

Yankee Doodle Daughters: The Influence of WWII on Democratic Study at Sweet Briar College  
from 1935 to 1943

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Sweet Briar College  
May 1, 2007  
History 105: Doing Sweet Briar History  
Professor Gerald Berg  
TR 9:00-10:15 AM

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1932 to 1936 are considered to be the pre-war years in Europe and a time of great economic depression both in Europe and in the United States. Conflicts in these years gave uneasiness and were confusing and so Sweet Briar professors went to the students and the Lynchburg population to explain these events. In order to educate and put the local and school population at ease, President Meta Glass arranged for the faculty to speak at extracurricular lectures and later, to have a scheduled program of important foreign lecturers to speak at Sweet Briar. The large problem in society from the 1930's to the 1940's was the escalating conflicts in Europe followed by the start of the Second World War which caused a feeling of confusion and uneasiness within the Sweet Briar population, the Lynchburg community, and the larger community. The United States had an isolationist policy where they would try to stay out of problems in Europe. This isolationist policy led to a lack of knowledge among the United States population of all of the events in Europe and their meaning and consequences. Sweet Briar chose to educate their students on these developing matters rather than to ignore and isolate the students from this problem. McCandless agrees with the idea that women who went to single-sex colleges were perceived as being "debutants" and being prepared to take their position in society. Also, "Just as the eighteenth century founding fathers had relied upon properly educated "republican mothers" to inculcate national values and democratic behaviors, so the twentieth century Southern patriarchs looked to the women's colleges to produce alumnae who would preserve Southern distinctiveness (and the status quo)."<sup>1</sup> Sweet Briar, led by president Meta Glass, took this fundamental idea of democratic education for the purpose of educating one's children and ran with it, taking her students from just casually learning about democracy to fully

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<sup>1</sup> McCandless, Amy T. "Preserving the Pedestal: Restriction on Social Life at Southern Colleges for Women, 1920-1940." *History of Higher Education Annual*, vol. 7 (1987): 45.

participating in it. From 1936 to 1939 the world political conflict escalated and guest speakers began to come to Sweet Briar from foreign lands to urge peace and explain the political situation. These were known as "Democratic Sessions." In 1939, World War II began in Europe. When the United States entered the war in 1941, there was a need to explain the political situation and keep the Sweet Briar and Lynchburg populations current so there was a drastic increase in foreign speakers as well as domestic speakers, and a more active participation from the Sweet Briar community. Sweet Briar College created a program of "Democratic Sessions" in order to spread cultural ideas, peace and understanding through outside guest speakers from across the United States and across the world. This program made Sweet Briar a head of it's time. I will proceed to explain the development of the democratic education at Sweet Briar College by referencing the Sweet Briar News from 1939 to 1941, the Committee on Instruction Minutes from 1936 to 1945, and a Lynchburg News Scrapbook pertaining to Sweet Briar College from April 12, 1936-June 2, 1943 as my primary sources while connecting it to a larger issue brought up by McCandless in her article, "Preserving the Pedestal: Restriction on Social Life at Southern Colleges for Women, 1920-1940." From the periodical, "*History of Higher Education Annual*," from 1987.

The democratic education of students began as an attempt to inform students of domestic events since they were isolated from the struggle of the common man outside of Sweet Briar College. These lectures were extracurricular lectures about government and current events by the teachers. They covered things from upcoming legislation in Congress to United States foreign policy. For example, on March 23, 1935 Laukhuff, the government professor from 1930-1936, discussed the different rehabilitation programs for the United States, stating that, "U.S. common sense will re-assert itself." In December 1935, Laukhuff gave a lecture on the bills

which were going to come before congress and the legislation. Later, during the pre-war years, from 1930 to 1936, Professor Laukhuff went off campus several times to speak about the situation in Europe to the Lynchburg community, such as to the Women's Club, the YWCA and the Rotary Club. The quality of the lecturers increased as the lectures occurred more publicly for the students to attend more. There was a definite shift in the quality of this political education once World War II began. It is at this point that foreigners began to visit campus on large tours which were open to the nearby towns as well.<sup>2</sup> These visits began at the very end of 1936 and grew in frequency throughout the war, till after the war. This movement to talk about domestic policy led to talk of foreign policy which in turn led to the organization of guest lecturers, educating and encouraging students in learning about foreign affairs, government, and democracy. This push led to the development of the International Affairs Major subsequently the mandatory education of students in democracy through the Democracy Convocations, all through the machinations of President Meta Glass.<sup>3</sup>

