless river that wrought ruin to the fields of the lowlying regions even in the early days. In the distance, the historic stream, soon to enter the Father of Waters, reflects itself in the afternoon sun a circlet of silver around the emerald islets that part its course. Near by, all nature is a-song with the joys of spring; to vision and to hearing the little city to the south reveals no sign of its presence, and even the trolley is not near enough to fret with its whirl and clangor. The magnificent elms, the historic lindens, the trees of a score of varieties that spread their boughs above the soft grass of the college park, strengthen the impression of sequestration, and suggest daydreams of the long ago, when the isolation was intensely real and perhaps not so enjoyable.

Coincident with Lindenwood's transfer to St. Louis Presbytery, in 1856, there arose the first milestone in its larger physical development—the central structure of the present Lindenwood Hall. One should pay tribute to the architect of those days, as

well as to the skill and integrity of the builders, by saying that this building of sixty years ago not only stands today well preserved and fully efficient for its purposes, but is in its planning in pretty fair agreement with modern thought as to school architecture.

Through all the long history of Lindenwood the note of conservatism sounds strongly. If the institution had been designed to make profits, or even to earn glory for its management, doubtless the cost of tuition and board, always so reasonable here, would have been pushed up; lavish investments would have been made, and probably debts incurred, in order that the quadrangle for which



Lindenwood Hall

while the famous Black Hawk was about to strike terror to the hearts of the women of the frontier, religion and education, the real advance guards of civilization, had planted their banners beyond the fighting line.

News traveled slowly in those days, but before the opening of the school in the fall of 1831, there had assembled,—coming on horseback, in carryalls or by boat,—about thirty boarding pupils. Mrs. Sibley had judged wisely the need of such an institution; but with its yearly growing demands a broader basis of development than could be afforded by private control seemed to be required. So the school and its property, early in the 50's, were presented to the Presbytery of St. Louis, on the condition that its standard should be maintained as a collegiate institution. In turn the Presbytery became impressed with its own limitations and the large possibilities of the school, and in 1859 it was made over to the Synod of Missouri, wherein its control still rests. During all this time, with a brief lapse at one period of the Civil War, Lindenwood has pursued its courses without interruption.

It is worth noting that ownership and control by the Synod has been no mere nominal condition. Association with its board of trustees for more than a quarter century of Rev. S. J. Niccolls, D.D., LL.D., of St. Louis, that splendid veteran of Western Presbyterianism, makes this fact sure. Despite all the demands of other interests, added to those of the church to which he has been the loyal pastor for forty-two years, Dr. Niccolls is still so fully identified—not dictatorially, but always full-heart-

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a hampering congestion; as things stand now, disappointment is almost certain to be the lot of applicants who are not very much forehanded. It is cheering, therefore, to observe that the new building will contain both living rooms and school rooms, and will thus increase the capacity and usefulness of the institution.

My haste to make known the added good things that the future holds for Lindenwood should not mislead any one into thinking that the school is not now amply equipped for whatever it promises to do. In the particulars of comfort and healthfulness there is no slighting. Gas illumination some time ago gave way to the safer and more adaptable electricity; ample steam heat is provided, the water supply is good, and sanitary precautions are fully observed. The location itself weighs strongly in the balance in favor of physical well-being, while the temperate climate and delightful surroundings are a constant persuasion to invigorating outdoor exercise. The college records demonstrate that the healthfulness of the place is not merely theoretical.

Recitation and practice rooms, living chambers, reception parlors, laboratory, gymnasium—such features as these, with which the college is satisfactorily equipped, we have not space to describe here. You must seek their descriptions in the catalogue. Yet one should specially mention the commodious chapel, with its blessed uniqueness of perfect acoustics; the dining-room,

can best be accomplished by serving the girl. High-pitched ideals are well enough, but if they interfere with immediate usefulness to the student they should be put aside until they are workable. Happily, experience has shown that the surest way to attain an ideal is to labor toward it, not to pull it down upon the work already done. And so, without undue relaxation of reasonable scholastic requirements, the course at Lindenwood is adapted to those who call upon it to equip them for life's responsibilities. Whatever is done is done thoroughly, though, and there has been an encouragingly constant progression in the educational demands of students, with which the college has kept abreast. Under the administration of Rev. George Frederic Ayres, Ph.D., the scholastic standards have been noticeably strengthened without a mistaken deviation from the traditional policy; and to Dr. Ayres' preparedness and enthusiasm Lindenwood is very sure to owe an access of helpfulness and prestige that will carry her far toward the goal to which the hopes of her friends are opening the vista of promise.

