

The Dance as Yet Undreamed:
Genevieve Stebbins and the Gilded Age Field of Expression

Kelly Jean Lynch

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN
THEATRE, DANCE & PERFORMANCE STUDIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

July 2025

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Abstract

Genevieve Stebbins (1857–1934) is a recognized 19th century leader in American Delsartism, a pedagogical field of physical expression, incorporating vocal delivery, gestural action, poise, and pantomime. Although her contributions have been historically misconstrued, Stebbins’ aesthetic dance practices established the foundation of American modern dance. Stebbins was a successful solo performer engaged in a philosophy of movement aesthetics yet, to date, her role as a dancer has remained largely unexplored. “Forgotten by dance historians today,” Stebbins “deserves credit as a forerunner of modern dance in America” (Shelton 1987). Scholars in dance studies, American Delsartism, Somatics and yoga studies have linked Stebbins to important developments in early modern dance (Jowitt 1997; Ruyter 1999; Edwards 1999; Bordelon 2016; Mullan 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022; Singleton 2010; Tomko 1999; Burns 1988, 2005; Thomas 1995, 2004; Foster 2011; Weber 2009; Brandstetter 2015; Kraler 2022), yet no one has devoted extended research to establish her life story, family history, her motivations for developing her own philosophy of movement, or her feminist reformations of aesthetic dance as a theatre art. Capitalizing on the recent digitization of historical newspapers, weekly entertainment reviews, and professional journals, this biographical study is a critical commentary on Stebbins’ performance work and pedagogy through her lesser known early years leading to the founding of her New York School of Expression in 1893. Utilizing theoretical approaches from feminist biography, theatre and dance historiography, framed by Gilded Age class dynamics and archival theory, this dissertation provides important context for the development of Stebbins’ philosophical ideas as well as her foundational role in the creation of early modern dance, when she created a unique genre of solo dance performance which has been critically overlooked.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude to Dr. Bridget Cauthery for patiently guiding me through the challenging process of producing this work. I have enormous appreciation for her light touch and kind hand. There are truly not enough words to say how important her aid was, little by little walking me through each avenue and turn in the road in the long and trying comprehensive exams, into organizing my dissertation team, and reading through many drafts as my dissertation continued to grow (and grow). I feared she would ask me to stop (!), as I wrote twice the length needed, however my research had not been fully laid out and I rushed to continue. She allowed me to put on paper over a decade of investigations that began before entering the Dance Studies program at York. She took the time to continue to critique and edit chapter after chapter, at a time when she was writing her own book and preparing for publication. This required a great deal more work on her part, and I feel completely at her mercy for how I may ever repay her for the honor of her professional and academic knowledge. Much Sincere Gratitude.

Thanks to Dr. Danille Robinson for working with me on my dance history comprehensive study. Dr. Marlis Schweitzer provided expert insight into late 19th century American theatre history and asked pertinent questions to not only keep me on track with critical thinking but to find ways expand upon certain thoughts. I enjoyed working with her on an independent study that included building research on Rose Eytinge's career. Her expertise in early New York City theatre life proved to be exponentially relevant as she provided bibliographic suggestions for me to build knowledge in this area. As my work progressed, she continued to offer keen insights and pertinent nudges to create further inquiries. Dr. Boyd Cothran, as an expert on the Gilded Age and a former editor for *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* replaced Danielle Robinson as a reader on my dissertation. He suggested various reading material and challenged

me to look deeper into indigenous atrocities in Californian history greatly expanding my views. I also appreciate the extensive feedback and support external examiner Sunny Statler-Pace gave, as it was quite generous of her time and consideration.

This journey would not have begun without the inspiring and foundational research of dance historian and Professor Emeritus in Dance Studies, Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, from whom all scholars have drawn any bibliographic information to date on Genevieve Stebbins. I cannot thank Ruyter enough for encouraging me to build upon her research and telling me that there was much more that remained to be discovered. I reached out to her a decade ago when I began investigated Stebbins' relationship within the educational genealogy of Somatics. We had many email exchanges, and Ruyter helped me refine my writing as an independent scholar while confirming my insights on Stebbins' work. She recommended that I connect with then student, now Professor Carrie Streeter, who was investigating American Delsartism. We have still not yet met in person but developed a close scholarly friendship enjoying phone calls with our findings, sharing questions, research, and archival materials. Streeter helped edit my writing prior to a few publications, which I was/am incredibly thankful for her feedback, re-writes and clarity.

This journey would also not have begun without the scholarship of Don Hanlon Johnson, Somatics historian, and Professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. His early publications, along with Thomas Hanna created the academic foundation for the field of Somatics. The first time I came across Stebbins' name was in a book by Johnson (*Bone, Breathe, and Gesture*, 1995) where Stebbins was mentioned as being an integral educator linked to German Somatic pioneers. Inspired by Johnson's work, I began to build upon his research by more fully investigating Stebbins' pedagogical contributions after which I found Ruyter's work. This led me on a long journey trying to piece together how an American woman, said to be a dancer, had such an international reach.

When my research began, I reached out to Johnson via email, and he kindly looked into my developing ideas and made suggestions for my investigative process, saying, “When one is going far back into history, one finds so many origins one fading into another that it becomes ever more impossible to sort out which particular one, if any is THE one. In that sense, I would be careful in editing with an eye towards eliminating any need to determine with mathematical exactitude who was before whom, and who was more significant, and stick to your marvelous work of tracking the rich patterns that have textured our consciousnesses by all these magnificent weavers” (March 20, 2017, email). Johnson read some of my research articles prior to publication and provided insightful feedback, along with appreciation for providing important historical research. My work as an independent scholar was done while I was a stay-at-home mom with a young child, and any encouragement for my research was incredibly impactful. Otherwise, I would likely have given up. Indeed, along this journey there were many times that I asked myself ‘what the heck am I doing?!! I felt strangely driven to investigate the life of Stebbins as I was so intensely curious as to how she created such an impact but no one really knew much about her. Who was she? I think in the process, Stebbins inspired me to think about the relevance of women’s creative work. Her words and writing gave meaning to my own life.

I am deeply indebted to Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter and Don Hanlon Johnson for writing my letters of recommendation in 2018 for my Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant, that garnered me the Joseph Armand Bombardier Award for my studies. I also appreciated receiving the Evelyn Carnie Rowe Graduate Studies Dance Scholars Award. Johnson wrote, “I have also followed her very important research over several years in which she tracked carefully the histories of some of the unknown and obscure innovators in what is now a field of study, research, and education: Somatics. Her work is very important in giving historical weight to this now very large collective of scholars and practitioners. I have been very impressed by the

level of scholarship that she has brought to this work all by herself without the support of any academic institution. She has clearly manifested an independence in her courage to complete such thorough work on her own. It has been very valuable in my own teaching.” Somatics scholar Dr. Martha Eddy also wrote a letter of recommendation and provided encouragement and enthusiasm for my journey which was greatly needed to continue my research and allow me to feel like I might be able to provide meaningful scholarship. Eddy, Ruyter, and Johnson also provided letters of recommendation for a National Endowment of Humanities grant, which I did not receive but appreciated their support. I give thanks to body psychotherapist Judyth Weaver, Ulfried Geuter, Michel Heller for the feedback on my past publications, along with Helen Thomas former editor for the *Dance Research Journal* who was kind enough to call me to talk through a publication. This prior research built the foundation from which I began this dissertation journey.

Finally, my tremendous appreciation for the ‘Psycho-Physical Culture’ discussion group. Created in 2020, with dance historian and Professor Emeritus of York University Selma Odom; Dr. Maria Meindl, Dr. Magdalena Kraler, Dr. Carrie Streeter, and Libby Smigel- dance archivist with the Library of Congress, we have been meeting periodically via Zoom over the last five years, sharing our research questions and following each other’s developing studies. Our co-written publication in *Women’s Innovations in Theatre, Dance, and Performance* with Routledge is upcoming. I also appreciated collaborating on a book review with Kraler and learning from her research on the relevance of Stebbins’ breathing practices within modern yoga pedagogy.

My sisters and brothers will celebrate the victory of completing this dissertation– as they have seen me work through many family gatherings. As a single mom, I think it is important to note that the dissertation process need not be perfect, it simply must keep going. The courage to continue builds strength and perseverance and for that part I thank myself for keeping on,

focusing and maintaining. I thank my stoic mother Susanne Lynch who brought her nine children to the library to sit amongst the books and develop a curiosity for ongoing learning. As a stay-at-home mom and volunteer dedicated to Vermont historical societies and our local history of Alburgh Springs, a once famous town in the 1860s, sparked my interest in long lost eras. And finally, finally— thanks to my childhood dance teachers who brought dance into my life and set me on my journey, Judith Karstens, Shelley Ismail, and Manon Pellman and the later significant influence of dance teachers Fabyenne Gosselin and Linda Rabin. My appreciation to all the dance historians and scholars who created the field of Dance Studies, and who continue to create work despite struggles for this work to remain relevant.

This work is dedicated to my #1, my daughter Eve Danu Mullan.

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Fig. 175. Courtesy of Chautauqua archives.

Fig. 176. Newport Summer Program, *Werner's* Advertisement, 1894.

Fig. 177. "With the Body Strong and the Brain is Active," *The Washington Times*, June 19, 1895, 9.

Fig. 178. Ling Movements, Courtesy GIH archives.

Fig. 179. "Swedish Gymnastics: Pittsburgh Women who believe in Physical Culture," *Pittsburgh Press*, January 24, 1897, 10.

Fig. 180. Examples of women doing drills. "With the Body Strong and the Brain is Active," *The Washington Times*, June 19, 1895, 9. The third image is representative of an action in the Amazon Drill.

- Fig. 181. *Thesmophoria*, circa 1894–1897, Francis Davis Millet, Brigham Young University Museum of Art.
- Fig. 182. Graduating class, *Werner's*, Newport summer program, 1895, 783.
- Fig. 183. “Ancient Greek and Roman dancing in prints,” Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections.
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- Fig. 186. Summer program, *Werner's* Advertisement, 1896.
- Figs. 187, 188, 189, 190, Courtesy YMCA archives.
- Fig. 191. *New York journal and advertiser*, December 14, 1897, 6. Library of Congress.
- “Three Thousand Sunday School Dance as Fairies in Cinderella Ballets: Sixteen Years of Age and Pretty. They were Street Dress. Professors of the Opera say “Smile” and “Higher” to them Incessantly. Girls Learn Coquettish Airs. In Revels of Roses, Bees, Hornets and Butterflies They Forget the Manners of the Strawberry Festivals.”
- Fig. 192. *Werner's*, school graduates, 1900, 499.
- Fig. 193 and 194. Ember Cottage, and The Pond, Slindon, Sussex, England.
- Fig. 195. Carmel by the Sea.
- Fig. 196. 1921 *New York Times* advertisement.
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- Fig. 199. Irene Lewisohn performing as Jephthah.
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- Fig. 201. Poem. New York School of Expression Prospectus, 1893, 4.

Introduction: First visions of the Creative in Dance:

Background information

In 1892, when Genevieve Stebbins danced solo at the Madison Square Theater in New York City, a fourteen-year-old in the audience proclaimed with admiration that it was her “first vision of the creative dance.” That audience member was Ruth St. Denis, one of the most widely acknowledged innovators of American modern dance. St. Denis recalls that seeing Stebbins perform inspired her “idealism in relation to the dance” (1937, 16). Despite this noteworthy statement by St. Denis, little is known about the artistic career of Stebbins. Born and raised in San Francisco, Stebbins (1857–1934) became a celebrated actress in New York City before teaching Delsarte Expression, becoming a public speaker, artistic statue poser, staging solo dances, and even speaking at the Women’s Congress in the 1893 World Expo in Chicago. Stebbins has been celebrated as a renowned elocutionist and American Delsarte educator but has not received as much recognition for her work as an accomplished actress and dancer. My dissertation aims to build upon previous scholarship to situate Stebbins as a significant innovator of ‘early’ modern dance, before the term was coined for this dance genre.

Stebbins does not have an archive preserved in any library or university program. Most significantly, she has no autobiography, biography, monograph, or thesis wholly dedicated to her life work. Hence, a fleshed-out picture of who Stebbins was does not exist. As such, my concerted purpose is to provide a more expansive understanding of her career, relevance and impact. There are no personal materials such as letters or diaries, stage memorabilia, or costumes that have been found, and few extant photos of Stebbins. With that said, Stebbins’ narrative can be investigated through her family genealogy, educational background, what she expressed in her

own publications, and how she was described in the press. Stebbins' viewpoints and working methods can also be traced through her four educational manuals published in 1885, 1888, 1892, 1898, and a book she edited in 1913.

In the late 1880s and into the next decade, Stebbins performed 'Delsartean' expressive movement sequences and solo dance dramas of her own creation. (A 'Delsartean' is an individual, while the term 'Delsartian' denotes the collective). Stebbins performed in legitimate theatres and women's clubs and was admired for what was described as 'new' [i.e., modern], expressive, or 'aesthetic' dances. Dance historian Elizabeth Kendall asserts a "kind of dancing that looks quaint to us now used to be the newest and freshest dancing in the world. It was called aesthetic or interpretive [...] dance; it emerged from the nineteenth century romantic revival of the antique, and it inaugurated a modern, twentieth century way to see motion" (Preface, 1979).¹ Kendall situates this vogue of physical culture and aesthetic exercise for women as representing a "birth of a new social being, the Modern American Woman" (8), and I argue that Stebbins was at the center of this movement.

Stebbins manifested and produced 'new' dance as a legitimate 'high art form.' She held the belief that motion is an operation of the imagination, and the dances she created were quite unlike anything in her day. She was intellectually curious about women's stories being told through dance. Stebbins also advocated for a corporeal revolution for women by encouraging women to learn embodiment practices. Her conception of spiritual embodiment built on Aristotle's idea of the body as an expression of the soul. She taught women to consciously use their bodies and minds for personal cultivation. Her practical work in contemporary terms can be viewed as a form of 'interactionist dualism,' or body-mind methodology, in that she articulated

¹ *Where She Danced, The Birth of American Dance Art* (Alfred Knopf, Borzoi Book, 1979).

how physicality affects the mind while the mind directs bodily action in a continuously linked action/reaction of correlating influence. Indeed, Stebbins's practices were known as 'psycho-physical culture,' a historical term for practices that were thought to cultivate body and mind. Stebbins' corporeal practices were matched by her marked intellectual exploration of corporeal philosophies, as she posited that a person physically actualizes as a 'bodily being' while also 'being a body' as theoretical reality.

Stebbins' actively pursued artistic leadership in the last two decades of the 19th century. As a contributor to the psycho-physical culture movement, Stebbins advocated for artistic and therapeutic 'fitness' practices for the young and old as a means of self-improvement and maintaining health. Psycho-physical culture is a historical term, used in the 19th century to denote physical practices that were enlivening, i.e., elevating to the spirit. In the transnational physical culture movement from Europe to the United States various forms of movement/exercise were scientifically proven to increase circulation, build lung power, and create a sense of overall well-being. As such, in the United States, physical culture was widely promoted within the growing public school system across the nation, and Stebbins significantly contributed to this phenomenon.²

Dance practices became a part of the physical culture movement when dance was recognized for developing coordination, building positive social connections, and generally being known as an enjoyable activity for participants. 'Aesthetic dance' emerged in the United

² See more detailed historical and philosophical background information for 19th century physical culture in my 2016 publication (as Kelly Mullan my former surname), "European Antecedents to Somatic Movement," Chapter Four in *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*, editor Martha Eddy, (Intellect Books UK, University of Chicago Press). And in an upcoming 2025 chapter "Moving Away from Delsarte: Conversations on the History and Practice of Psycho-Physical Culture," in *Women's Innovations in Theatre, Dance, and Performance* (Vol. I, Bloomsbury Press), with co-authors Magdalena Kraler, Maria Meindl, Selma Landen Odom, Libby Smigel, and Carrie Streeter. Martha Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Oxford University Press, 1988). Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

States in the late 19th century when European folk and national dance steps (plus their various group movement floor patterns) merged with basic elements of ballet technique and ballroom dance steps that were creatively re-organized into new dance steps, techniques, combinations, and choreography. As such, it was a unique result of a mixed immigrant culture.

Historically speaking, the terms ‘expressive’ and ‘aesthetic dance’ were popularly known between approximately 1890–1930, before the modern dance field was firmly established.³ Today, the umbrella term ‘early modern dance’ designates dance forms for roughly the same era between 1910–1930. Aesthetic dance is not a designated subject term within the Library of Congress Classification/ LCC system, suggesting that this historical dance genre is not commonly recognized, and therefore under researched.

‘Early’ modern dance was recognized initially as being a professional solo dance art, in contrast to the later modern dance movement from the 1930s onwards that was dominated by dance companies.⁴ Dance historians commonly agree that the most celebrated American early modern dancers (‘forerunners’) are Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and to a lesser extent Loïe Fuller.⁵ Both St. Denis and Duncan were twenty years younger than Stebbins when

³ This assertion is based on extensive investigations of digitized historical newspapers, google books Ngram, and late 19th century American dance texts.