President Meta Glass's goal to educate her students on democracy took an official turn with the formation of a formal academic program, the International Affairs Major. President Meta Glass and Professor Laukhuff are credited for developing the government department. This movement by the forward-thinking President Meta Glass culminated on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1936. On this date, the Committee on Instruction approved plans for 10 new interdepartmental majors, one of these being the International Affairs Major. This major began the first effort by the

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<sup>2</sup> One such lecturer was Hubertus Loewenstein, an Austro-German prince that served as a visiting professor of contemporary European History and Politics at several prominent universities, by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in November 1937. Some came from even further. He developed a close relationship with Sweet Briar College, making several lecture visits.

<sup>3</sup> *Lynchburg News Scrapbook*. 1936-1943, Archives of Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar College, VA.

college to offer more courses and a structured plan of study in an attempt to educate their students on the ideals and application of government and democracy. Before this, there was a steady growth in optional lectures by faculty and then by guest speakers about the world political situation and policy. The purpose of making it an Interdepartmental Major rather than a departmental major in history was so that it would go across departmental boundaries. This makes it perfect for use in war settings as one gain knowledge of history and politics while at the same time learning a language, and learning a valuable area of expertise.<sup>4</sup> Socially, the major was designed to teach about public health and security, the creation of an understanding of the relationship of citizen to citizen and of one social association or institution to another. Politically, it was designed to teach about the creation or restoration of such sovereignty in the area as was compatible with the general good, the development of an understanding of the mutual relationship of citizen and state, and understanding of the individual position and functions of the area within the system of states.<sup>5</sup>

President Meta Glass achieved her goal of Democratic education by the creation of the Democracy Convocations which showed a shift from optional to mandatory democratic education of students as well as propaganda for the government department. On September 28, 1939, President Meta Glass announced the mandatory Democracy. She felt that the Sweet Briar students needed to get together as a community to bond. She asked the students to think of a topic and then she came up with the suggestion for the theme of these convocations. Her jump from asking the students to think of a topic to quickly suggesting one of her own that was quickly started reveals this scene as a sort of set up, to drum up interest in the Convocations.

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<sup>4</sup> The major had five different sections for France, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain.

<sup>5</sup> *Committee on Instruction Minutes*. 1936-1945, Archives of Sweet Briar College. Sweet Briar, VA.

These convocations were to talk about the ideals of democracy as well as the relationship between the United States and the Western Hemisphere. This latter part developed through the guest lecturers into lectures more concerning the political climate in foreign countries that would windingly lead to an effect on the United States or one of its allies. As Miss Glass states, “(these convocations) provide an opportunity for discussing important matters in the presence of the student body, and gives a community feeling and solidarity.” The Democracy Convocations show the shift from having optional democratic and world events study to mandatory study. Sweet Briar started the push to educate women about world events and democracy with the creation of the International Affairs major in 1936. More classes were created to provide the option of enlightenment on democracy and world events and the school had had guest speakers before but it was not until this moment when democratic education became mandatory. In my opinion, these convocations were also a bit of propaganda for the new government chair that was announced in November 1939, in the hope that the students at Sweet Briar.<sup>6</sup>

The first lecture of the Democracy series set the foundation for the rest of the series by describing the principles of democracy. The first Democracy Convocation was by Dr. Harvey Dillard.<sup>7</sup> He states that in order to have freedom and equality, there must be some security. This makes perfect sense because to have equality there must be order and to have this order there must be the ability to have the power to create justice and order. Dr. Dillard states that there are two ways to attain that security: “the way which America trusts, and which is called Democracy; and the way of the Totalitarian State, the employment of which necessitates the sacrifice of individual liberty.” He says that there are no reasons why to think of democracy as a

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<sup>6</sup> “President Glass Gives Reasons For Holding Regular Convocations,” *Sweet Briar News*, October 4, 1939.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Harvey Dillard was of the Law Faculty of the University of Virginia.