Lindenwood has been becomingly modest in naming its ambitions as well as in exploiting its accomplishments, and it would scarcely be in keeping for me to do more than hint at the vision that will not down before the eyes of her loyal friends. It is a vision born of a need that is real and growing—the need of a



... that spread their boughs above the soft grass of the college park."

light, well ventilated, and by no means small, but which must soon give way to a more ample apartment with the growth of numbers; the parlors, with their restful absence of gewgaws and overfurnishing; and, last but not least, the neatness and "comfy" appearance of the apartments given to the girls' own.

Educationally Lindenwood is not attempting to do the impossible, nor is it simply trimming to the whims of its students' fancy. It is not striving to erect St. Peter's domes upon cottage superstructures, nor does it abide by whatever intellectual fatalism may smite the pupil and limit her aspirations. The thought has been, ever since those early years in the forest primeval, to help every girl who might come under its influence to make the most of her natural capabilities. President and faculty strive first to understand the girl, and then to encourage her to her best, whatever that may be, without persuading her to the impracticable, however alluring. In other words, the effort is to avoid leaving a gap between the girl's previous training and what she is to receive at Lindenwood, and to carry her forward by sure steps to where she may enter a larger college or university with sufficient preparation, or can go into life well equipped for the duties of womanhood.

Service it is, and not sentiment, that governs the practice at Lindenwood. There has ever been foremost the desire to serve in the highest way this great region of the Middle West, and that

fully equipped, properly endowed, highly inspired and capably directed college for women in this central section of the great Middle West. This must come, and those who know her best believe that this historic school possesses the possibilities for such a development.

Social training has its well-defined part in the life at Lindenwood. There is not only the incidental cultivation coming from wisely directed association, and from the influence of the sixteen members of the faculty, but there is a stated course of lectures by the lady principal, Mrs. Heron, whose preparation includes a long acquaintance with social usages in the East. With regard to outside influences, the comment may be made that the school is markedly self-contained; but the best use is made of the many advantages afforded by metropolitan St. Louis, and friendly, if not intimate, relations are maintained with the agreeable folk of St. Charles.

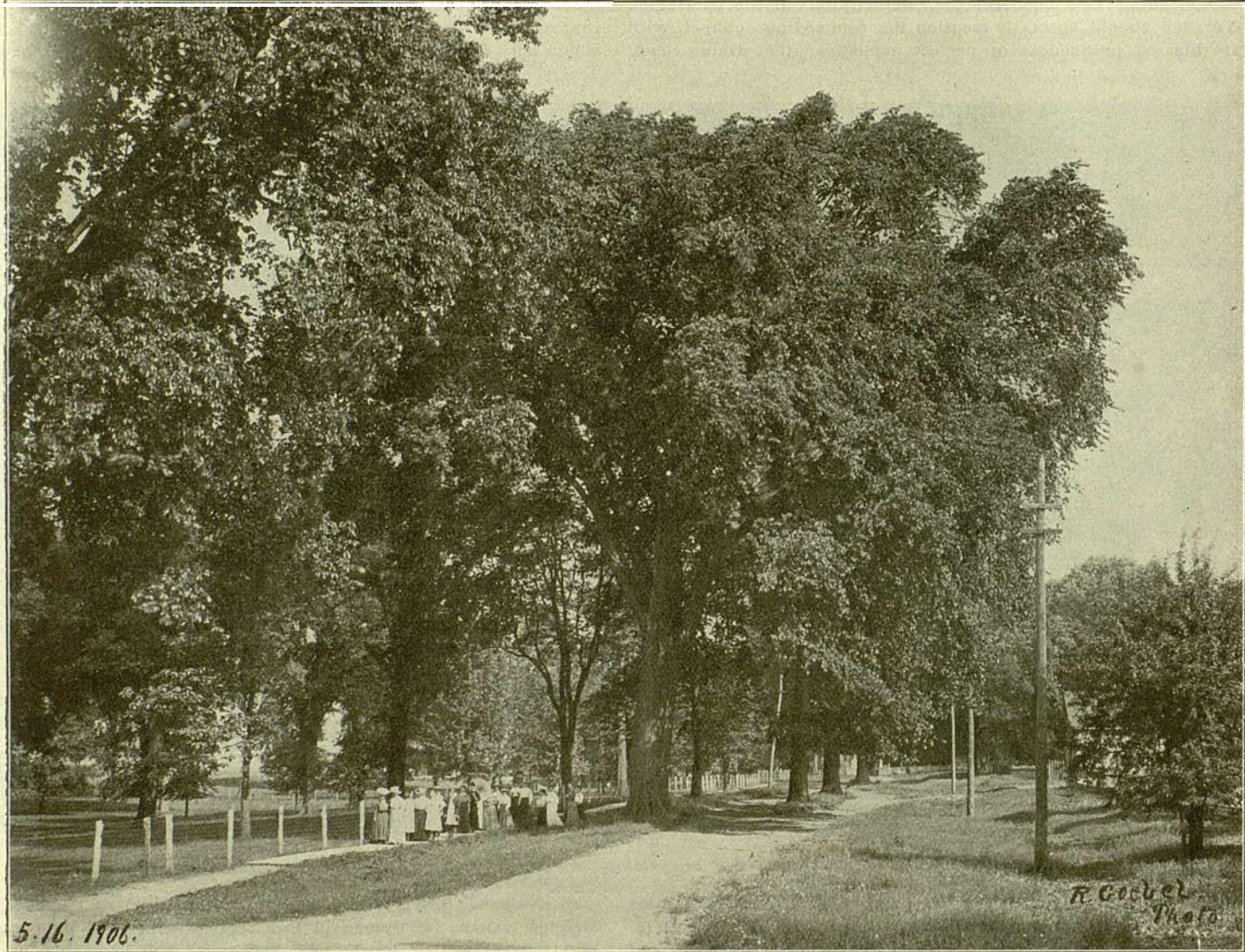
At times, too, there have been interesting excursions, under good management and proper chaperonage, such as those to Washington City and to Cuba. It is no subtraction from the student's essential function as a learner to permit her to have a measure of wholesome amusement; indeed, the assumption at Lindenwood is that she should not go without it. And so, whether it be in the form of one of these tours, a visit to the city, a college reception, a rare call from a properly introduced young man, a