⁴ See more in my 2022 publication “Aesthetic Dance as Women’s Culture in America at the Turn of the 20th Century: Genevieve Stebbins and the New York School of Expression,” Special issue on Dance for the *Feminist/Modernist Studies Journal*, Taylor and Francis.

⁵ Anne Barzel, “European Dance Teachers in the United States,” *Dance Index*, Eakins Press Foundation, 3, no. 4–6 (2017): 56–100, https://www.eakinspress.com/danceindex/issueDetail.cfm?issue=danceindexunse_18.

Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in Historical Avant-gardes* (Oxford University Press, 2015). Anne Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1995/2002). Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (University of California Press, 1989). Margaret Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (Dance Horizons, Princeton Book Publishers, 1949). Nancy Ruyter, *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance* (Dance Horizons, 1979). Suzanne Shelton, *Divine Dancer: A Biography of Ruth St. Denis* (Doubleday, 1981), and “The Influence of Genevieve Stebbins on the Early Career of Ruth St. Denis,” Fifth Congress on Research in Dance conference, Philadelphia, 1976. Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture: Explorations in the Sociology of Dance* (Routledge, 1995). Jody Weber, *The Evolution of Aesthetic and Expressive Dance in Boston* (Cambria Press, 2009). Linda Tomko, “Considering Causation and Conditions of Possibility: Practitioners and Patrons of the New Dance in Progressive Era America,” in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, ed. Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris (Taylor and Francis, 2017).

they arrived in New York City to begin their careers. At this time, Stebbins was at the height of her success as a performer and educator. Some dance scholars note how aspects of Stebbins' unique dance innovations were inappropriately credited to Duncan and St. Denis. My aim is to share Stebbins' psycho-physical pedagogy, the philosophical basis for her creative work, and actual dance innovations to establish her influence on later generations of dancers.



Fig 1. 1896, Ruth St. Denis, NYPL digital collections. Fig 2. Genevieve Stebbins, *Keynote, Music, Art, and Literature* xvii, no. 2, February 1895, 43.

In her article “American Delsartism: Precursor of an American Dance Art” (1973), dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter shares when St. Denis first saw Stebbins dance, and the profound impact it had on her as a young person (429).⁶ In her autobiography St. Denis wrote about seeing Stebbins perform when she was a teenager. She states:

Linda Tomko, *Dancing class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890–1920* (Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁶ “American Delsartism: Precursor of an American Dance Art,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 25, no. 4 (1973): 421–435.

To me at this early age nothing so beautiful had ever entered my life. The curtain rose on a dark greenish background (this was, of course, long before Isadora's famous blue curtains) and there stood an exquisite woman in costume made of soft ivory-material that fell in gracious lines to her feet, her figure beautifully proportioned, her blond head proud and shapely. The strong light pouring upon her made her gleam like a pearl against the dark setting. She moved in a series of plastiques which were based upon her understanding of the laws of motion discovered by Delsarte. Her poses were derived from Greek statuary and encompassed everything from the tragedy of Niobe to the joyousness of Terpsichore. Later she did a dance called *Dance of the Day*. At the opening of the scene, she was on the floor asleep, and then, awakened by the morning sun, she rose with a lovely childlike movement to her knees and bathed herself in its rays. A light rhythmic step signified the morning and the noontide; and then began the slower movements of the afternoon, presently mingled with sadness as the late rays brought her slowly to her knees and again into her reclining posture of sleep. It was most effective and lovely, and represented an imagination reaching out for a vision of dance as yet undreamed of in her generation. Through Miss Stebbins I glimpsed for the first time the individual possibilities of expression and the dignity and truth of the human body, moving in that Grecian atmosphere of grace and light (1937, 16–17).⁷

This declarative statement is a testament to St. Denis' sentiments regarding Stebbins' artistry. It demonstrates that Stebbins' creative work was indeed considered innovative and unlike anything another comparable artist had yet dreamed of doing. Stebbins presented new material on the concert stage, and she had throngs of admiring women who flocked to see her perform.

From the late 1940s to 1990s, American modern dance historiography introduced critical biographies of the most prolific 'early' concert dance choreographers/ dancers, and historical metanarratives on the evolution of modern dance.⁸ Biographies included those written by

⁷ *Ruth St. Denis: An Unfinished Life* (George G. Harrap and Co., 1937), Archive.org.

⁸ Such as, Anne Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1995). Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (University of California Press, 1989). Deborah Jowitt, "Images of Isadora: The Search for Motion," *Dance Research Journal* 17 no. 2, 18, no. 1 (1985–86): 21–29. Margaret Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (Dance Horizons, 1949). Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance* (Dance Horizons, 1979). Suzanne Shelton, *Divine Dancer: A Biography of Ruth St. Denis* (Doubleday, 1981). Lee B. Eisler, "The Origins of Modernism in Dance" (Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1980). Ted Shawn, *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet, being a History of her Oriental Dances* (Printed for John Howell by John Henry Nash, 1920). Ruth St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, An Unfinished Life: An Autobiography* New (Harper and Brothers, 1939). Caroline and Charles Caffin, *Dancing & Dancers of Today; The Modern Revival of Dancing as an Art* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1912). Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced the Birth of American Art-Dance* (University of California Press, 1984). Agnes De Mill, *Dance to the Piper* (New York Review Books, 1951). Marcia B. Siegel, *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphry* (Yale University Press, 1981). Mary Desti, *The Untold Story: The Life of Isadora Duncan* (Dacapo Press, 1981).

established newspaper dance critics, such as Walter Terry who wrote about Isadora Duncan in 1963, Ruth St. Denis in 1969, Martha Graham in 1975, and Ted Shawn in 1976.⁹ Since the 1990s there has been a resurgence of biographies, as other established ‘early’ dance artists have been honored and critiqued, such as the performative creations of Loïe Fuller whose sweeping fabrics were said to have danced more than she did (1997, 2007, 2009),¹⁰ or the vaudevillian star Gertrude Hoffman who was known as being an “imitator” of highbrow concert dance forms.¹¹ Japanese dancer Michio Ito arrived a bit later on American soil (around 1915), but he was an inspiring teacher of Dalcroze Eurythmics and Asian movement aesthetics. His first biography is from 1977, written by his student Helen Caldwell, and a second in 2024.¹² At last count, more than twenty biographies are found on Duncan and Graham, a handful on St. Denis, and Shawn has a new biography from 2020.¹³ There are ‘second’ (or third) generation biographies on Charles Weidman, Doris Humphry, José Limón, Pearl Primus, Lester Horton, Anna Sokolow, Katherine Dunham (with eight or more books on her works), Paul Taylor, Erick Hawkins, and Alvin Ailey. Biographies chronicle dancers’ careers, the struggles they encountered along the way, and serve to exemplify the perseverant task of art making. Reading any of these biographies in tandem reveal how cultural knowledge flows, how influences merge, and overall, how life stories contribute to our historical understanding of dance construction. It is important to note

⁹ Walter Terry *Isadora Duncan, Her Life, Her Art, Her Legacy* (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1963); *Miss Ruth: The ‘More Living Life’ of Ruth St. Denis* (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1969). *Frontiers of Dance: The Life of Martha Graham* (Crowell, 1975). *Ted Shawn, Father of American Dance* (Dial Press, 1976).

¹⁰ Richard Nelson Current, and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loïe Fuller, Goddess of Light* (Northeastern University Press, 1997). Ann Cooper Albright, *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller* (Wesleyan University Press, 2007). Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller’s Performance of Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Sunny Stalter-Pace, *Imitation Artist: Gertrude Hoffmann’s Life in Vaudeville and Dance* (Northwestern University Press, 2020).

¹² Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito: The Dancer and His Dances* (University of California Press, 1977). Tara Rodman, *Fantasies of Ito Michio* (University of Michigan Press, 2024).

¹³ Paul A. Scolieri, *Ted Shawn: His Life, Writings, and Dances* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

that focusing on the word ‘modern’ in relation to American ‘modern dance’ does not mean that Indigenous dance forms did not have ‘modernizing’ elements (Murphy 2007).¹⁴ However, the difference is that the genre of American modern dance emerged from movement codification that developed over decades until the style became recognizable as ‘modern dance’ through the dedicated creative intent of dance artists and choreographers.

While the earliest modern dance biographies focused on white artists, African Americans were participating in and making innovations within the art form. Black artists from the 1930s are recognized for melding modern dance conventions with African American expression (Perpener 2001, Manning 2006, Amin 2017),¹⁵ yet there is a need for further scholarship to contribute to this history. As society began to slowly change through desegregation and civil rights protest, the dance field became more accessible, inclusive, and interracial. Early scholarship largely focused on New York City as distinct technical dance styles emerged from this cultural center. In the 1920s–1930s early modern dance era and through the Harlem Renaissance, America was still a highly segregated society racially operating under Jim Crow laws. Despite this challenging oppressive atmosphere, Black artists asserted their right to sociocultural awakening and celebrated black expression through the creation of new artistic aesthetics in the “New Negro” movement, supported by the philosopher Alain Locke. In the Harlem Renaissance, the Black elite espoused a rise in artistry that represented their humanity and excellence of black achievement.

¹⁴ Jaqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

¹⁵ John O. Perpener, *African American Concert Dance: the Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (University of Illinois Press, 2001). Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). Takiyah Nur Amin, “African American Dance Revisited: Undoing Master Narratives in the Studying and Teaching of Dance History,” in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies* (2nd edition), ed. Nicholas, L., and Morris, G. (Taylor and Francis, 2017), 44–55.

John Perpener contends that Black dancers utilized “artistic conventions of Western theatre [incorporating modern and ballet technique] and recast dances from the African diaspora in concert versions that could be accepted as serious art” (2001, 23). Casting for concert theatre dance was largely separated by race, reflecting societal norms of the day, although the Metropolitan Opera in New York City cast black dancers and black modern dance companies within its opera narratives. Otherwise, it was challenging for Black artists to finance and stage productions, therefore careers were certainly impeded by societal racism and access to the stage.

In the 1930s, prior to the rise of Katherine Dunham’s and Pearl Primus’ career, the likes of New Negro Art Theatre, Bahamian Negro Dancers, and dance artists Helmsley Winfield, Charles Williams, Edna Guy, and Asadata Dafora received acclaim for their productions (Perpener 2001). During the ‘Jazz Dance’ age, dance historian Danielle Robinson asserts that integrated social dance halls brought a boom of work opportunities for Black educators. Black dancers mastered European ballroom dances and hybridized them with jazz musicality and jazz dance styles. These innovative social dances became extremely popular with new eastern European immigrants flooding into the city, along with the Black population that had tripled in size (Robinson 2015, 11).¹⁶ In the concert dance realm, interracial casting was found in dance companies such as in Edith Segal’s 1930 choreography *Black and White* (Lindgren 2013, 28)¹⁷, and in later works by Helen Tamaris, Lester Horton, Franziska Boas, Martha Graham, and Alvin Ailey. However, in decades prior dance productions were generally racially segregated.

¹⁶ Danielle Robinson, *Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Allana C. Lindgren, “Civil Rights Strategies in the United States: Franziska Boas’ Activist Use of Dance, 1933–1965,” *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 2 (2013): 25–62.

Unfortunately, within American early modern concert dance, who was ‘in’ or out’ of the ‘dance canon’ was determined by access and opportunity within a segregated society and divides across racialized communities. Regarding the canon, who is ‘in’ or out- will continually change as the trope is somewhat arbitrary. The idea of the dance canon, for any cultural style, provides a brief summarization and succinct way of explaining the foundational history of a certain dance form. As such, any summary precludes certain individuals or companies from making ‘the list.’

Within American dance historiography, Stebbins’ work has been largely eclipsed by the younger dancers she influenced. Yet she did not disappear unnoticed. While Stebbins’ solo dance career spans from the late 1880’s onwards, she has never been situated as an ‘early modern dancer.’ However, her contributions have been noted. Dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter’s original 1973 article mentioning Stebbins became a chapter in her 1979 book *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance*. Here, Ruyter admires Stebbins’ “sense of serious purpose [that] provided a metaphysical and philosophical rationale for dance as an art” from which St. Denis and Duncan benefitted (23). Yet, Ruyter argues that American theatrical dance had to wait for St. Denis and Duncan “to infuse dance with grandeur of vision and nobility of purpose” (1979, 13). To put this in context, Ruyter did not intend to insinuate that Stebbins’ influence was negligible. Stebbins’ aesthetic exercises were made available through her popular publications, and as Ruyter found Stebbins taught in private girl’s schools, and her work was taught in women’s colleges and women’s clubs across the nation. At her New York School of Expression, (established in 1893), Stebbins’ taught elocution and drama, pantomimic use of gesture and facial expression, breathing and vocal exercises, and expressive ‘aesthetic dance’ choreography.

By the 1920s into the 30s, young girls and college women enthusiastically participated in aesthetic dance practices, led by dance educators such as Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, Doris Humphrey, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Martha Hill, and Margaret H'Doubler.¹⁸ It took over forty years for the 'American modern dance movement' to become established and, within that time, Stebbins' foundational performances had become a thing of the past more or less forgotten. Partly, this was due to St. Denis and Duncan not clearly stating their indebtedness to Stebbins, nor specifically mentioning that she was known across the nation as a prominent Delsarte educator, philosopher of aesthetics, and as an established solo dancer. Instead, like many dancers since, they proclaimed that *their work* was incredibly unique, and they were the pioneers of a new dance form. This thesis examines Stebbins created 'new' dance as a high art worthy of the concert stage, and how her dance philosophy influenced early modern dancers.

Aesthetic Dance as a Performance Art

In *On Stage Alone: Soloists and the Modern Dance Canon*, dance historian Ramsey Burt notes that early solo modern dance artists largely choreographed work for themselves, which he found to be unique within performing arts (2012, 35). Theatre historian Karl Toepfer argues that women as solo dancers were inventive and modern "insofar as audiences regarded it as an art, which meant that solo dance had to operate in a performance environment independent of cabarets and music halls" in theatres intended for performances "that conveyed seriousness of

¹⁸ Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H'Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2012). Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (Taylor & Francis, 2010). Janet Lynn Roseman, *Dance was Her Religion: The Spiritual Choreography of Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Martha Graham* (Hohm Press, 2015). Janet Mansfield Soares, *Martha Hill and the Making of American Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 2009). Elizabeth M. McPherson, ed., *The Bennington School of the Dance: A History in Writings and Interviews* (McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2013). Karen Bell-Kanner, *Frontiers: American Modern Dancer and Dance Educator* (Taylor & Francis, 2013). Irwin Spector, *Rhythm and life: the work of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze* (Pendragon Press, 1990).

purpose” (2012, 92–92).¹⁹ Toepfer surmises that early modern dancers were admired by audiences who enjoyed seeing women be expressive and freely move at a time when cultural norms and societal pressures controlled much of what a woman was allowed to do.

Stebbins was a liberated woman expressing her independence on the stage. As a professional performer, Ruyter situates Stebbins as being unique in “performing original dances compositions that either stood alone or carried forward the narrative of dramatic work.”²⁰ In her 1999 publication, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism*, Ruyter has several chapters on Stebbins’ performance career, her work as an educator, and detailed descriptions of Stebbins’ dance creations. Ruyter is the leading scholar to date on Stebbins, having established what is known biographically about Stebbins’ career.²¹

Ruyter positions Stebbins as the primary Delsarte educator responsible for creating a new genre of solo dance. Yet, Ruyter also states that Stebbins did not consider herself a dancer. Although to clarify, while Stebbins was not explicit about calling herself a dancer in public announcements, Ruyter certainly situates Stebbins as having danced professionally. I would surmise that Ruyter meant to hint at the fact that Stebbins did not publicly proclaim herself to be a ‘dancer,’ not because she wasn’t one, but due to the possibility of public scorn and bias held against stage dancers during the Gilded Age. ‘Dancers’ were known for performing in burlesque

¹⁹ Karl Toepfer, “Aesthetics of Early Modernist Solo Dance in Central Europe,” and Ramsey Burt, “Alone into the World, Reflections on Solos from 1919 Vaslav Nijinsky and Mary Wigman,” in *On Stage Alone: Soloists and the Modern Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitelman and Barbara Palfy (Glatfelter Natures Book, 2012).

²⁰ “Antique Longings: Genevieve Stebbins and American Delsartean Performance,” in *Corporealities: Dancing, Knowledge, Culture and Power*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Routledge, 1996), 70–89.

²¹ *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* (Greenwood Press, 1999), 124–127. Ruyter’s 1973 article was reprinted in 1979 as a chapter on American Delsartism in her book *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance*. “The Intellectual World of Genevieve Stebbins,” *Dance Chronicle* 11, no. 3 (1988): 389–97. “The Delsarte Heritage,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 14, no. 1 (1996): 62–74.

shows in vaudevillian halls with subtle (or overt) sexual tones not deemed suitable for ‘polite’ society. Leading dancers in the opera or ballet were thought of as being more respectable.²²

Stebbins wanted to create a ‘serious’ new dance art form, where the dancers’ body could communicate grace, and an ecstatic sensuality not deemed as vulgar or flamboyant. I hypothesize that Stebbins’ efforts to revive ancient ‘sacred’ dances on the modern stage purposefully intended to bring legitimacy to dance as an art unlike anything the American public had seen. For this reason, St. Denis states that Stebbins created a “dance as yet undreamed.” Consequently, I aim to build on Ruyter’s foundational scholarship by examining archival materials to assemble a critical study on Stebbins’ career and impact as a solo dancer artist.