successful form of government. "The fundamental assumption of a democracy, as distinguished from a totalitarian state is that the similarities between man and man are considered greater than the differences." Basically, his speech has the implication that other forms of government are not inferior, just different and to have an open mind. It is what we would call today as being very politically correct. Dr. Dillard states that we should fix what is wrong with our own democracy at home rather than getting involved in Europe, since, "We are not in on the council table of peace (in Europe) and we should not be in on the council table of war."<sup>8</sup>

The second Democracy Convocation continued the student's education of democracy by educating them about the political biases and the truth about newspapers while simultaneously serving as propaganda for more of President Meta Glass' government classes. The main point of Mr. Riegel's lecture was that propaganda is neutral in itself, but it is the way it is controlled, either by censorship or by a monopoly of propaganda as the way towards dictatorship and totalitarianism. He defines the press as all the channels through which news, opinions, and ideas reach the public. While ideally in a Democratic country people would have all of the facts necessary to make proper, well-informed decisions to aid in the running of the government, this is not always the case. Facts become skewed and spun, greatly more in Europe at this time. The newspapers are not all at fault for this, but rather the audience, who do not seek to be informed but to be comforted. However, it is a double-edged sword, because since the masses are told what they want to hear and are not fully informed, when their wish for comfort in ignorance is striped away, they are quick to jump on the press for deceiving them, and so have a strong mistrust of the press. The concern over propaganda is much greater today due to the sheer massiveness of the literate population, the quick travel of news, and those people quick to

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<sup>8</sup> "Doctor Harvey Dillard Talks On Democracy," *Sweet Briar News*, October 25, 1939.

counter-attack any propaganda they see. According to Riegel, there are two types of propaganda: the kind for advertising and for private interests, which possesses no great threat, and the political type. The political type of propaganda is not dangerous if all propaganda and not just one side, opinion, or party is represented. He also says that the only ways of dealing with propaganda are to simply ignore it, censor it, “expose it without comment, or through the use of counter-propaganda, which is in his opinion the most caustic as it most often causes a backlash. This convocation was important because of its general social topic, which discusses propaganda rather than a specific event in a certain country. This is a prime example of the choice to educate rather than to ignore, were the establishment has decided to discuss the perils of one-sided propaganda and its path towards totalitarianism.<sup>9</sup> This lecture also served as propaganda for a new class which focused on reading and interpreting newspapers in the attempt to discover the truth and the biases.<sup>10</sup>

The endowment of a new government chair was a step forward by President Meta Glass to provide students with proper government education by offering more options to the students through more teachers. On December 5 1939, the instatement of the New Glass Government Chair was announced. Mr. Glass was a senator who was also the brother of Ms. Meta Glass, the President. It seems too coincidental that the big push for democratic study happened at the same time that a new government chair was being announced. It takes a year or two from when an endowment is given for the new faculty position to be filled. I have not found any reference of it

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<sup>9</sup> “Mr. O.W. Riegel Speaks on “Press and Public” at Convocation Nov. 9.” *Sweet Briar News*, November 15, 1939.

Mr. Riegel was the Director of the Lee Memorial Journalism Foundation at Washington and Lee University, which the school promotes as the oldest journalism school in the country. He was also the author of, “Mobilizing for Chaos and the Story of the New Propaganda.”

<sup>10</sup> *Committee on Instruction Minutes*. 1935-1945, Archives of Sweet Briar College. Sweet Briar, VA.



in the Alumni Magazine from the years previous looking back as early as 1936 that there was going to be a new government chair<sup>11</sup> which leads one to assume that there were no advertisements by the school to the alumni for funds and therefore, that there was little alumni involvement in the creation of this new chair at all. The fact that the chair was funded by the President's rich brother points that this was Meta Glass's idea and her creation. The chair was carried out by the Board of Overseers, in which Senator Glass was apart of, and funded by members of the Board. It is my opinion that the convocations were the culmination of Meta Glass's wish to educate women in democracy, government and politics. In her wish for this knowledge to be instilled in her students, she had guest lecturers come in to speak on current political events and theory. New classes were offered in this attempt to educate and as a result, a new government professor was needed also as an investment for the future political education of the school as she would be resigning by 1945.<sup>12</sup>