carefully planned entertainment, or of one of those impromptu "doings" so dear to the girl-heart, a sensible supervision does not withhold the variety that makes school life unirksome. The acme of physical exercise, too, is held to be that which has its enjoyable aspect, so that outdoor sports and games generally are given encouragement as preferable to the set work, which is, nevertheless, not neglected.

Something of the same spirit the observer will judge to prevail with relation to the sometimes unpleasant problem of discipline. The assurances are that promptness, truthfulness, faithfulness and industry are unswervingly insisted upon; but whatever the rigidity of requirement, the iron hand of enforcement is not obvious. The history of family life itself has not always justified a parental government too minutely prescriptive; and whatever may be said of boys, it seems certain that girls do not need to live their every hour by rote in order to be restrained from mischief. At Lindenwood there are certain fundamental rules that form a sort of dead line, but the girl is not so hedged about by commands that freedom of development is denied.

foundation laid by this God-fearing couple is itself a splendid memorial to their sacrifices. There could be no question about the sincerity of their gift; their hearts and their efforts went with it. So it is satisfying to know that the approaching diamond jubilee will be both a tribute to the founders and the marking of a new epoch that shall rear still higher the monument to their philanthropy in American womanhood made richer by Lindenwood school. The Synod of Missouri convenes at St. Louis on Tuesday, October 23. On Thursday the entire body will adjourn to Lindenwood College, where, in conjunction with the alumnae and friends of the institution, a jubilee fellowship service will be held, followed by the laying of the cornerstone of the new hall. In the evening Dr. Nicolls will deliver a historical address, and probably Governor Joseph W. Folk, of Missouri, will speak. It will be a high day both in its historical significance and in its forward-looking promise.

Honorable and remarkable as its history may be found, the paramount inquiry of the parent, or the thoughtful girl herself, is with regard to what Lindenwood can promise at present and



A pause in the inviting shade of one of the great elms."

Nor does any disheartening compulsion characterize the spiritual side of the college life. Lindenwood is and always must be under distinctively Presbyterian control; but that does not mean that a distinctively Presbyterian cast must be given to its religious instruction. In the broader sense there is much Christian teaching. Study of the Bible is prescribed in all courses; twice a day a period is set apart for worship and prayer; every one is expected to attend divine service on the Sabbath; the Young Women's Christian Association numbers more than half of the students. All this is more than incidental; it influences all phases of the college life. The purpose of the devout founders of Lindenwood was religious as well as educational; and I believe this dual purpose is still vital.

Major Sibley passed away at the height of the Civil War, the weight of his fourscore years heavy upon him. His devoted wife long survived him, and their graves are side by side in the little burying ground occupying one of the twenty-nine acres of the college grounds. The institution that has grown upon the

in the future to the student. Now that there is provision for young girls even below the seminary or preparatory age, it is proper to say that Lindenwood affords well-balanced training practically from the time the girl looses her grasp upon childhood until she becomes a woman. Anything savoring of specializing is shunned; though art and music, for instance, have their very large place, under the direction of highly trained instructors, emphasis is not unduly laid upon these studies. The exceptional number of instructors in proportion to the number of students, and the character of their preparation, affords strong assurance of thoroughness and of close consideration of personal characteristics. And if I have not made clear the very agreeable and healthful character of the surroundings, it is my hope that I have at least made it seem worth while to go and observe them with your own eyes. The visitor finds a cordial hospitality, and will long remember with pleasure his look-in upon the life at Lindenwood. It is the sort of wholesome existence that you do not often discover. Happy the girl who shares it!