Ruyter’s foundational research on American Delsartism has been cited by scholars across many academic fields. Ruyter laid out the historical development of the field of American Delsartism from the transmission of François Delsarte’s expressive theories in France to America via his student Steele MacKaye in the 1870s, to work established by women educators from the mid-1880s onwards. Ruyter positions Stebbins as the leading American Delsarte educator at the turn of the 19th century who “carried the [Delsarte] system the farthest in the direction of dance,” led by her “approach to movement as an expressive art” (1979, 21; 2009, p. 2015, p. 2022).²³

Ruyter states that Delsarte was important to the development of dance in America but that his impact has largely been ignored by dance historians. Ruyter specifies that while “Delsarte never showed the least interest in dance himself, his concepts and theoretical manifestations have

²² Although, as dance historian Elizabeth Kendall explains, chorines were thought to be susceptible to male exploitation and wouldn’t be hired for domestic service employment if it was known they worked in the theatre (Kendall 1979, 6). Before ballet companies were established in the U.S., famous European ballerinas like Fanny Ellsler toured cities and theatre management would announce they were hiring local girls as chorus dancers/ background figures. Most parents did not want their young girls to be enchanted by theatre life and the lure of the footlights.

²³ “American Delsartism: Precursor of an American Dance Art,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 13 (Routledge, 2009): 2015–2030.

been seminal” in modern dance developments (2005, 6).²⁴ With that said, I have published work specifically situating Stebbins as a more integral innovator who integrated aspects of Delsarte’s concepts within a larger movement/dance system of her own creation, in order to separate the name of ‘Delsarte’ from being directly connected to the advent of American modern dance, as it is rather misleading.²⁵ Dance historian Jody Weber likewise asserts that “neither Delsarte nor MacKaye were the least bit interested in dance” (2009, 34). MacKaye was the only American to have studied directly with Delsarte in Paris. As MacKaye’s most accomplished student, Stebbins expanded upon Delsarte’s expressive theories to create a veritable artistic movement system that provided a “foundation of legitimacy for female physical expression” and a “sound physical basis for the foundation of interpretive dance” (Weber, 32–33).²⁶ Based upon MacKaye’s teachings combined with her own physical culture and dance training, Stebbins utilized a variety of aesthetic dance steps, physical movements, and spatial floor patterns to create solo dances and group choreography for her students.

In her study on the sociology of early modern dance, Helen Thomas argues that American modern dance developed out of the physical culture movement, American Delsartism, health and dress reform, New Women era independence, growing financial freedoms for women— all of which served to advance the “cause of dance as an aesthetic mode” (1995, 165). Thomas also points out that few feminist scholars focused their research on dancers, and that it was dance scholars who situated these historical figures in a feminist light. Dance historian Sally Banes studied women as leaders in American modern dance including those from the late 19th century

²⁴ Ruyter, *Essays on Francois Delsarte* (Mime Journal, Pomona College Theatre Department, 2005), Introduction.

²⁵ Under former name Kelly Mullan, “Forgotten New Dancer of New York City’s Gilded Age: Genevieve Stebbins and the Dance as Yet Undreamed,” *Dance Research Journal* 52, no. 3 (2020): 97–117. “Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas,” *Currents: Journal of The Body-Mind Centering® Association* (2016): 16–28.

²⁶ Jody Weber, *The Evolution of Aesthetic and Expressive Dance in Boston* (Cambria Press, 2009).

expressive and aesthetic dance movement (*Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage*, 1998). Banes discerns that aesthetic dance performances inspired audiences of women who saw these dancers claim their public right to be producers of a new art representing a freedom unknown to most middle and upper-class women at the turn of the century. Lynn Connor concurs in her analysis of American historical newspaper dance criticism prior to 1930, saying that solo dance was significantly “female initiated” and designed to explore “individual expression, spiritual life, and bodily freedom.” Connor states that while “theories about the cultural roots of the solo dance movement” vary, there is critical consensus that most of the early dancer artists were women (1997, 25). Amongst performing art forms, aesthetic dance was especially dedicated as a practice for women, and it was an art that women greatly enjoyed participating in.

I argue that, in her construction of aesthetic dances as a new and viable art form, informed by feminist consciousness despite that terminology not being used in her day, Stebbins can be seen as exemplifying the dancer as a ‘New Woman.’ Gerda Lerner, one of founders of the academic field of Women’s History, positions exemplary female historical figures as having consciously chosen to assert their identity and intelligence despite being acutely aware that ‘Patriarchy’ positions women as a socially constructed subordinate group.²⁷ While Lerner’s definition may read as theoretically dated, in a global context Lerner’s concept of personal agency is still relevant. Stebbins’ work is a testament to her concerted efforts to manifest dance as an art, and additionally theatrical and therapeutic practices, at a time when women were rarely deemed as being capable of industriousness or recognized as artists of their own merit.

²⁷ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

In this dissertation I build on the scholarship of historian Carrie Streeter who situates female practitioners of Delsartean practices as ‘New Women’ in her study “Wings to her Heels: Self Expression and Health and the Rise of the New Woman” (2023). Streeter explores Delsartean mind-body therapeutics gendered as feminine and associated with “forms of body knowledge and qualities of emotional sensitivity and receptivity,” thought to be characteristic of womanhood (2023, 17). American Delsarte scholar Taylor Lake situates Delsartism as a gendered form of feminine training and “respectable womanliness” (2002).²⁸ Yet, even with the performative femininity in her work, Stebbins created empowering exercises involving the right to self-possession, self-expression, and public engagement that were rare for women in this era. While being ‘feminine,’ historian Jane Donaworth argues that late 19th century physical training programs designed for women countered the passive ideal of “delicate femininity” favored in the Victorian age. She further states that Stebbins’ work challenged gendered ideology (2013, 105, 116).²⁹ Furthermore, Joseph Fahey demonstrates that women as American Delsartists were a powerful force voicing their opinions in the progressive social reform movement (2000).³⁰

In creating a study that is in part biographical, and part critical commentary on her performance work and pedagogy, I hope to provide a broader conception of Stebbins as a woman with clear professional goals. Understanding Stebbins as a performer and an educator who encouraged self-cultivation will provide insight into a unique woman’s life. This research includes several historiographic studies drawing on Stebbins’ family genealogy to explore how

²⁸ Lake’s chapter on Stebbins titled “A Beautiful Physique with Graceful Strength in Every Action: Genevieve Stebbins’ Delsartean Self Realization Program for Women” provides an informed analysis of Stebbins’ Delsartean pedagogy (97–130) in “American Delsartism and the Bodily Discourse of Respectable Womanliness” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2002).

²⁹ *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women’s Tradition: 1600–1900* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2013).

³⁰ Joseph Fahey, “Americanized Delsarte Culture as Physical and Political Expression: How American Women Shaped Francois Delsarte’s System of Applied Aesthetics into a Progressive Force for Social Reform, Performance, and Professionalism” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000).

her heritage, social status, and cultural standing in her community allowed her the opportunity to start a career as a ‘legitimate’ actress in New York City, followed by becoming a leading American Delsarte educator and solo dance innovator. To this end, **Chapter Two** I discuss the following: the relevance of biography for women’s history, American modern dance historiography, American Delsarte scholarship, Stebbins’ inclusion in recent yoga scholarship, and finally Delsarte Hagiography and Ted Shawn. **Chapter Three** evolves in five chronological sections covering Stebbins’ maternal and paternal genealogy, Alta California and Gold Rush-era San Francisco, the arrival of Stebbins’ mother Henrietta, the formation of new State of California, and the State of the Union. **Chapter Four** examines the influence of Stebbins’ aunt, Louise Amelia Clappe (a Californian author) as well as the impact of the San Francisco’s social and cultural environment on Stebbins’ upbringing and her education. In **Chapter Five** I consider the early acting career of Stebbins in New York City beginning in 1876. I explore the influence of her mentor, Rose Eytinge, the production of *Rose Michel*, Stebbins’ first theatre tour, Stebbins’ performance in *Our Boys*, and her work with theatre producer Steele MacKaye. **Chapter Six** explores Stebbins’ teaching at Boston University’s School of Oratory, performance of *Aftermath, or Won at Last* at the Madison Square Theatre, problems with her working relationship with MacKaye, and legal troubles with *Rose Michel* that led to both Stebbins and MacKaye testifying in court. **Chapter Seven** follows Stebbins teaching and performing with Mary Thompson in New York City, performances in 1880, her Grand Tour of Europe, and a theatre tour with the production *Lights o’ London*. **Chapter Eight** investigates public opinion regarding ‘Delsarte’ prior to Stebbins’ publication, issues with MacKaye withholding Delsarte’s secrets, Stebbins’ first publication, *The Delsarte System of Expression* and her theories regarding cognition and semiotics. **Chapter Nine** reviews society women’s support for Stebbins, her

performances between 1887–1890, a Delsarte spoof, Stebbins’ second publication *Society Gymnastics*, the essence of grace, and a contentious statue posing debate. **Chapter Ten** investigates the creation of her artistic aesthetic philosophy, her early artistic statue posing performances, dance as poetics, her 1892 publication, and the influence of the occult in her dance drama creations. **Chapter Eleven** explores the founding of The New York School of Expression in 1893, ongoing dance performances, student commencement ceremonies, society women and physical culture, and concludes with looking into the final years of her life, and the successes of some of her students.

Theoretical Engagement

With the digitization of historical newspapers, weekly entertainment reviews, and 19th century professional journals, there is a treasure trove of sources to explore Stebbins’ work more intimately. I have created my own archive, built from research at the New York Public Library, the library of the Museum of the City of New York, and Oberlin College, and by accessing digitized materials through the Library of Congress Chronicling America, Hathitrust Digital Library, archive.org, newspapers.com, ancestry.com, and databases of 19th century publications.

In tracing and evaluating the development of Stebbins’ career over three decades, such investigations will engage “hermeneutics of suspicion,” a concept introduced by French philosopher Paul Ricouer (1970).³¹ Hermeneutics of suspicion describes critical interpretation that draws out what is less visible by reading between the lines– what Stebbins might call ‘lifting the veil,’ to decode meaning and reveal the unknown. Ricouer envisioned a relationship between the text and individual interpreter as dynamic, whereby meaning emerges between the two.

³¹ *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Yale University Press, 1970).

Using the method of New Historicism (Greenblatt and Gallagher 2000), my goal is to construct a sense of Stebbins' activities within a larger historical context. New Historicism explores how the meaning of a work may change over time in light of new assessments, revisions, theoretical developments and changing views of an art form. New Historicism includes 'New Women's History' as women are written into aspects of history in which they were formerly ignored. Women, as historically significant figures, were not entirely relevant within academia until the 1970s when Women's Studies emerged. Women existed outside the "great man biographical model" dominated by men lauded in the realms of philosophy, science, invention, political power, and capitalism (Newton 1989, Barry 1990).³² A feminist critical approach to biography includes structuring a larger socio-political history around women as a dialectic. History then becomes praxis moving from micro to macro historical perspectives (Barry 1990). By investigating women as relevant historical figures, insights into their social influence can be gained and women's greater cultural imprint brought into focus. Scholar Helen Hamilton describes a 'life and times' style of biography which involves a detailed description of the historical, social and cultural context of the time in which the protagonist lived. This builds insight into how the subject acted in their circumstances, their aims, outlook and impact.³³

In investigating a chosen subject, it is important to juxtapose vast resources. New Historicism and archival theory shine a light on otherwise disregarded subjects through the analysis of sources from cross disciplinary realms (drawing from intertextuality and working outside one's academic silo). New Historicism is also a form of literary criticism with a view to analyzing historical texts to understand the time frame in which they were produced, in the hopes

³² Judith Lowder Newton, "History as Usual? Feminism and the 'New Historicism,'" in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (Routledge 1989), 150–167. Kathleen Barry, "New Historical Synthesis: Women's Biography" *Journal of Women's History*, John Hopkins University Press I, no. 3 (1990): 75–105.

³³ Helen Hamilton, "Balance in writing a life: Some issues in biography," *Collegian* 27, no. 6 (2020): 585–588.

of avoiding bias or ‘presentism’ against those who lived in a different era. As scholar John Chapman puts it, “The Ghost of the Present Haunts the Past.”³⁴ Presentism is important to bear in mind, seeing as the idea of appropriate social behaviors, moral codes, use of language and terminology changes over time. Of course, historical subjects cannot be excused from obviously questionable or horribly offensive behaviors. Nonetheless, historical subjects need to be positioned within the norms of the time and place they inhabited without contemporary sensibilities distorting the historical picture. Writing biographical studies requires imagining the possible based upon historical facts, without altering biographical details for artistic effect. Grounded theorizing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) involves being attentive to the constant interplay between data and developing insights.³⁵ History is unique to periods in time, and historical developments are incredibly complex processes. ‘Thick descriptions’ (Geertz 1973) require contextual analysis as a historian reflects on several vantage points to explore interacting forces that contribute to defining a moment in time, or an era, to create a detailed portrayal and as clear a picture as possible.³⁶

Nigel Hamilton assesses that the historian is responsible for describing and exploring dominant ideologies, existing values and norms in the cultural context of their time. In so doing, a subject’s behavior, “responses and reactions provides the biographer with intimations of their personality and character. Accuracy in descriptions of the context in which the life was lived, therefore, are pertinent and an important element in the interpretation of the life” (2020, 588).³⁷

Kathleen Barry argues that women’s biography needs to function beyond ideological

³⁴ John Chapman, “Aesthetic Interpretation,” *Dance Chronicle* 3, no. 3 (1979–80): 254–274.

³⁵ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1967).

³⁶ See Clifford Gertz, “Thick Description: An Interpretive Theory of Culture,” <https://philpapers.org/archive/geettd.pdf>

³⁷ Nigel Hamilton, “In defence of the practice of biography,” *Contemporary British History* 10, no. 4 (1996): 81–86.

frameworks be they “Freudian, Marxist, or any other closed deterministic model,” as to do so erodes subjectivity. Strict reliance on theory can distort and possibly misrepresent a historical subject “in view of their acceptability to contemporary ideologies” (1990, 89). Barry asserts that researchers must ground analysis in historical evidence that deepens insights and reveal women’s subjectivity. By being true to historical context, it becomes possible to comprehend the conditions that influenced a subject’s life (82).

Biographer Deborah Jordon reasons that the biographers’ role isn’t to cast personal judgements because if “our own values are treated as normative, we face a danger of ‘presentism,’ a form of anachronism” (2022, 310).³⁸ To judge figures based upon contemporary ideologies can erase agency and distort an individual’s efforts and historical relevance. Donna Lee Brien and Kiera Lindsey state that a biographer “offers hypothesis to test” and build “convincing ‘life worlds’ of plausibility” by imagining the most likely scenarios built upon historical evidence (2022, 20).³⁹ Sheile Kineke argues that ultimately, a theoretical perspective is created, and the reader should clearly be able follow the biographers process of analysis (1994).⁴⁰

Through the course of this dissertation, I hope to demonstrate how Stebbins’ body-mind pedagogy uniquely benefitted women. In my study, theoretical frameworks from the historiography of American Delsartism and physical culture history will inform the expressive corporeality in Stebbins’ work. Stebbins’s pedagogy includes a focus on elocution with breath awareness activities and vocal exercises, physical culture to develop physical agility, and movements to explore grace, poise, and coordination. Her approach involved improving dramatic

³⁸ Deborah Jordon, “Speculative Biography as Dew Drop: Writing Women’s Lives,” in *Speculative Biography, Experiments, Opportunities and Provocations*, ed. Donna Lee Brian and Kiera Lindsey, Routledge.

³⁹ Donna Lee Brein and Kiera Lindsey eds, *Speculative Biography: Experiments, Opportunities and Provocations* (Routledge, 2022).

⁴⁰ Sheila Kineke, “Subject to Change: The Problematics of Authority in Feminist Modernist Biography,” in *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism* (1994), 253–372.

performance capabilities by developing a practical understanding of nonverbal communication and realistic ‘pantomimic’ expression. Stebbins’ students included public speakers, teachers-in-training, educators seeking advanced training, and artists seeking additional training to be able to perform dramatic monologues or aesthetic dances on the professional stage. Stebbins’ legacy can be seen in her remarkable influence on the field of early modern dance, known then as “aesthetic dance.” Through a performance career spanning from 1876 to at least 1907, Stebbins had a long and lasting impact on future solo dance artists.