This lecture extols the virtue of a nearly utopian, Norway, to show how democracy can develop as a way to peak students' interest in democracy in foreign lands.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Hambro upholds Norway as the purest form of Democracy. He says that the word "democracy" is overused out of context. "Dr. Hambro doubted that Europe was really struggling for democracy because it seems Europe is going away from it." He sites that Norway is the oldest democracy in Europe, with a parliament and a constitution, free education, and government owned utilities, with an evenly divided wealth among its people. In Norway, the public's opinions have more weight, due to less bureaucracy. Dr. Hambro states that, "Democracy is not a form of government, nor a system of civil liberties. It is a way of living, of thought, and a philosophy of life... If people are not

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<sup>11</sup> *Alumni Magazine*, 1931-present, Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, VA.

<sup>12</sup> "Professor of Government to Be Instituted at S.B.C." *Sweet Briar News*. December 6, 1939.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Edvard Hambro was a leader in the Christian Michelson Institute, Bergen, Norway.

willing to take the responsibility of democracy, then democracy is doomed to death.” This talk was, in my opinion, a set up for the new government chair which would be announced in December 1939. This lecture has more to do with political theory, probably as propaganda for the new political theory classes being offered at Sweet Briar. It also serves as an example of how democracy can work outside of the United States, a more utopian view of it. This lecture was more neutral in its opinion about the war.<sup>14</sup>

This talk was different in that it was concerned about a specific example of Democracy, that of the existence of Democratic ideals in Latin America providing a real-world example for the students to peak their interest by moving out of the theoretical. He explains that while there are the roots of democracy in Latin America, but that there was a stigma of years of colonization and oppression which led to a mistrust of anything having European or just white roots, even democracy. During the Napoleonic wars, the native population was told that they were fighting for, “democracy, freedom, liberalism, etc.” However, they did not get their just rewards but were instead suppressed again, leaving a bad taste in their mouths. However, he said that there was hope. There is a strong link between the strength of democracy and the strength of a democracy in South America. Because of this, Mr. Aikman argues that whatever country invests in South America can quickly gain control of it which would threaten the safety of the United States. So, he suggests, the United States needs to enact the Monroe Doctrine to protect itself. This lecture served as an important step by providing a real-world example of democracy and the danger our inaction will cause. This is a far cry from the PC lecture of Dr. Dillard, most likely because America’s increasing distaste over the Axis’ actions and the United States subsequent aid of Great Britain. This lecture was designed to drive home to the students the current political

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<sup>14</sup> “Norway, Citadel of Democracy Asserts Doctor Hambro” *Sweet Briar News*. November 9, 1939.

climate and its link to the historical events, and the impact of the United States in these world events.<sup>15</sup>

The fifth convocation aimed at relating democracy with religion in an attempt to persuade the students to use their new knowledge for change as it was their duty to do so. This lecture was unique in that it concerned “the Religious and Moral Responsibility of the Church in the Democracy.” The speakers for this talk were the Reverend Russel C. Stroup and Rabbi Calisch.<sup>16</sup> What I find extremely forward thinking is having a Rabbi come to speak at the school at a time before there was much religious tolerance. Reverend Stroup explains that religion is not suppose to defend or help democracy but that democracy cannot exist without religion, which is why totalitarian states persecute religion. Stroup says that democracy is founded on the principles that the sovereignty of God is the seat of power and all power is derived from him. Secondly, that man is made in the image of God and so can govern ourselves but that it is the responsibility of the Church to mold mankind into righteous leaders. Thirdly, that there should be no nationalism because we are all united as men. Rabbi Calisch agreed with Reverend Stroup that religion is the founder of democracy. However the Rabbi disagrees with the Reverend saying that the Church must denounce hate and injustice and that “religion owes to democracy the spirit of brotherhood.” Basically, they both the Reverend and the Rabbi say that a belief and faithfulness in god is necessary as well as the guidance of the Church for democracy to flourish. By having this discussion, they are uniting faith with government education and freedom and thus make it the religious responsibility of the students to take an active part in government

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<sup>15</sup> “Mr. Duncan Aikman Speaks on Democracy in Convention,” *Sweet Briar News*. 21 February 1940.