Catching a Ghost– Les Corps Fantômes:

The Challenge of Feminist Biography

In “Catching Ghosts: Biography and the Historical Record,” scholar Andrea Harris asserts that dance history is still relatively new in academia, and historical narratives are an invaluable contribution toward broadening understanding in the ‘narrow lineage’ of American modern dance history (298).⁴¹ Exploring Stebbins’ life will be a retrieval of a ‘ghost from the past.’ In French, the term ‘*corps fantôme*’ denotes the ghostly presence of historical figures, the presence of past events, the discovery of forgotten events, or the lingering presence of those who have passed. A ‘*fantôme*’ can also be a haunting memory, or someone who has the psychic ability to communicate between the living and the dead. There is no perfect way to capture a ‘ghost,’ or entirely depict a life, but I will attempt to build a narrative that provides insight into the legacy of Stebbins’ teachings and artistry to allow the reader to understand how she created work that was “considered avant-garde in the United States at the time” (Mayer 2017, 528).⁴² How can we catch ghosts of the past? There are many ‘stories’ about Stebbins in the press and 19th century journals. Utilizing narrative theory to compare stories, I will analyze sources to weed out fiction from fact, and in the process a biographical study can be created as a ‘story’ of events.

In this chapter I will discuss the following: the relevance of biography for women’s history, American modern dance historiography, American Delsarte scholarship, Stebbins’ inclusion in recent yoga scholarship, and finally Delsarte Hagiography. These insights are relevant as they serve as a guide to comprehend how Stebbins has been viewed in contemporary scholarship.

⁴¹ Andrea Harris, “Catching Ghosts: Biography and the Historical Record,” *Dance Chronicle* 33, no. 2 (2010): 292–297.

⁴² “Education reform visions and new forms of gymnastics and dance as elements of a new body culture and ‘body education’ (1890–1930),” *History of Education* 47, no. 4 (2017): 523–543.

Dance scholar Alexandra Carter stresses that historians find meaning through interpretive frameworks and critical analysis of historical sources. Archival theory includes examining sources to ascertain ‘who’ wrote them, for ‘what’ audience, and ‘why.’ Additionally, Carter encourages having a bit of skepticism about ‘facts’ and ‘truths.’⁴³ Exploring credibility of sources determines their relevance. Dance scholar Lena Hammergren notes that source criticism is essential, as is juxtaposing sources to develop interpretive insights.⁴⁴ Penny Russel similarly surmises that asking historical questions creates context, and context “illuminates’ life.”⁴⁵ ‘Who’ is deemed as ‘valuable enough’ in biographical studies, falls into the hands of the individual researcher. It takes an extensive amount of time and dedication to establish new scholarship. No researcher should be chastised per se for choosing one investigative subject over another, as research dedication relies on sustained scholarship.

Scholar Susan Ware writes that the challenge of feminist biography relies on access to archives, years of research, and available time for a consistent attentive focus. In “The Book I Couldn’t Write,”⁴⁶ Ware relays how she lost initiative to write about Alice Paul, famously known for drafting the ERA proclamation and having spent 50 years working on women’s rights. Because there was no archive of her personal life, no inherent drama, and Paul was tight lipped about professional controversies in interviews, Ware felt that she couldn’t make her story compelling. She also couldn’t find an overarching theoretical framework to situate Paul’s interior life. So, she lost initiative, didn’t write the book, and it is left for others to take up the reins.

⁴³ “Destabilising the Discipline: Critical debates about history and their impact on the study of dance,” in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, ed. Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris (Taylor and Francis, 2017).

⁴⁴ “Many sources, Many Voices,” in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, ed. Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris (Taylor and Francis, 2017).

⁴⁵ Penny Russell, “Life’s Illusions: The “Art” of Critical Biography,” *Journal of Women’s History* 21 no. 4 (2009): 152–156.

⁴⁶ “The Book I Couldn’t Write: Alice Paul and the Challenge of Feminist Biography,” *Journal of Women’s History* John Hopkins University Press 24, no. 2 (2012): 13–36.

Aside from prominent national leaders, there is an academic interest in women who were not involved in national campaigns, but who lived a relatively average life, albeit with struggles. These stories provide insight into the broader general situation of women and contribute to women's history. In *Feminist Biography and Feminist History*, Barbara Caine argues that understanding the female condition historically is a way of analyzing feminism itself, as it develops awareness as to what women had to transcend, and what they fought for in the first place.⁴⁷ For example, in the first full-length study of Irish domestics in America, historian Margaret Lynch-Brennan (my aunt!) investigates the lives of young Irish Catholic women age 14–21 who worked in Protestant homes between 1840–1930. Using private collections of Irish emigrant letters, she establishes a history of Irish women finding financial independence and participating in political involvement such as boycotts and activity in labour movements.⁴⁸

Editors Hans Renders and David Veltman Brill Leiden argue in *Fear of Theory: Towards a New Theoretical Justification for Biography* (2022),⁴⁹ that biography can take many shapes and forms. Microhistory is both a theoretical and methodological approach (23). Not only are 'smaller' stories relevant, but bigger stories can be re-positioned to establish new perspectives. Renders and Leiden assert there is no biographical theory per se, instead there are methods of data collection and using theoretical viewpoints to put information in context. Biography can "amend, rectify, and revise previous historians claims and assumptions about individuals and their actions" and clarify former misinterpretations (32). Biographical correctives are important for historiography. Renders notes that theoretical frameworks in biography are "seldom

⁴⁷ Barbara Caine, "Feminist biography and feminist history," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 247–261.

⁴⁸ Margaret Lynch, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840–1930* (Syracuse University Press, 2014).

⁴⁹ Hans Renders and David Veltman, eds., *Fear of Theory: Towards a New Theoretical Justification for Biography* (Brill Leiden, 2022).

mentioned explicitly,” but it doesn’t mean that biography necessarily lacks critical analysis (140). He reasons that theorization is implicit because sources need to be contextualized and given an authorial voice. These points are relevant for biographical narratives on dancers.

American Modern Dance Historiography

Mid-twentieth century dance historians note educational connections between American Delsartism and early modern dance practices. Dance historian Anne Barzel, in an essay for the *Dance Index*, claims that the American Delsarte movement between 1870–1890 directly influenced later modern dance developments, largely through the performance work and teachings of Genevieve Stebbins (1944, 72).⁵⁰ Likewise, dance historian Margaret Lloyd argues that “before Isadora’s career had begun,” Stebbins “taught expression through movement and gesture,” and her work along with the “fancy, natural, aesthetic, and interpretive dancing that flooded the country [...] were permeating physical education, then called physical culture, and drifting into the dance schools” (1948, 8).⁵¹ Lloyd explains that modified ballet exercises, Delsarte gestures, and barefoot dancing were therefore “not altogether unknown” in the early 20th century, and as such, she determines that the history of early “modern dance is a story of interrelated influences, of growth and change” (8). Notably, Lincoln Kirstein credits Stebbins, saying in her “rare private performances before friends, Stebbins stood for what was most vital in creative dance, the opposite of the dead tradition of classical ballet as maintained by teachers at the academic Metropolitan Opera House” (1935, 350, cited in Scott Johnson 1999, 183).⁵² To

⁵⁰ Anne Barzel, “European Dance Teachers in the United States,” *Dance Index*, Eakins Press Foundation 3, no. 4–6 (1944): 56–100.

⁵¹ Margaret Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (Dance Horizons, Princeton Book Publishers, 1949).

⁵² Scott P. Johnson, *Embodied Rhetoric in Anglo-American Modernity* (Regent University, 1999).

clarify, Stebbins performed in private shows *and* danced in theatres— including at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1897 as a soloist in the apotheosis in the ballet *Cinderella*.⁵³

Largely due to Ruyter’s scholarship, Stebbins’ innovative work has been noted by several dance scholars such as Linda Tomko (1999), Helen Thomas (1995, 2004), Jody Weber (2009), Judy Burns (1988, 2005), Susan Leigh Foster (2011), and Gabrielle Brandstetter (2015)⁵⁴ Brandstetter maintains that Stebbins’ teaching became a model for the “development of free dance and expressionistic dance.” She states that “Stebbins was the first to clearly define this vitalism model” in her elaboration of Delsarte theories, which “heralded a paradigm shift in twentieth-century modern dance in an attempt to redefine dance movement on the basis of vitalist understanding of dynamics” (2015, 47).⁵⁵ Brandstetter argues Stebbins’ work “reflected the variations of rise and fall, expansion and contraction, tension and release,” and flows of energy that were integral to early modern dance techniques (47). Moreover, she assesses that Stebbins’ influence on “the field of dance and theatre reform in the early twentieth century were manifold and extensive” (48). Scant research has compared Stebbins’ performances with that of Ruth St. Denis (Jowitt 1989: 128; Ruyter 1979: 23–24, 1999: 126–127; Shelton 1976: 33–49, 1981: 15, 57), or Isadora Duncan for that matter (Jowitt 1989: 78–91). In many ways, Stebbins’s life work was eclipsed by the younger dancers she influenced, due to scholars focusing on their

⁵³ *New York Journal and Advertiser*, “Three Thousand Sunday School Dance as Fairies in Cinderella Ballets: Sixteen Years of Age and Pretty. They were Street Dress. Professors of the Opera say “Smile” and “Higher” to them Incessantly. Girls Learn Coquettish Airs. In Revels of Roses, Bees, Hornets and Butterflies. They Forget the Manners of the Strawberry Festivals,” December 17, 1897, 6.

⁵⁴ Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture: Explorations in the Sociology of Dance* (Routledge, 1995). Linda Tomko, “Women, Artistic Dance Practices, and Social Change in the United States, 1890–1920” (PhD diss., University of California, 1991). Linda Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance 1890–1920*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 110–123. Judy Burns, “The Culture of Nobility/ The Nobility of Self-Cultivation,” in *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance*, ed. Gay Morris (Routledge 1996/2005), 177–197.

⁵⁵ Gabriele Brandstetter, “Vitalist interpretation of Greek Sculpture: Genevieve Stebbins,” in *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in Historical Avant-gardes* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

fame. However, seeing as Stebbins does not have an archive, her life story is only to be found in rare books and historical newspapers. Prior to the digital age, information on her was difficult to find. Ruyter's research is quite remarkable, as her extensive findings required intensive investigative time in library collections to provide a foundational outline for Stebbins' career.

Some dance historians utilized feminist theories to speak of early modern dance as being liberating and gender-empowering even while being gender affirming for women (Banes 1998, 66; Franko 1995, 10). Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster compares the feminine nature of Stebbins' work with male physical culture exercises to speculate about gender roles and credits Stebbins' teachings with laying "important groundwork for concert dance as woman's work" (2011, 110). Foster suggests that Stebbins' approach to bodily cultivation proved useful for "artists in the new modern dance" who were "circulating in early 20th century urban centers" (122).⁵⁶ However, she doesn't go so far as to situate Stebbins as a concert dancer.

In her dissertation, Laura Williams Iverson argues that American Delsartism exemplified the "physical expression of a burgeoning women's rights movement" (2007, viii).⁵⁷ Dress reform was an important component of the women's movement, as tailored dresses restrained the arms from lifting higher than elbow height, and corsets limited the ribcage from expanding. Aesthetic dancers were able to perform in flowing garments, and although their dress was fashioned after the Greek 'antique,' dancers depicted the very idea of being freely modern. Dance attire of neo-Grecian dress represented the very 'spirit of the age' when women were otherwise physically

⁵⁶ "Tensing and Relaxing Naturally: Systematic Approaches to Training the Body," in *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 110–123.

⁵⁷ Laura Williams Iverson, "Conscious Home Exercise for Women: Cultivating the New Mind/Body in the late Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2007).

restricted in their everyday fashions (Fensham 2011, 82).⁵⁸ In the Progressive Era, both dancers and dress reformers advocated for women to have greater freedom of movement.

French scholar and co-director of a Gender History Research Group, Elizabeth Claire, writes that the field of dance history has been renounced in academia as “historicized methods came to be perceived by dance theorists as outmoded, even conservative, while the discipline of history continued to resist any serious considerations of dance as a legitimate object of study” (2017, 169).⁵⁹ She argues that monographs are essential for dance history. One problematic Claire concedes is that historical Western dance forms have been thought of as reinforcing gender norms, but she also argues that they have been seen as a form of gender empowerment.

In dance historian Susan Manning’s recent work (2025), she recalls her earlier research in which she situated Duncan’s creative work through the lens of male gaze theory and viewed her dancing as a performative seduction ‘the patriarchy’ expected. Biographer Ann Daly argued in response that Duncan’s work was diminished as a result. Daly asserts that a research dilemma emerges when a dancer or choreographer is expected to “topple a power structure that we have theorized as monolithic.” The choreographer as a result Daly argued, faces a “no win situation” as they will always be seen as reinforcing the status quo, “despite any transgressive behavior.”⁶⁰ As Manning reflected, “it seems that pursuing the debate over early modern dance in terms of whether the practice transgressed or upheld dominant conceptions of race, gender, and nationality results in a dead end comparable to the ‘no-win situation’ Daly posits” (2025, 46). Manning therefore re-assessed her earlier writing by stating that female audiences experienced

⁵⁸ Rachel Fensham, “Undressing and Dressing Up: Natural Movement’s Life in Costume,” in *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 82–97.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Claire, “Dance Studies, Gender and the Question of History,” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 46 (2017): 157–185.

⁶⁰ Daly (1992, 243) quoted in Susan Manning in *Dance on the Fault Lines of History* (Dance Studies Association, University of Michigan Press, 2025), 43.

“the kinesthesia of early modern dance,” which was regarded as expressive (rather than erotic) due to their own embodied understanding of the dance forms presented on the stage— that of “Delsartism and aesthetic gymnastics” (rather, *aesthetic dance*). Manning describes audiences of women in the theatre corresponding with the dance performances on the stage in kinesthetic rapport, and while dances such as Duncan’s could be seen as reiterating “images of gender and ethnicity, the kinesthetic dimension introduced a new image of the female body in motion that was without precedent” (2025, 49). Early modern dancers can be celebrated for their innovations (while also being critiqued) without their artistry being expected to dismantle ‘The Patriarchy.’

In a similar vein, scholar Shannon Walsh views progressive era physical culturists and what she calls the “Americanized Delsarte” movement (and uses throughout) as being complicit with white supremacy.”⁶¹ In *Eugenics and Physical Culture in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout*, Walsh focuses on the idea that to be “fit meant to be white” (9). Certainly, American Delsartism (the proper historical term) and physical culture in general was largely enjoyed by white women in the middle to upper leisure class who had the economic and social freedom to do so. Yet, to liken being ‘fit’ or ‘filled with grace’ with whiteness as a default category erases non-white participants “agential subjectness,” and is ultimately dehumanizing.⁶² White women surely had more available educational choices for recreation or physical culture while Black communities faced enormous disadvantages, yet Blacks were nevertheless active within the physical culture movement (Mjagkij 1994, Weisenfeld 1997).⁶³ Walsh notes that most feminist sports historiography focused on “self-government that led to agency and liberation from

⁶¹ Shannon Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (Springer, 2020).

⁶² Christian List, “Agential possibilities,” *Possibility Studies & Society* 1, no. 4, 2023: (461–470).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/27538699231200093>

⁶³ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852–1946*, University Press of Kentucky, 1994. Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York’s Black YWCA, 1905–1945*, Harvard University Press, 1997.

hegemonic patriarchal forces” (9) and instead situates her physical culture study around racial exclusion. Yet, she doesn’t include the histories and ‘alternative futures’ created by Blacks that engaged with physical culture, specifically within American Delsartism. What is being racialized is the idea that self-cultivation practices in American Delsartism were only for white women. Most erroneous, Walsh credits “especially Steele MacKaye” for “facilitating the transition of Delsarte method [sic] from small studio practice to a comprehensive system that could be applied more broadly in schools and gymnasiums” (28), in addition to the phenomenon of statue-posing (47). However, MacKaye did not contribute to American Delsarte physical culture practices to the extent that Stebbins and others did, nor was he involved in statue posing.

In contrast to Walsh, scholar Ava Purkiss situates Black women’s engagement in physical culture as an emancipatory form of exercising citizenship in her engaging study *Fit Citizens: A History of Black Women’s Exercise: From Post-Reconstruction to Post War America* (2023).⁶⁴ Purkiss shares how Black women advocated for racial uplift, both morally and physically, as being politically advantageous. Despite living in a segregated society with racist policies that excluded access to recreational spaces, Black women created place to explore strength and grace (27). Purkiss does not mention American Delsarte practices nor specifically delve into forms of physical culture methods, but more broadly speaks to exercise, collective health improvements, and educational initiatives within impoverished Black communities.

It is important to reflect upon why Black engagement in physical culture was minimal (but existent, mainly for northern Free Blacks) during the Reconstruction era. After emancipation, the former slave population did not have land to call their own, to farm or build on. Faced with insurmountable conditions, many became sharecroppers and continued in physical labour for

⁶⁴ *Fit Citizens: A History of Black Women’s Exercise: From Post-Reconstruction to Post War America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2023). Purkiss’ publication is from her 2016 dissertation.

little pay. Black social reformer Frederick Douglass argued that in Russia at least serfs were given enough land to grow food on to feed themselves. During the Reconstruction era, the legacy of state imposed institutional oppression, lack of social assistance, illiteracy and extreme poverty, positioned southern Blacks at a tremendous disadvantage. To overcome such insurmountable odds is so severe that to this day there is a significant difference between the economic progress of families with enslaved ancestors compared to northern Free Black families from 1865 (Althoff and Reichardt, 2024).⁶⁵ Enforced ‘reconstruction’ in the south, between 1865 until 1877 until the Union Army left, was met with intense resentment by the white population which resulted in the implementation of Jim Crow laws. One third of all Jim Crow laws impacted education, with few resources designated for Black schools. Eugenic theories as a form of scientific racism devalued investment in Black communities. It took many decades before larger groups of rural Black southerners could migrate north, as one had to have the financial means for transport to do so. By the 1910 census, New York and Chicago had 2% Black populace, Philadelphia 5%, Baltimore 15%, New Orleans 26%, and Washington D.C. 36%. Most Blacks lived in rural communities, and it was not until after WWI that the ‘Great Migration’ of Blacks from the South to the North occurred (Kahan, 2022, 34),⁶⁶ which launched the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age.

Within the Black social reform movement, physical culture involvement arguably was an act of resistance against white supremacy and racial bigotry. Black families had fewer resources to dedicate to physical culture, yet in time participation grew through health reform advocacy and the pursuit of Black excellence (Guillory 2015).⁶⁷ Significantly, in the first study on African

⁶⁵ Lukas Althoff, Hugo Reichardt, “Jim Crow and Black Economic Progress after Slavery,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 139, no 4 (November 2024): 2279–2330.

⁶⁶ Micheal Kahan, “Urban America,” in *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Christopher McKnight Nichols, ed., and Nancy C. Unger (Wile Blackwell Companions to American History, 2022).

⁶⁷ Joseph Anthony Guillory, *The Physical Uplift of the Race: The Emergence of the African American Physical Culture Movement, 1900–1930*, W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, PhD University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

American Delsarteans, historian and American Delsarte scholar Carrie Streeter found that Black women were proponents of Delsartean exercise for the benefit of health, self-expression, and performance opportunities albeit within a reform era segregated society (2020). Streeter assesses that exercises used by Black Delsarteans were most likely drawn from Stebbins' popular manuals. The Reconstruction era was fraught with racial discord, and Streeter notes that Black and white elocution reformers both sought to "expose the philosophical flaws of racist and sexist logics" (2023, 26). In her focused investigation of Indianapolis, Streeter explores the phenomena of Black women using Delsartean corporeal practices to develop their expressive capacities. In their Delsarte clubs, women performed as the Queen of Sheba, Athena, Amazon, "a brave Diana, a defiant Gladiator" and presented themselves as dignified figures commanding public respect (Streeter 2020, 8).⁶⁸ In community centers and church events, Black women performed Delsartean styled pantomimes and dance dramas as commercial events to fundraise for charities. As a result, they were able to contribute to social and financial needs within their communities.

In regard to race and American Delsartism, scholar Colleen Kim Daniher uses a post-colonial lens to situate the bi-racial Mohawk poet-performer Pauline Johnson's "performative indigeneity" in the transnational genealogy of American Delsartist practices (2020, 2).⁶⁹ She speculates that Johnson strategically appropriated Delsartean methods to position herself within the "larger cultural-moral-civic practice of self-development, especially for white middle-class women" (3). Streeter and Daniher have reframed American Delsarte history to place race and cultural agency as an integral part of the historical narrative.

American Delsartism was initially considered by scholars as being a genteel tradition for

⁶⁸ Carrie Streeter, "Breathing, Power, and Poise: Black Women's Movements for Self-Expression and Health, 1880s–1900s," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 1 (December 2020): 5–46.

⁶⁹ Colleen Kim Daniher, "Looking at Pauline Johnson: Gender, Race, and Delsartism's Legible Body," *Theatre Journal*, John Hopkins University Press 71, no. 1 (2020): 1–20.

middle and upper-class white women yearning to develop ‘cultured nobility’ and an embodied style of sentimental femininity. Yet American Delsarte practices also proved to be a turning point for women trying to push acceptable boundaries and manifest new opportunities for artistic expression (Burns 1996/2005, Kimber 2011, Lake 2008).⁷⁰ Situating women historically includes conferring social class, race or ethnicity and how these factors impact social mobility, alongside gendered advantage (or disadvantage) as a way of understanding an individual’s social position. In the anthology *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, dance historian Linda Tomko situates American Delsarte practices and aesthetic dance within immigrant ‘settlement programs’ that offered a variety of free classes for new families and their children, sponsored and funded by philanthropic organizations. Educators would ‘settle’ to live in lower-class neighborhoods where they worked in service of the community’s social welfare. A study from Virginia Commonwealth University finds that settlement programs had various approaches to meet varied needs, and “according to the *Handbook of 1911* they contained one or more identifiable racial or ethnic groups including Native American, Black, Irish, English, Scotch, Jewish, French-Canadian, Italian, German, Belgian, Dutch, Austrian, Bohemian, Slavic, Scandinavian, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Romanian, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Basque, Syrian, Greek, Armenian, Mexican, Japanese and Chinese.”⁷¹ Programs would include such things as medical services, teaching English, skill development, employment resources, physical culture, and recreational activities such as drama and dance. Middle and lower-class families created Delsarte styled entertainments such as pantomimic dramas, tableaux, and

⁷⁰ “The Culture of Nobility/ The Nobility of Self-Cultivation,” in *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance*, ed. Gay Morris (Routledge 1996/2005), 177–197. Marian Wilson Kimber, “Iowa’s Nymphs, Naiads, and Graces: Performing Delsarte for the Masses,” *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (2011): 58–61. Taylor Lake, “Mapping Meaning, Making Being: Genevieve Stebbins Delsartism and the Performance of Womanliness,” Conference Papers 94th National Communication Association, San Diego, CA, 2008.

⁷¹ Margaret E. Berry, “The Settlement Movement: 1886–1986”

<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/settlement-movement-1886-1986/>

pageant performances. American Delsarte practices were therefore not only for upper class white women as scholarship demonstrates.

Tomko argues that one can be ‘Foucauldian’ in the process of creating historical context, because a historian can look at “conditions of possibility for relations and networks” framing the social existence of research subjects (2017, 173).⁷² Tomko offers Foucauldian reasoning to clearly situate her historical dance study as existing within a social matrix. Reflecting a larger theme in the anthology, contributing dance scholars question who gets chosen as an important figure in dance history and why? Who gets included in the dance history canon and why? What study is deemed to be important? What style, genre, or period of dance history gets studied? Who gets overlooked? Ultimately, a research subject or chosen focus is an individual’s passion.

Linda Tomko’s 1991 dissertation, and later book published in 2000, *Dancing Class, Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance 1890–1920* questions “what empowered women to innovate in dance?” (v). Tomko is Professor Emeriti at the University of California, Riverside, and former President for the Society of Dance History Scholars (now Dance Studies Association). Her book is considered by dance scholars as an exemplary study of women’s cultural agency in Progressive era dance practices. Tomko uses critical theory and “poststructuralist inquiry about identity” to demonstrate how “classical historical analysis” shares similarities with feminist analysis as an interpretive lens viewing how change occurs over time (2017, 182). Tomko accounts for the prevalence of women in new dance practices between 1890–1920 not only on the concert stage, but also in educational dance classes at community centers and charitable settlement homes. American Delsarte practices, folk dance, national

⁷² Linda Tomko, “Considering Causation and Conditions of Possibility: Practitioners and Patrons of the New Dance in Progressive Era America,” in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, ed. Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris (Taylor and Francis, 2017), 173–186.

dances, and aesthetic dance practices were all enjoyed as a form of social recreation in settlement programs in cities like Chicago, Boston, and the Lower East side of New York City. These programs also offered important employment for women as dance educators.

Tomko explores culture as “identity-fashioning” which has historically privileged women of different social classes, separated by race and ethnicity. She provides a foundational framework to understand how solo dance pioneers emerged out of certain cultural conditions that allowed these individuals the potential to create change. Her work demonstrates how early modern dance innovators benefited from popular women’s aesthetic dance practices that preceded their success. Clubwomen, as patronesses of the arts, provided performance opportunities for up-and-coming young dancers at benefit events. Tomko maintains these “elite fundraising entertainments for reform causes at which St. Denis performed were thus linked to a larger context of women’s social welfare work in turn of the century America” (1991, 52). St. Denis’ heroines were “women reformers, aesthetics lecturers, Delsarte priestesses [...] who exhorted women to examine condition of bodies as a manifestation of the conditions of their spirits” (Kendall 1979, 12). While Duncan and St. Denis had patronage and supportive connections, they also needed self-confidence to forge their own unique paths as performers. Consequently, Tomko assesses the “conditions for possibility” reflected opportunities that they seized in their pursuit of fame.

In Karen Blair’s study, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868–1914*, she compellingly argues that women’s clubs were an integral and powerful force in first-wave feminism in America. Clubs provided upper-class women with a sanctuary outside of the home, to share in sisterhood, friendship, and a space to voice their opinions, concerns, and needs.⁷³ Women’s clubs provided opportunities for the “acquisition of knowledge, the training of

⁷³ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868–1914* (Holmes & Meier, 1980).

power [...and] the attainment of the conscious freedom of the woman spirit,” according to Jane Cunningham Croly, honorary president for Sorosis, and honorary vice-president for the General Federation of Woman’s Clubs.⁷⁴ Before women were readily admitted into higher education institutions, clubs were places for learning and exchange, organizing leadership for public benefit, and sharing in cultural entertainments. Clubs regularly hosted guest speakers, held classes, and produced theater, music, and dance shows.

An integral aspect of club life was public speaking, and many women financially supported themselves by touring to read literary selections, perform dramatic readings or monologues, and speak about reform causes. Speakers were respected not only for their ability to deliver profoundly moving speeches, but also for physical poise. As such, club members were encouraged to take lessons in elocution to learn how to speak with distinction, and aesthetic gymnastic lessons to achieve grace, ease of motion, and a confident bodily presence. Aesthetic gymnastic exercises were integral for club women, elocutionists, and dramatic artists. Exercises included comportment and learning how to use gesture and physical expression to portray meaningful intent. Some women additionally performed pantomimes, “synchronized physical movement pageants,” movement drills (choreography), and statue posing presentations.⁷⁵

Dancing Qualities of the Soul

By the 1880s, aesthetic dance, folk, and social dance forms dominated the American landscape in educational physical culture programs (Ruyter 1979, 90; Tomko 1999, 2017, Lynch 2022). Expressive and aesthetic dances were thought to reflect the true inner nature of women, in

⁷⁴ Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Women’s Club Movement in America*. Published under the authority of the Council of the General Federation of Woman’s Clubs of America (Henry G. Allen & Co., 1898), 13.

⁷⁵ Jane Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women’s Tradition, 1600–1900* (Southern Illinois Press, 2011), 106–107.

their feminine qualities of “beauty, ease, grace, agility, and suppleness” (Vedel 2011, 133),⁷⁶ or in the presentation of an ecstatic liberated body of action (Macintosh 2011, 44).⁷⁷ According to sociologist Leila Sussman, by the mid-1890s, “two physical cultural movements, gymnastics and Delsartian exercise, included dancing in aspects of their programs” taught at women’s colleges that required exercise classes and courses in health, hygiene, and physiology. There was no such mandate in men’s colleges. Sussman argues that for women, “given this background, it is no surprise that dance entered the college curriculum as a kind of exercise intended to promote health [and evolved] as a form of self-expression with aesthetic dimensions.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Sussman situates dance as meeting a “feminist” moment as physical practices were an integral part of the women’s campaign for inclusion in higher education.

Dance historian Mark Franko posits that early modern dancers, who were mainly female soloists, engaged “feminine subjectivity” by following unconscious motivations in their souls (10). Franko describes Duncan as an artist driven to move from within, who listened to her soul and inner sensation to find feelings that gave rise to unique movement explorations (1995, 8). Preceding Duncan, Stebbins likewise created dance art as a way of harnessing the spirit within. In her conception, the soul channels the imagination, and it is the soul/spirit that inspires creative acts. Stebbins stresses that great art comes from “the principle that ideas are eternal and constitute the only divine part of the soul” (1902, 373). In her publications, Stebbins provides descriptions of her embodiment exercises and choreographed movement sequences (called

⁷⁶ Karen Vendell, “‘Female Nature,’ Body Culture and *Plastique*,” in *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 124–138.

⁷⁷ Fiona MacIntosh, “The Ancient Greeks and ‘Natural,’” in *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (2011), 43–57.

⁷⁸ Leila Sussman, “Colleges and Companies: Early Modern Dance in the United States,” in *Outsider Art: Contesting Boundaries in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Vera L. Zolberg and Joni Maya Cherbo (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 176–177.

‘drills’) designed for women to use their body as a way of connecting to their soul. Stebbins believed esoteric ritualistic physical practices were transformative, and her embodiment practices invited students to achieve ‘*henosis*,’ or union with ‘God,’ i.e. the ‘spirit’ within.

Stebbins was an avid scholar with extensive studies in metaphysics, Christian theology, Greco-Roman mystery religions, and Egyptian and Greek mythology (Ruyter 1988). Stebbins believed in the soul’s inextricable link to the cosmos, and that the “higher and more ethereal powers of mind and soul emanate from the same celestial center” (1892, 10). In a similar vein, 19th century Spiritualists believed that humanity is connected to the soul of the cosmos, and that ‘God’ is omnipotent. As such, psychic revelations came from the cosmos. For metaphysical theorists like Stebbins, this primordial, eternal, and spiritual concept of divine intelligence is the Creator of the universe and the universal creator.

According to a panentheistic and natural theological viewpoint, the ‘cosmic divine’ lives both within nature on earth and in the cosmos.⁷⁹ Therefore, *Nature is God*. In 19th century American mystical occult circles, Spiritualists considered God’s omnipotent creativity to be nature itself, whether celestial or earthly (otherwise known as Christian nature theology). Spiritualists and occultists believed in the continuous interplay between the cosmos, spiritual forces, the soul, human thought and intellect.⁸⁰ For this reason, the soul is seen as being responsible for all essential and vital acts that a human performs. Thus, creative actions and accomplishments represent the moral character and essence of one’s soul.

⁷⁹ Benedikt Paul Göcke, Godehard Brüntrup, Ludwig Jaskolla eds., *Panentheism and Panpsychism: Philosophy of Religion Meets Philosophy of Mind* (Brill, Mentis, 2020). Courtenay Raia, *The New Prometheus: Faith, Science, and the Supernatural Mind in The Victorian Fin De Siecle* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

⁸⁰ Ann Braude, “‘Thine for Agitation,’” in *Radical Spirits, Second Edition: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 56–81. Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato’s Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Daniel Bowlin, “The American phantasmagoria: The rise of spiritualism in nineteenth-century America,” Thesis (Eastern Michigan University, 2019). Amy Lehman, *Victoria Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists, and Mesmerists in Performance* (McFarland and Co., 2009).

Stebbins equates mental aspiration or creative thought with divine essence, or indwelling spirit, positioning both as coming from a greater cosmic origin. She likens the emergence of the soul to the science of evolution and the Genesis narrative to how life on earth began. The expression of the creative spirit thereby corresponds with the cosmos in the Hermetic esoteric axiom ‘As Above, So Below,’ or the macrocosm to microcosm analogy. In a similar manner, Stebbins associates the “bioplasm” with the “psychoplasm” as the brain and body are equally co-dependent and reliant on the soul and mind for physical expression (1892, 11).⁸¹

In continuation of this line of thinking, Stebbins elucidates the interrelationship between emotions and sensation, such as how unconscious responses are linked to certain emotional triggers. On the flip side, she argues that an artist can make purposeful choices related to emotional impulses and use them for creative purposes. Consequently, through training of the artistic mind, “the individual becomes their own master by being able to rightly judge instinct” (1898, 136). In Stebbins’ view, internal instinct can be trained to help guide the creation of art. ‘Divine inspiration,’ in Stebbins’ belief, was a gift from God granting artistic prophetic power.

For Stebbins, physical expression represents the soul’s thoughts. In considering the body’s ability to communicate, dance historian Mark Franko maintains that “early modernist expressivity was nourished by classical expression theory” (1995, 75), in which early modern dancers gave feeling to their movements. He describes early modern dance as expressing the physical corporeality of emotions, inner sensations, and impressions of the soul. This theorization of expressivity is comparable to Delsarte’s Law of Correspondence in which the body, mind, and soul are thought to cooperate in a continuous sympathetic reverberation. Thus, from this cyclical trinity, as Ruyter explains “any thought, intention, psychological state,

⁸¹ *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (Edgar Werner, 1892).

character trait, emotion or ‘spiritual function’ will have a bodily manifestation and, conversely, a gesture, facial expression, voice, carriage, [and/or] physical mannerism [that express] some kind of meaning” (1996, 64). In a similar manner, Stebbins asserts that in the Ancient Greek and Roman era, sculptural art expressed “godlike powers and principles embodied in the human soul” (1902, 422), and in her dance work she embraced these ideals. This call to ancient religious and sacred dance spoke to a desire for pagan abandon and the untamed Dionysian, as a way of validating new dance forms with ancient, sacred ideas (Kendall 1979, 11).