<sup>16</sup> Reverend Russel C. Stroup was from the First Presbyterian Church in Lynchburg and Rabbi Calisch was from the Beth Ahabah Synagogue in Richmond and was also the president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1921 to 1933.

affairs. This way, as their religious responsibility, the students might get more involved in the government department at Sweet Briar.<sup>17</sup>

The International Affairs Major was revised as a means of keeping it current to help with the war effort and keep the major appealing to students as a major. In 1943 the Major was radically revised in its fifth year of existence. In these five years, 17 students had graduated, and nearly half of those are married.<sup>18</sup> In my opinion, Meta Glass was the one who moved for the major to be revised in an attempt to provide training for work in the post-war reconstruction in Europe or for women to just get involved in their own community. Meta Glass was on the board of the A.A.W.C, which appealed to President Glass for the education of students in wartime occupations to help with the war effort.<sup>19</sup> There were three main goals of this newly-revised major: “to provide the necessary cultural and fundamental training necessary for the understanding of the area selected for concentration; to give adequate training in the language of the area selected; to give training in some special skill or field of activity.” Basically, the student studies some country and their language, and a certain area of study, such as nutrition, administration, etc. The hope is that even if the graduate of this major does not go into government service, that the right principles and right leadership skills will be instilled in the graduate. This move to revise the major to keep it current shows a wish to keep the major from being merely theoretical philosophies of government and their historic examples to being able to be put to practical use. The goal of keeping it current was to inspire the students to take an

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<sup>17</sup> “Convocation has Rabbi Calisch and Mr. Stroup as Speakers,” *Sweet Briar News*. 20 March 1940.

<sup>18</sup> There are many important graduates of this major. Ensign Mary Jane Burnett, U.S.N., is in the Bureau of Personnel, Washington, D.C., Nancy Catch is in a hospital unit in North Africa as a secretary of the International Red Cross, and Mrs. Susan Boutell Hopkins is a secretary for the Clearing House, Commission on Teachers Education, American Council of Education, Washington, D.C., just to name a few.

<sup>19</sup> The A.A.W.C is the American Association of Women’s Colleges.

active role in democracy, not to just know about it and instill it in their children, but to also be able to do something about it whether in their community or throughout the world. This is why on November 17, 1942, the Committee on Instruction proposed to add war groups. They were an addition to the International Affairs Major. These war groups could be considered a war minor. It was purposed in an attempt to make the political education provided more current and to open this education up to more people by allowing them the opportunity to only minor instead of major in current political affairs.<sup>20</sup>

“Taken as a whole, they (the Democracy Convocations) present an opportunity to consider and examine this ideal; while individually, each one may contribute to our thoughts and ideas about Democracy.”<sup>21</sup> As Appell said, “At Sweet Briar we are isolated from the outside world to such a degree that the normal person easily loses contacts with the struggles which people miles away are enduring...For the purpose of awakening college students to the real meaning and significance of living in a democracy, the democracy convocations were initiated.”<sup>22</sup> President Meta Glass saw the need to educate women in government, foreign affairs, and democracy. She understood that most of the girls of the students at Sweet Briar belonged to the upper class and were isolated from the rest of the population during the Great Depression and shielded from foreign turmoil and political unrest. Because of this, she pushed to educate her students in government, foreign affairs and democracy, by initiating informative lectures by the professors as a first step towards a structured, credited major. President Meta Glass agreed with Mr. Wheeler-Bennett, another guest speaker, “who expressed his confidence

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<sup>20</sup> *Committee on Instruction Minutes*. 1935-1945, Archives of Sweet Briar College. Sweet Briar, VA.

<sup>21</sup> “The Democracy Convocations,” *Sweet Briar News*, Vol. XIII-No. 23 (get date) 1940.