Recent Delsarte / American Delsartism Scholarship

American Delsarte scholarship builds on Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter’s foundational research with dissertations, books, and numerous articles or chapters that make mention of Stebbins’s work. These studies involve American Delsartism in diverse fields of thought including dance history, elocution/rhetoric history, yoga studies, performance studies, gender, feminist, and Somatics studies. French Delsarte scholars Alain Porte and Franck Waille have created integral scholarship with Porte’s publication *Francois Delsarte: Une Anthologie* in 1992, and Waille’s dissertation “Corps, Art, Spiritualite chez Francois Delsarte (1811–1871): Des Interactions Dynamique” from 2009, followed by his publication, *Trois Décennies de Recherche Européenne sur François Delsarte* (2016) that includes several European Delsarte scholars.

Some of my publications establish an educational lineage from Stebbins’ work to the 20th century field of Somatics.⁸² Scholar Ashton Kohl Arnoldy was inspired by my research to write

⁸² Including in my Master of Arts thesis *The Art and Science of Somatics: Theory, History and Scientific Foundations* (2012), 40–47; 51–57. “Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas,” *Currents: Journal of The Body-Mind Centering® Association*, 2016, 16–28. “Somatics herstories: Tracing the educational antecedents of Elsa Gindler, Hade Kallmeyer, and Genevieve Stebbins,” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, Intellect Press UK, 9, no. 2 (2017): 159–178.

“Genevieve Stebbins and the Philosophical Roots of Somatics.”⁸³ In his 2018 dissertation, *From Esotericism to Somatics: A History of Mind-Body Practice Across the Divide of Modernism, 1820s to 1950s*, Matthew Zepelin maintains “Stebbins attained the height of fame available to a teacher of American Delsartism, becoming virtually synonymous with the method and even launching her own system of psycho-physical culture.”⁸⁴ Somatics scholar Maria Meindle contends “Stebbins was known as having created innovative exercises integrating outer movement with inner feeling.”⁸⁵ In her 2007 thesis, Laura Williams Iverson notes that the “history of the system, and its effects on women’s self-cultivation and image building, are still rich and largely untapped research topics.”⁸⁶ Carrie Streeter’s 2023 dissertation, *Wings to Their Heels: Self Expression and Health and the Rise of New Woman*, views Stebbins’ role within American Delsartism (in part) as an effort to reform elocution curricula through the exploration of the dynamic relationship between mind and body.⁸⁷ In Joseph Francis Fahey’s dissertation (Ohio State, 2000), “Americanized Delsarte Culture as Physical and Political Expression: How American Women Shaped Francois Delsarte’s System of Applied Aesthetics into a Progressive Force for Social Reform, Performance, and Professionalism,” he notes that modern theatre historians failed to investigate American Delsartism’s physical training as a system of culture (4). Yet, he argues if one looks beyond the sentimental prose of many Delsartean texts, a cultural force emerges with a progressive vision for society and theatre (6). Fahey situates Delsartism as a national movement that spread as a “gospel of social reform and liberation through physical awareness.” By positioning Delsartean texts within the larger social and political context of the

⁸³ *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 14, no. 1 (2022): 22–33.

⁸⁴ (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 2018), 253.

⁸⁵ “Reading Elsa Gindler: Tracing the Legacy of a Somatics Pioneer” (PhD diss., Centre of Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Toronto, 2022).

⁸⁶ Laura Williams Iverson, “Conscious Home Exercise for Women: Cultivating a New Mind/Body Practice in the Late Nineteenth Century” (Florida State University, 2007).

⁸⁷ PhD diss., in U.S. history, (University of California San Diego, 2023).

late 19th century, Fahey demonstrates how this reform “laid roots for the suffrage movement and feminist movement of the twentieth century” (iii). In a similar manner, I will explore Stebbins’ biography as a background to her established role as a leading American Delsartist to engage with Stebbins’ feminist reformations of aesthetic dance as a theatre art.

Modern Yoga Scholarship

Amongst contemporary yoga scholars, yoga historian Mark Singleton is respected for his research on the transnational development of hatha yoga asana practices in the early 20th century. One aspect of Singleton’s scholarship notes Stebbins’ influence within the overall integration of Euro–American physical culture methods in the development of modern hatha yoga. Singleton created the umbrella term ‘harmonial gymnastics’ to signify Euro–American physical culture methods by likening these methods with Western esoteric spiritual traditions he designates as ‘Harmonial Religion’ with its “spiritual stretching, breathing, and relaxation regimes” as seen in the work of Stebbins, created within a “harmonial religious framework” (2010, 146). The term ‘harmonial’ comes from religious scholar Sydney Alhstrom’s study of 19th century American spiritualist movements. The term was utilized by yoga scholar Elizabeth De Michelis followed by Singleton.⁸⁸ Alhstrom’s term stems from the text *Harmonial Philosophy* (1852) by Andrew Jackson Davis.⁸⁹ Speaking of terminology, it is important to remember that ‘gymnastics’ is not to be confused with our modern conception of the professional sport but rather was a general historical term meaning bodily exercises. To be precise, the actual historical term Stebbins used

⁸⁸ Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism*. London/New York: Continuum, 2004.

⁸⁹ Davis’ *Harmonial Philosophy* text documents revelations he received during psychic trance communications with mystics, peoples from other planets, and other immortal souls. Celestial intelligence told him that God is in all things, spirit is matter, and mystical correspondences were to be found everywhere. Davis’s clairvoyant ‘harmonial philosophy’ readings were a part of a cultural phenomenon in New England beginning in the 1840’s that came to be known as Spiritualism.

for her physical culture exercises was ‘Harmonic Gymnastics’ and never ‘harmonial gymnastics.’ Regardless, Singleton places Stebbins as an important historical figure whose practical body-mind-psyche (embodied) pedagogy was influential within the development of Indian ‘modern’ yogic practices.

Singleton assesses that Stebbins created a system of exercises within a “harmonial religious framework” (2010, 146) but doesn’t explore Stebbins’ methods in a detailed manner. Stebbins, herself, however, describes her philosophy in detail:

The system of culture we bring before you are not play. It is the hard work— the necessary training which will result in a great art, namely, the art of being able to always express the true self; to elevate the soul to its highest aspiration and the mind to express its highest possible plane of thought; and last, but not least, to concentrate the whole vital energy at a moment's notice to any portion of the body for the immediate execution of the behests of the will. It is the art of graceful dynamic presentation of self under all possible circumstances, and an increase of life by increasing the capacity for the reception, storage and utilization of the vital power (1892, 70).⁹⁰

Stebbins continues by explaining that gymnastic exercise is in “rhythmic harmony in every motion; hence, the term “*Harmonic Gymnastics*,” which we have adopted to distinguish our motions from those of the ordinary gymnasium. These exercises should always, wherever possible, be accompanied with music suitable to aid the imagination” (*Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* 1892, 73). Her use of the term “Harmonic Gymnastics” was intended to separate her system of gymnastic exercise from other available physical culture methods.

Singleton found that the “typical transnational Hatha Yoga class of today arguably owes more” to 19th century women’s physical culture practices than to the “hatha yoga systems handed down in the history of India” (2013, 50).⁹¹ Singleton mentions the 19th century Indian scholar

⁹⁰ Genevieve Stebbins, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (Werner’s Publications, 1892).

⁹¹ Mark Singleton, “Transnational Exchange and the Genesis of Modern Postural Yoga,” in *Yoga Traveling. Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, ed. B. Hauser (Springer, Heidelberg, 2013).

Vivekananda who admired American Delsarte body–mind training regimes during his visit to the United States in 1893. Vivekananda described Delsartean physical practices as being akin to philosophical principles in yoga. At this time, Vivekananda shunned traditional Indian bodily practices to create distance from ascetic practices of fakirs who would sit in painful postures for extensive periods of time (Singleton, 2013, 41–42). Yogi Ramacharaka later declared that hatha yoga was nothing new, considering it bore “a close resemblance to the calisthenic exercises and Delsarte movements in favor in the West” (1904: 192; cited in Singleton 2010, 146).⁹² To be more specific, these ‘movements’ were not created by Delsarte, but were innovations created by Stebbins and other American Delsartists in Delsarte’s name some twenty years after his death.

Yoga scholar/historian Magdalena Kraler of the University of Vienna positions Stebbins’ innovative breathing techniques as having directly influencing early ‘modern yoga’ breathing practices.⁹³ After examining *prāṇāyāma* within an ancient South Asian context, Kraler focuses on yogic breathing techniques between 1850 to approximately 1930. She examines the integration of Euro–American psycho–physical culture influences within modern yoga practices. In a manner that seems counterintuitive, as an anti-colonialist initiative within the Hindu reform movement, Indian modern yoga pioneers utilized available international practices in their work. Kraler notes that “Shri Yogendra explicitly cited Stebbins, and quite obviously also employed her concept of psycho-physical culture to explain nothing less than the yoga of Patanjali (2022, 147). Situating Stebbins as a “physical culture occultist,” Kraler established Stebbins contributions to the cosmological framework within modern yoga. Stebbins spoke of inhaling intermediary subtle energies of ether, that she called the “breath of life” which vitally connected

⁹² *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Yoga Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹³ “Yoga Breath: The Reinvention of Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga” (PhD diss., Religious Studies, University of Vienna, 2022).

the body to the cosmos (153). Yoga scholar Anya Foxen also finds (yet in less intensive detail) that Stebbins' breathing practices were not appropriated from Indian yoga, but rather Yogendra adopted and/or copied certain ideas and practices described by Stebbins in her publication *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892), (2020, 240–244). Yogendra's early publications cite Stebbins, but later he removes her name and represents her ideas as his own.

Yoga studies have also taken an interest in early modern dance history because of established links with American Delsartism, Stebbins, and yoga. Yet, there are a few errors in yoga scholarship when it comes to Stebbins. In Kara Miller's dissertation "Reimagining Modern Dance as Transnational Phenomena Through the Lens of Yoga" from University of California, Davis, she asserts that Stebbins was a student of Delsarte, which is misleading as she did not directly study with him, but rather with Delsarte's student Steele MacKaye. Miller falsely claims 1) Stebbins was a teacher of Vedanta, 2) Stebbins' Delsartean training included similar asana and posture work to contemporary yoga class, 3) Stebbins worked with kundalini energy. Miller also states that Stebbins "instructed St. Denis," (2015, 39), which is not true, however, Miller may have been following Singleton who likewise states that Stebbins trained St. Denis (2010, 144). St. Denis is also spoken of in Jennifer Aubrecht's dissertation "Choreographers and Yogis: Untwisting the Politics of Appropriation and Representation in U.S. Concert Dance" (2017, University of California, Riverside) in which she positions St. Denis as drawing from yogic thought and Asian spirituality to "access a different understanding of the self" and to construct "concert dance as universal spiritual expression" (40). She argues that St. Denis needed to access the yogic Eastern 'other' to bridge the body–mind divide found in Christianity. Yet, Aubrecht fails to appreciate the relevance of American Delsartism, and its initial influence on St. Denis as a system connecting body, mind, and psyche. Yoga scholar Anya Foxen argues that Aubrecht

overestimates St. Denis' mastery and understanding of Indian cultural knowledge, stressing that it is far too common for people to see "Yoga!" in any practice that involves the "coupling of mindful breath with movement" (2020, 10). The historical heritage of European breathing practices are much lesser known therefore assumptions about Yoga's exclusivity are common.

Dance historian Jane Desmond notes that St. Denis's integration of practical and spiritual aspects of American Delsartism allowed her to utilize representative bodily choices (poses and attitudes) to create narratives for her performances.⁹⁴ Again, while St. Denis did not directly study with Stebbins, she did own one of her books and her mother was a Delsarte enthusiast. Initially, St. Denis modelled her work after Stebbins but as her career developed, she was certainly inspired by Eastern philosophies and representations of mythical goddesses. Although some of St. Denis's dances were clearly influenced by South Asian dance and inspired by her idea of 'yogis,' her performative work was distinctly American in its appropriative ethos. St. Denis toured in the vaudeville circuit— but not of the "minstrel-show variety" that portrayed exaggerated ethnic caricatures (Desmond 1992, 48). St. Denis intended her work to be reverent. Contemporary scholars rightly situate St. Denis' Orientalist trappings as an 'imagined vision of the East,' such that St. Denis presented herself as a fantasy 'other,' a woman at once sensual and spiritual, sexualized and chaste (Desmond 1992, 42). St. Denis's spiritual exoticism is described by one of her former dancers Jane Sherman as a "compulsive drive toward the divine" that was not entirely 'sacred' but stemmed from her 'showbiz' nature and "purely opportunistic theatricalism." Sherman regards St. Denis's dances not necessarily as a means of 'merging with

⁹⁴ Jane Desmond, "Dancing out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's 'Radha' of 1906." *Signs* 17, no. 1 (1991): 28–49.

the divine,’ but rather due to her innate “Warp of aspiration and the woof of necessity” (326).⁹⁵ Essentially, she marketed her body in a spiritual guise, to present herself as a dance fantasy.

In her study *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga*,⁹⁶ Anya Foxen explores links and connections between American Delsartism, Western esotericism, modern hatha yoga and early modern dancers. Foxen roughly connects the physical practice of yoga with the advent of early American modern dance. Yet there are enormous differences between modern dance and hatha yoga. For one, dance choreography relies on technical dance steps, complex movement patterns in space and across the floor, and such things as dynamic lifts and turns, or intricately coordinated partner work. Yoga is, and has always been, essentially static in that asanas moved ‘on place.’ Yes, movement ‘flows’ from asana to asana, but the body remains stationary on the mat. There is no twirling, spinning, skipping, leaping, grooving, or physical interactions between practitioners in yoga. Yoga is not interpretive art, or intentionally an emotionally expressive movement form. It is a practice integrating breath with movement, for clearing the mind, and if one is so inclined a spiritual uplift can be experienced.

American Modern Dance Hagiography

Within American dance historiography, modern dance pioneer Ted Shawn wrote *Every Little Movement: A Book about Francois Delsarte* (1954, 1963, 1974), in honor of Delsarte’s legacy and to proclaim Delsarte as the ‘Father of American Modern Dance.’ Shawn avidly researched, collected, and gathered as much material on Delsarte as he could for his publication. French dance historian Annie Suquet assesses that his book is a mix of “citations of citations,”

⁹⁵ Jane Sherman, and Christena L. Schlundt, “Who’s St. Denis? What Is She?” *Dance Chronicle* 10, no. 3 (1987): 305–29.

⁹⁶ I co-authored a book review with Magdalena Kraler noting some historical errors Foxen had in her work in *Correspondences, The Journal for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism* 9, no. 1 (2021): 141–147.

that mainly draw from Stebbins' publications without properly crediting or attributing her (2005, intro).⁹⁷ Shawn argues that "for some generations previous to 1900, the dancing in the theater and in the ballet was almost exclusively acrobatic and meaningless, with the advent of Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan, a whole new approach to movement had come into the dance world—that at all times dance should *express something—the movement might be expressive of wind or waves, or have dramatic, emotional, narrative content*" (italics mine, 1954, 10). In Shawn's assessment, women in the late 19th century couldn't possibly have been seen on the stage as dancers, because it wasn't considered ladylike. As he posits, it was not until Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan that dance was revolutionized and freed "from stylized, artificial crystallizations of 19th Century ballet and the meaningless acrobatics of the commercial theater." However, if one considers the popularity of aesthetic dance, Shawn's claim is not true.

It is commonly argued that early modern dance was some sort of revolt against ballet, yet this is a limited viewpoint. For one, there were no American ballet companies to revolt against when Isadora, Ruth St. Denis or Ted Shawn began their work. In fact, American audiences had very little exposure to ballet except for perhaps in the opera. Ballerina Fanny Elssler toured in the United States from 1840–1842, and while she was greatly admired, her work did not inspire the creation of American ballet schools or companies. Dance studios and dancing master's mainly focused on teaching the latest social dances, and while ballet was taught its purpose was as exercise and learning grace and ease of movement and not necessarily for the stage. Anna Pavlova made her first tour to America in 1910 and is credited with introducing Russian ballet to the country. The first ballet company to tour the United States was Les Ballets Russes in 1916,

⁹⁷ *Chaque petit mouvement a propos de Francois Delsarte* (Centre National de la Danse, 2005).

some ten years after St. Denis and 15 years after Duncan began their dance careers. It wasn't until 1933 that the first American ballet company was established, the San Francisco Ballet, after the death of Duncan and the demise of St. Denis's career. While early modern dance was not a revolt against ballet, the creations of Stebbins, St. Denis, Duncan and Shawn were unique.

Ted Shawn argues that "without the principles of Delsarte, we pioneers could not have done our pioneering work, and without our pioneering work American Modern Dance of today would not exist" (1963, 88). Yet, Shawn was clearly aware that Delsarte had little to no connection with dancers, writing

in the most careful search of all sources of information regarding the names of his students for over a period of twenty years, the name of no dancer is found. [...] Delsarte himself, from all his quoted statements, never focused his laws of gesture to the art of Dance. [...] It is only here in America, and after Delsarte's death, that his laws were apprehended and used by dancers to revolutionize the art of dance. (1963, 60–61)

In the 1960s, some fifty years after the popularity of Delsarte in America had faded, Shawn gave lectures and classes on Delsarte at Jacob's Pillow (the summer dance festival he founded in Lee, Massachusetts).⁹⁸ One student, Thomas Leabhart, recalls the Delsarte classes he took with Shawn.⁹⁹ Speaking of the classes, Leabhart writes that "once the basic principles already explained in the lectures had been expanded upon, little remained. By this I mean Shawn presented no physical movements, or exercises" (2005, 10). Shawn explained to the class that it was difficult to know exactly what Delsarte taught and said, "Principles existed but not on the 'level of 'incorporated knowledge' [...] nothing that approached 'technique'" (2005, 10). As

⁹⁸ I greatly enjoyed a summer program at Jacob's Pillow with Mark Morris in 1992.

⁹⁹ Thomas Leabhart, "Misunderstanding Delsarte (and Preserving the Cherries)," in *Essays on Delsarte, Mime Journal*, 23 (Pomona College, 2005), 8–21. With gratitude to Nancy Ruyter for mailing me this book.

such, I have reservations about Shawn's assertions that Delsarte's principles were foundational to the advent of American modern dance.

While Shawn was knowledgeable about Delsartean theory, he did not teach practical Delsarte technique or movement exercises. Therefore, Leabhart describes Delsarte's influence in the creation of American modern dance to be a 'misunderstanding' (2005, 10). Citing and concurring with Nicola Savarese, Leabhart says, "Misunderstanding is fertile. It creates new realities, it is a stimulus toward new inventions, although it is historically incorrect (9). Leabhart continues by explaining Leonard Pronko's concept of "fertile misunderstandings," that look at the evolution of movement practices as interpretive, resulting in modified and amalgamated versions over time of others' work. From one generation to the next, these 'misunderstandings' become compounded. Often, the kernel of truth as to "who" originally created "what" can be quite difficult to determine. Leabhart argues that changes occur in theatrical practices or movement systems, through unintentional forgetfulness, misunderstandings based upon limited information, purposeful distortions, or conscious modifications of systems and concepts (16).

Leabhart argues that Shawn carried his "search for 'pure' Delsarte material to almost obsessive lengths. One might say it was his Holy Grail" (13). In Shawn's hagiographic idealization of Delsarte, he wanted to teach only what was 'original' to Delsarte, and so he omitted Stebbins' exercises. He knew Stebbins' American Delsarte work synthesized various influences, concluding therefore that her exercises were not *original* to Delsarte. So, he did not teach them. As a result, one of America's greatest modern dance pioneers 'Ghosted' Stebbins, leaving her to become a faint and distant memory for other dance scholars to notice.

Shawn did acknowledge that "Genevieve Stebbins had preceded Isadora Duncan in the wearing of "Greek" costume, of appearing barefoot (or with soft sandals) and in demonstrating

the fluid movement of the whole body of successions” (1954, 95). Yet, overlooking Stebbins’ innovations, Shawn misrepresented Stebbins’ *Isis* performance by describing it as a “lecture demonstration” when it was actually a dance performance. Shawn’s dismissal of Stebbins’ influence is evident in his statement that Stebbins “was not a dancer, not even a theatre performer, but a lecturer and teacher only” (79). Although Shawn did compliment Stebbins’ Delsarte book, saying it demonstrates a “woman of genuine erudition and with a cultured mind and real intelligence.” He states that her work “reveals much of what has developed in America under the name of and in honor of Delsarte” (1954, 95–96), but he also downplayed Stebbins’ work by adding that her “exercises are of not much use today.” However, not only are her embodiment and somatic exercises of great use today, furthermore her dance exercises were extremely popular within the aesthetic dance movement at the turn of the 20th century and utilized across the nation by enthusiastic young women. Additionally, Stebbins was known as a celebrated performer, something which Shawn fails to mention. As such, Stebbins’ position within dance historiography has been overshadowed because Shawn did not give Stebbins the credit she deserved for her pioneering work.

It is quite unfathomable that Shawn did not state Stebbins was a dancer, seeing as his wife Ruth St. Denis was an admirer of Stebbins’ performances. Shawn first encountered “Delsarte” through the dances of Ruth St. Denis in Denver in 1911, when he saw her perform three extracts from *Egypta* (Palace Dance, Veil of Isis, and Dance of the Day)—inspired notably “by the presentations and writings of Genevieve Stebbins, American disciple of Delsarte” (Suquet, 2005, 8). St. Denis’ biographer Suzanne Shelton argues Stebbins’ *Isis* dance “reappeared” [eighteen years] later in St. Denis’ dance titled *Egypta*, which was ‘similar’ to Stebbins’ performance including “two scenes called *Dance of Day* and *The Myth of Isis*” (1981, 15). Unfortunately, St.

Denis claimed her dance was inspired by an image of Isis she saw in a poster on the street advertising cigarettes, and not as an homage to Stebbins' earlier work (1939, 51; Shawn 1920, 3). Yet, according to St. Denis' biographer, themes from Stebbins' *Isis* dance were repeated in *Egypta*. French dance historian Annie Suquet also asserts that *Egypta* was inspired "by the presentations and writings of Genevieve Stebbins" (2005, 8). In one scene, *The Mystery of Isis*, St. Denis "with singularly suggestive gesture and movement, voices the life of man and the passing of the soul" ("Ancient Egyptian Rites Seen in Dance," *New York Times*, December 13, 1910, 13). These scenes were found in Stebbins' original creation.

Clearly, Shawn knew of Stebbins, and it's unclear why he did not say that Stebbins was a dancer who inspired St. Denis. Furthermore, Shawn claims that Duncan was the "first to introduce Greek dancing" (1920, 88).¹⁰⁰ Yet, preceding Duncan, in 1889 Stebbins "executed a Greek dance studied from the friezes,"¹⁰¹ and was repeatedly reported as performing 'Greek' inspired dances. By the time Duncan arrived in New York City in 1898, *a decade later* as a novice, she gave revivals of "ancient Greek terpsichorean diversions" [reminiscent of Stebbins' signature style] for "church entertainments, teas, and affairs of that kind" (*New York Times*, November 8, 1903, 36). Duncan would have been aware of Stebbins' professional reputation, as she was acclaimed in the press and admired in the theatre community to the extent that there were often few vacant seats in the theater ("Entertained by Miss Stebbins," *New York Times*, November 26, 1892, 9). Stebbins was described not only as a dancer but also as a genius, "roughly defined as having ideas others do not have."¹⁰² Stebbins "danced as the Greeks danced- [...] More pretty girls and fashionably attired women than the Madison Square Theatre was ever

¹⁰⁰ Ted Shawn, *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet, being a History of her Oriental Dances* (Printed for John Howell by John Henry Nash, 1920).

¹⁰¹ "The Delsarte Matinee," *New York Times*, February 13, 1889, 4.

¹⁰² Wilbur in *Werner's*, February 1891, 30.

intended on any one occasion to accommodate, held their breath in a transport of delight” to watch her perform.¹⁰³ This evidence of Stebbins’ solo dance performances both supports and challenges scholarly assessments about her influence on Duncan.

While Duncan herself “acknowledged no antecedents or peers” (1927, xvi), dance historian Deborah Jowitt argues there were “enough similarities between Mrs. Stebbins ideas and the ones Duncan later expressed” and between Stebbins’ choreography and “exercises later taught in Duncan’s schools” to suggest that Isadora [and her sister Elizabeth] incorporated Stebbins’ work (1985–86, 24).¹⁰⁴ The details of Stebbins’ early solo dances offer compelling corroboration of Jowitt’s argument. Abundant evidence about Stebbins’ career negates Shawn’s characterization of Stebbins’ work. She clearly did more than simply teach and deliver lectures.

Stebbins brought an unprecedented new style of physical expression to the stage including artistic statue posing and dances. Stebbins’ poses were said to “dissolve and reappear before our eyes.”¹⁰⁵ Fifteen years later Ruth St. Denis’ dance piece *Radha* was described in a similar manner to Stebbins’ as having a “slow, rhythmic succession of graduated movements that never jerk to extremes but rather melt into each other by easy transition [...] every part of the body cooperates with every other part, and one posture dissolves into another almost imperceptibly.”¹⁰⁶ In the article, St. Denis speaks of ‘Delsarte’ as being the foundation for expressive dance, without crediting Stebbins. Shawn writes that St. Denis was merely posing and not dancing in *Radha* (1920, 50) sharing a 1918 newspaper article describing St. Denis’ work as a “series of plastic postures” (1920, 83). Shawn states “some of her presentations were less

¹⁰³ *New York World* in *Werner’s*, December 1893, 445.

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Jowitt, “Images of Isadora: The Search for Motion,” *Dance Research Journal* 17 no. 2, 18 no.1 (1985–86): 21–29. *Time and the Dancing Image* (University of California Press, 1989): 80.

¹⁰⁵ *Werner’s*, February 1891, 445; Ruyter 1979, 23.

¹⁰⁶ “Bringing Temple Dances from the Orient to Broadway,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1906, 44.

dances than a series of poses” (96). St. Denis’ biographer Suzanne Shelton proclaims Stebbins is “forgotten by dance historians today, she deserves credit as a forerunner of modern dance in America” (1981, 14), and concluded “Stebbins, or in broader terms ‘Delsarte’ was the source of St. Denis’ dance technique and, by inheritance, that of her successors.” Dance historian Deborah Jowitt additionally remarked “Delsarte had given a public framework in which to consider new forms of dance. Isadora stretched that framework” (1989, 81). While Jowitt’s recognition of Duncan’s predecessors is significant, it is important to clarify that Delsarte was neither a dancer nor a choreographer. With that said, Jowitt found a description of Isadora Duncan dancing in 1898 that she said sounded “almost as if she were doing the kind of narrative ‘plastique’s’ Stebbins had performed: Dressed in a simple white frock, Miss Duncan took up a series of graceful poses but passed from one to another so rapidly that the succession of postures resolved itself into a dance” (1989, 82). Therefore, Jowitt notes Stebbins’ influence.

In a similar vein to St. Denis having been inspired by Stebbins’ *Isis* performance, Duncan changed from her first name to take her middle name, ‘Isadora,’ in honor of Isis. She wrote to one of her lovers Gordon Craig, “I am called Isadora. That means Child of Isis— or *Gift* of Isis. Isis is the Goddess of Birth— Isis will always protect me because I have her name (1974, 56).¹⁰⁷ In 1899, Duncan performed poses for a reading of the *Rubaiyat* at the Lyceum Theatre. The *Rubaiyat* with descriptive pantomimic gestures alongside words from the poem was later published by Stebbins.¹⁰⁸ In a critique, the *New York Times* reported, “As someone well said, Miss Duncan’s posturing is more expressive of her own lines than of those of Omar Khayyam” (“What Is Doing in Society,” March 19, 1899), in essence stating that Duncan did not interpret

¹⁰⁷ “*Your Isadora*,” *The Love Story of Isadora Duncan & Gordon Craig, Told Through Letters and ~Diaries Never Before Published*. Edited with connecting text by Francis Steegmuller (Random House, 1974).

¹⁰⁸ *The Rubaiyat, A Pantomime*. (Edgar Werner, 1903).

the poem. Elizabeth Kendall also observes in *Where She Danced the Birth of American Art-Dance*, that Duncan “became a salon soloist in the order of Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins” (1984, 63). Unfortunately recent scholars such as Carrie Preston claimed that Duncan’s dancing in a legitimate theatre was unprecedented” (2011, 145), and remarkably, in the 2010 book *Ancient Dancers in the Modern World*, there is only one mention of Stebbins, whereas Isadora Duncan is acknowledged over 100 times, underscoring the pattern of eclipsing Stebbins’ career.¹⁰⁹

Dance scholar Mark Franko describes Duncan as “resembling the Delsartism” of Stebbins, when Stebbins staged ‘power in reserve’” in her artistic statue posing performances (1995, 11). In her ‘artistic’ posing, Stebbins wasn’t overtly pantomimic with distinct facial expressions or theatrical gestures, rather her movements were more intangible. Franko describes that “expressive posing allowed for conveying thoughts and feelings [while] artistic statue posing maintained beauty of form and proportion but without expression” (11). In her artistic statue posing performances Stebbins molded herself into arrested states of motion, much in the same way that Greek statues portray active physical engagement frozen in marble. She would smoothly transition from one character to another, presenting well-known figures such as Ceres, Apollo or the Fighting Gladiator.

In conversation with dance historians Selma Odom and Nancy Ruyter, Mark Franko shares insights he gained discussing the American Delsarte movement and its influence on Duncan. Citing Ruyter, Franko states that “much of what was considered original to Duncan actually stems from American Delsartism” (1995, 150). It is widely known that when early American modern dance history is simplified and grossly generalized, the mythic stature of Duncan and St.

¹⁰⁹ Carrie Preston, *Modernism’s Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (Oxford University Press, 2011). Fiona Macintosh, ed., *Ancient Dancers in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Denis loom large. Dance historian Mark Franko contends that generalizations, such as ‘when modernism began in dance,’ the “concerns of history and theory become partisan debates” (1995, 49). Some argue modern dance began in the 1920s, 1930s, or in the 1960s. Franko finds a “modernist spirit of historical modern dance” (i) and stresses that each era had a “modernist moment” (40). To challenge the assumption of historical dance events being viewed as continuous linear progress, Franko attests that dance productions can be evaluated “in the light of [their] own artistic, cultural, and political contexts” (40). Franko therefore situates dance as existing within “tautological contextualizations,” in that the idea of when ‘modern dance’ began has been argued contradictorily by different scholars, yet each argument can be determined to have some truth to it. Certainly ‘what is modern dance’ and ‘when American modern dance began’ is, to some degree, in the eye of the beholder.

It is important to look at all historical sources with a skeptical but not cynical eye, to ascertain if an author leans towards a hagiographic idealization of a subject. Dance scholars Karen Eliot and Melanie Bales argue in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies* (2013), that dancers often lack core disciplinary knowledge in dance history, while other art forms such as art, music and theater rely on their own ‘histories’. Eliot and Bales therefore encourage scholarship using dance-centered methodologies such as case studies, use of primary resources, and an ability to “rely on skills developed through critical, informed observation of movement” (2013, 3). I do not desire to create a hagiographic origin story for the birth of American modern dance by arguing who was “first” at creating something or the other, yet with that said, my ambition nonetheless is to explore how Stebbins utilized available aesthetic dance methods to generate a unique genre of solo dance performance for which she has been largely overlooked. Historian John Chapman argues, as have many others, that history is not exponential

growth per se, as often certain phenomena emerge and die, only to arise another day. As Lincoln Kirsten said “Novelty is not essentially new. It is a final definition of some of the elements in the world of ideas, always ready for a new assemblage” (cited in Chapman, 1979–80, 266).¹¹⁰

Establishing ‘firsts’ is not entirely important– as once one looks deep enough, variations on the theme will usually be discovered. In essence, all starting points are arbitrary. Yet, within the long stretch of history, it is necessary to simplify and generalize while at the same time trying not to ignore the particulars of what makes something significant.

At the end of her 1999 book, Ruyter acknowledges that her work was “just a beginning, a foundation for much more that need[s] to be investigated.” Ruyter expressed to me a “great desire that other researchers would pursue the many questions and issues that she covers (email 2019). By situating Stebbins as an educator in the expressive arts, I hope to provide insight into a uniquely American tradition of bodily education and aesthetic dance. To conclude, interestingly, the modern use of the term “Catching the Ghost” describes a dancer caught between conscious action and pure flow in improvisational movements as the dancer is swept up into the music and the moment. The term emerged from contemporary ‘house dance’ culture taking place in after-hours dance clubs.¹¹¹ I would think that Stebbins was searching for such experiences in her aesthetic dance creations, to achieve a sense of ‘henosis’ or a mystical sense of being at one, inner and outer extending into space in a transitory moment in time trying to ‘Catch the Ghost.’

¹¹⁰ John Chapman, “Aesthetic Interpretation,” *Dance Chronicle* 3, no. 3 (1979–80): 254–274.

¹¹¹ Christian Kronsted, “Catching the Ghost: House Dance and Improvisational Mastery,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 19 (2021): np. As a former ‘house dancer’ over a decade in the 1990s to early 2000s at Club Stereo in Montreal, I can attest to how house music from specially designed speakers on the dance floor moves the body and spirit of dancers as they connect energetically. Dancing for hours on end, five hours or more, produces ecstatic states akin to spiritual experiences.