<sup>22</sup> Janet Lee Appell, “Interest in Democracy Awakened by Convocations,” *Sweet Briar News*, 22 May 1940.

that the Allies would be victorious, but we must still remain conscious and wide-awake to every struggle that is going on abroad...so we will be better qualified to speak concerning the protection of our own lands.”<sup>23</sup> This sentiment was also expressed by the students. Everyone polled by Janet Lee Appell were eager for the event to continue the next year. Some asked for more American-centric speeches while others asked for speakers with all different opinions so that they could be exposed to them in order for them to make their own opinions and be able to debate. In the end, the Democracy Convocations were a great success. As a result of the Democracy Convocations and the International Affairs Major, the school took a more aggressive stance in having the students work towards service with the post-war reconstruction. In an April 4, 1945 report by the Committee on Instruction, it discusses the profitable ways of spending one’s summer vacation as a way to help with work abroad. That same year the Committee on Instruction posted a seven page paper detailing the different combinations of classes and their uses for the post-war reconstruction in Europe.<sup>24</sup> This great push by the school towards active participation in the war was to continue until after the war, when it faded out, and interest in politics as a major began to diminish without the threat of imminent danger. However, the foundation was left for the active education of Sweet Briar students in democracy and the government department was greatly advanced during the war by President Meta Glass, serving as one of her many legacies at Sweet Briar.

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<sup>23</sup> Janet Lee Appell, “Interest in Democracy Awakened by Convocations,” *Sweet Briar News*, 22 May 1940.

<sup>24</sup> *Committee on Instruction Minutes*. 1935-1945, Archives of Sweet Briar College. Sweet Briar, VA.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

*Alumnae Magazine*. 1931-present, Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar VA.

The purpose of the Alumnae Magazine was to acquaint the Sweet Briar alumnae of the current events at school such as plays, as well as upcoming events and plans for the future, such as new faculty and fundraising. This publication is biased in that its purpose is to make Sweet Briar look brilliant so that the alumnae will donate their financial and social support to the school. It is useful in so much as it details financial information and future plans that are not privy to the rest of the student body.

*Committee on Instruction Minutes*. 1936-1945, Archives of Sweet Briar College. Sweet Briar, VA.

The Committee on Instruction. I used dates from 1936 to 1945. The Committee on Instruction is a sub-committee made up of a few members of the faculty that discuss matters of the curriculum. They then bring their decisions before the whole of the faculty and the issues passed by the Committee on Instruction are either passed, rejected, or discussed by the rest of the faculty. The main limitation of this source is that there is nearly no student involvement in the academics of the program. These documents help me by showing me the decision process of the school concerning academic matters and those matters concerning the preparation of Sweet Briar's students for whatever, in this case, the war.

*Lynchburg News Scrapbook*. April 12, 1936-June 2, 1943, Archives of Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar College, VA.

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It is a green scrapbook of Lynchburg News articles relating to Sweet Briar College from April 12, 1936 to June 2, 1943. The articles in the scrapbook describe performances, and important guest lecturers occurring at Sweet Briar, Sweet Briar staff lectures in the wider community, and Sweet Briar events that also involve the community. The purpose of the original writers of these articles was to acquaint the Lynchburg community at large with the important and note-worthy events happening at Sweet Briar College. These articles show Sweet Briar's standing within the community and what aspects of Sweet Briar are important to the Lynchburg community. It also shows what the perception of a woman's college is.

*Sweet Briar News*, 1901-1998, Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar VA.

The Sweet Briar News dates from 1901 to 1998. It is a student composed newspaper. The problem with stories from this newspaper is that it is biased to praise the good things about the college but to de-emphasize the problem due to the need for faculty approval. Most of the stories in the ten years before and after World War II are mainly about current activities, such as May Day, music or art performances, clubs and school news. The Sweet Briar News during WWII posted broader, far-reaching pieces.

#### Secondary Sources

McCandless, Amy T. "Preserving the Pedestal: Restriction on Social Life at Southern Colleges for Women, 1920-1940." *History of Higher Education Annual*, vol. 7 (1987): 45-67.

This article is useful in its description of the role of women in the South from 1920 to 1940. It deals mainly with the education of women. It is useful as a source as it describes female southern education during my time period and helps to link life there



with the outside world and philosophical matters such as women's obedience and as democratic mothers. It is not as biased as my other sources because it is a private historical paper and she presents the information and then draws a logical conclusion rather than coming into the paper with a specific preconceived point to make.