The Golden Gate: California Life in the Emerging City of San Francisco

& Stebbins' Family Genealogy

During the California Gold Rush, Henrietta Smith and James Cole Stebbins had their first child, a daughter, Genevieve Lee Stebbins, on March 7, 1857, in San Francisco. As described in the introduction, there is no archive dedicated to Genevieve Stebbins, no known letters or correspondences, no diaries, or personal items to analyze. Therefore, it is not possible to create a standard critical biography of her life. As a result, this chapter draws from multiple, diverse sources to create as nuanced a picture as is possible of Genevieve Stebbins' heritage and upbringing. Using primary historical texts and contemporary scholarship, I examine the cultural environment and social influences that impacted Stebbins' childhood. While her career as an elocutionist has been examined by several scholars over the last 30 years,¹¹² there is little known about Stebbins' upbringing, family genealogy, or theatrical stage experience. This chapter evolves in four sections covering Stebbins' maternal and paternal genealogy, Alta California, Gold Rush-era San Francisco, the arrival of Stebbins' mother Henrietta, the new State of California and State of the Union. This chapter aims to provide background context for the new

¹¹² Paige V. Banaji, "Womanly Eloquence and Rhetorical Bodies: Regendering the Public Speaker through Physical Culture," in *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak*, ed. David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs (Routledge, 2013), 154–176. Suzanne Bordelon, "Embodied Ethos and Rhetorical Accretion: Genevieve Stebbins and the Delsarte System of Expression," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2016): 105–130. Suzanne Bordelon, "Female Embodiment, Contradiction, and Ethos Negotiations in Genevieve Stebbins' Late Nineteenth-Century Statue posing Arguments," *Rhetoric Review* 38, no. 1 (2019): 23–38. Jane Donawerth, *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900: An Anthology* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). Paul Edwards, "Unstoried: Teaching Literature in the Age of Performance Studies," *The Theatre Annual* 52 (1999). Lisa Kay Suter, "The American Delsarte Movement and the New Elocution" (PhD diss., Miami University, 2009). Lisa Kay Suter, "The Arguments They Wore: The Role of the Neoclassical Toga in American Delsartism," in *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak*, ed. David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, (Routledge, 2013), 13–153. Paige M Van Osdol, "The Women's Elocution Movement in America, 1870–1915" (PhD. diss., The Ohio State University, 2012).

city of San Francisco, where Stebbins' parents chose to make their home and where Stebbins was raised. The following chapter will chronicle her emerging career as an actress, but firstly, I will position Stebbins in relation to her family genealogy. In the map I created for Stebbins' family lineage, missing links remain. However, it provides an idea of her extensive family heritage. Genevieve 'Lee' Stebbins can be considered an American 'blue blood,' from a high-status family with a traceable genealogical lineage. Stebbins' aunt Louise Clapp wrote that Stebbins was

descended on one side from a long line of Amherst professors who devoted themselves mostly to theology, [and as such] she might be claimed by the Brahmin caste of New England's scholars [...] were the fact not offset by her descent on the other side from the famous Gideon Lee, a name renown in its day of wealth and fashion [...] Brought thus within close ties of consanguinity [blood relation] with such names as Julia Ward Howe, Genevieve Ward, among others, it was not remarkable that Miss Stebbins should enjoy some heritage of genius" (*Werner's Directory L.A.C.* 1887, 289).

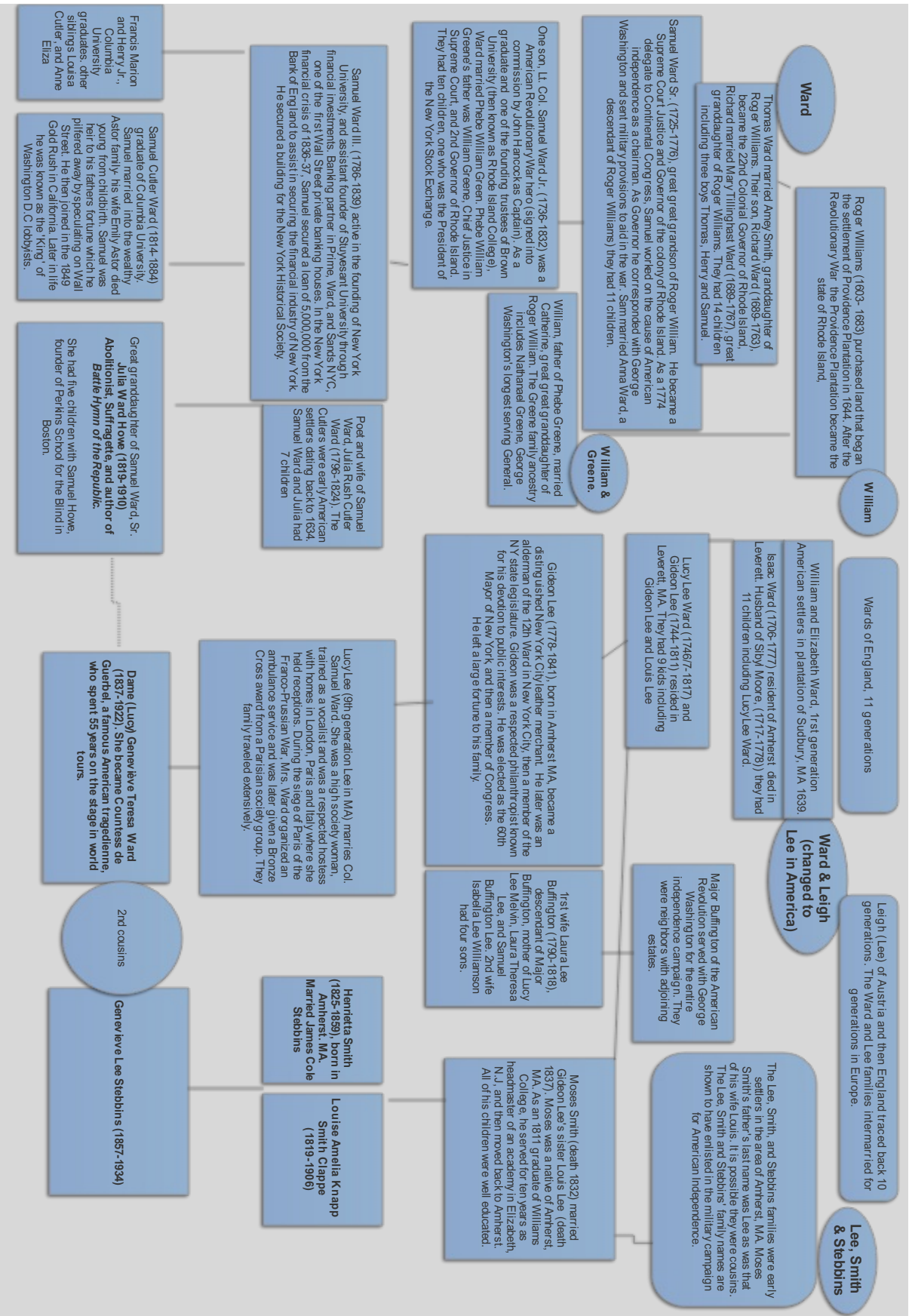
The "Boston Brahmins" was a term coined by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. in 1860 for elite wealthy families descended from early colonists. He likened these elites to the privileged Brahmin caste in India. The map I created on the upcoming page demonstrates how Stebbins is related to Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910). The lyrics for the American anthem, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* (1862), were written by Howe in honor of radical militant abolitionist John Brown during the Civil War. Her lyrics were published as a poem in *The Atlantic*. She wrote the lyrics after hearing Union Soldiers chanting the marching song 'John Brown's Body.' Remarkably, Dr. Martin Luther King's last words in public were from the Battle Hymn song. The song proclaims, "Let us Die to Make Men Free" (for soldiers to fight for the end of slavery), with the chorus "Glory, Glory, Halleluia!" Howe was an ardent suffragist, abolitionist, and the President of the American Association for the Advancement of Women.

The Ward home in New York City where she grew up was known as "The Corner" as it took up the whole corner of Bond Street and Broadway. Julia's brother, Samuel Ward, was

married to Emily Astor (of the famous Astor family). Established families in Europe and America had a long tradition of intermarriage. This allowed for passing on estate inheritance, maintaining family wealth by ‘good’ matches, and upholding the heritage of family names. For example, Genevieve ‘Lee’ Stebbins’ middle name comes from the families of Lee (formerly Leigh) and Ward intermarrying for generations in Europe (between England and Austria) prior to their arrival in Colonial America in the 17th century. The Lee (Leigh) family can be traced back 10 generations in Austria. The Ward family genealogy book of 1851, traces their family name to the year 700 in Denmark, although these claims may be of varying reliability.¹¹³

The American Lee and Ward families were considered an elite family, in the sense of *noblesse oblige*, meaning that with family wealth and power came the expectation of civic responsibility. Career choices for men were meant to lead them to the top of their field as leaders in their town, city, state, etc. Women managed the social life of the family, organized social events, and fundraising activities for the less fortunate through church functions or women’s club events. *Noblesse oblige* families valued the integrity of being well educated, hardworking, and acting with honor. Anything less would bring disgrace to the family name.

¹¹³ Genevieve Ward’s biography states that Leigh Baron accompanied William the Conqueror from Normandy in the conquest of England in 1006, and “from that period to the present, the Wards and Leighs have intermarried” with a notable portion in “positions of responsibility and public trust” (1881, 3). A Ward family member went to Europe and spent time investigating the family ancestry.



Genevieve Lee Stebbins' parents were New England stock going back seven generations. Her father James Cole Stebbins (1820–1889) was born in Oneida, New York as a descendent of British settlers. The *Stebbins Genealogy* book of 1904 situates him as “unidentified” in the family lineage, and neither his parent nor his siblings are noted, while Genevieve has a page dedicated to her career success (Greenlee 1904, 1100). I found that James Cole Stebbins was the first-born child of Jabez Stebbins and Davidella Cole's (listing #2236 of Clement Minor ancestry), eight children. James Stebbins' grandparents (Jabez Stebbins and Lucinda Stebbins) were born in New London, Connecticut and relocated to the Oneida region in New York. His great grandparents (Jabez Stebbins and Sarah Turner), second great-grandparents (Christopher Stebbins and Abigail Allen), and third great-grandparents (John Stebbins III and Phebe Minor) were all from New London. His third great-grandmother, Phebe Minor, was the daughter of Clement Minor (1639–1700) whose family ancestry lineage goes back many generations.

Clement Minor was the son of Thomas Minor, a British man who landed in Salem, MA in 1630 and moved to Charleston (Boston). He and his wife then moved to Hingham, in the greater Boston area, where Clement, their second child, was born. The Minor family moved to Connecticut and bought land in New London County where they became ‘founders’ of Stonington, CT (there is a founder monument in town dedicated to Thomas Minor). He and his sons fought against Wampanoag Indigenous warriors in the 1670s. Many New Englanders fought alongside Indigenous allies and against Indigenous adversaries in King Phillip's War over land and new territorial boundaries. James Cole Stebbins, Genevieve's father was an 8th generation Thomas Minor descendant, thereby making Genevieve Stebbins 9th generation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ According to the Thomas Minor Society, tmsociety.org-Clement.

For white middle to upper class American families of the mid 19th century it was traditional to use a mother's maiden name as a middle name in honor of maternal lineage, or to use a grandparent's surname as a middle name as a matter of family pride. The "Lee" in Genevieve Lee Stebbins, comes from her maternal grandmother, Lois Ward Lee Smith (1787–1837, buried in Amherst, MA). The Lee surname was "widely and favorably known in the United States, synonymous with enterprise, prosperity, and clean repute" (Gustafson 1882, 3).¹¹⁵ Stebbins' grandmother Lois Ward Lee Smith was the sister of Gideon Lee (1778–1841),¹¹⁶ a wealthy merchant, philanthropist, 60th mayor of New York City and member of Congress (Ward 1851, 80).¹¹⁷ Gideon Lee's first wife was Laura Lee Buffington, daughter of Major Samuel Buffington who served in the Independence campaign with George Washington (Lee 1888, 286). They were neighbors with adjoining estates. Gideon Lee's second wife was Isabelle Lee Williamson, and their children were first cousins with Stebbins' mother Henrietta.

Stebbins' maternal great-grandparents were Gideon Lee Sr. (1747–1811) and Lucy Ward Lee (1746–1817), a "prosperous family" of Leverett, Massachusetts (Marytn 1925, 140).¹¹⁸ Stebbins's great-great grandparents were Isaac Ward (1706–1777), resident of Leverett, MA, and Sibyl Moore. They had 11 children including Lucy Ward (Lee) who descends from William and Elizabeth Ward, first generation American settlers of Sudbury, MA est. in 1639. Genevieve's

¹¹⁵ Zadel Barnes Gustafon, *Genevieve Ward: a biographical sketch from original material derived from her family and friends* (Boston James Osgood and Company, 1882), archive.org.

¹¹⁶ Gideon Lee (p. 731) is included in *A Biographical Dictionary: Comprising a Summary Account of the Lives of the Most Distinguished Persons of All Ages, Nations, and Professions* (13th edition Philadelphia, H. Cowperth Wait and Co. 1859). Gideon Lee made his wealth in the tannery area of NYC where he became a leather dealer. Later he partnered with Shepard Knapp and became President of the Mechanics Bank. He lived on Bond Street in a marble front home in what was then the fashionable area of town. In 1822 he was a member of the state legislature, 1833 Mayor of NYC, then 1836 a member of Congress. He left a large fortune to his family. *The Old Merchants of New York City* (259–260).

¹¹⁷ Andrew Ward, *Ward family, descendants of William Ward, who settled in Sudbury, Massachusetts, in 1639* (S.G. Drake, 1851).

¹¹⁸ For more on the family see Louise H. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts, Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*, II (1879), 732.

maternal grandmother, Lois Ward Lee Smith, was a fifth generation descendent of the William Ward family. In more than 10,000 descendants on the Ward side of her family tree, Genevieve is 7th generation. William Ward came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in one of 17 ships. In the Ward family lineage is General Artemus Ward, first commander in chief for George Washington in the American Revolution.¹¹⁹ Stebbins' grandmother Lois Ward Lee Smith is listed in the William Ward family genealogy (#1081), as is her husband Moses Smith, but only three of their children are listed. Their first-born child Louise Amelia is not listed, nor is Henrietta (Genevieve's mother) or her other sisters.¹²⁰

On Genevieve's grandfather Moses Smith's side of the family, her second-great grandmother was Sarah Lee Smith (1754–1816) married to Noadiah Smith (1751–1799) a farmer from Amherst, MA. Sarah Lee (5th generation) was the daughter of Abner Lee a farmer from Concord, MA (1714–1781). In a family genealogy book, Abner Lee (4th) was a son of Henry Lee who was born in Ipswich (1686) and died in Boston (1745). Henry (3rd generation) was one of the earliest settlers of Worcester, MA and he held offices of “honor and trust” (129).

Henry descended from John Lee of Ipswich, MA (1600–1671). John Lee's first recorded historical account is from April 1, 1634. Apparently, he was punished for calling his neighbor a “false-hearted knave.” He was whipped, although others in the town said he stated the truth, but perhaps it “should have remained unspoken” (*Mass. Col. Records* 62).¹²¹ He was a bit of a troublemaker, as he also was found to be “pretending love in the way of marriage when he himself professes he intended none” (69). His punishment was to be forced to listen to an elder

¹¹⁹ wardhouse.harvard.edu

¹²⁰ Charles Martyn, *William Ward Genealogy: The History of the Descendants of William Ward of Sudbury, MA 1638–1925* (Published by Artemus Ward of the seventh generation, 1925).

¹²¹ *John Leigh of Agawan [Ipswich] Massachusetts, 1634–1671; and his descendants of the name of Lee* (Compiled by William Lee, Albany, NY, Joel Munsells Sons, 1888).

widow read the bible to him. He became so annoyed he stole the bible from her and was again punished (70). He had a house and farm on Heartbreak Hill.

Genevieve's third-great grandfather was Moses Smith (1706–1781), fourth-great grandfather Ichabod Smith (1675–1746), and fifth-great grandfather Lieutenant Philip Aaron Smith (1632–1685) of Hadley, Massachusetts. Philip was a representative to the Assembly of the Colony. Genevieve's sixth-great grandfather Lieutenant Samuel Smith (1602–1680) of Suffolk, England, is listed in *Colonial Families of the USA, 1607–1775*. His wife and four children sailed on a barque to Massachusetts from England in 1634. He served in the military and was one of the founders of Hadley, Massachusetts in the vicinity of Amherst, where he is buried. Genevieve Stebbins' mother's first cousin was Lucy Lee Ward, a respected society women who was married to Colonel Samuel Ward. They had homes in London, Paris, and Rome. Lucy Lee Ward's daughter, Genevieve Ward (1837–1922), was Genevieve Stebbins' 2nd cousin, who was also known as the Countess de Guerbel, and as a great actress. Genevieve Ward was an opera singer turned tragedienne who spent 55 years traveling the world's stages. She was the first American actress granted the honor of Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire by the royal family.¹²² Genevieve Ward's name is often written with the French accent è; however, many historical sources print her name without it, and it is more likely that her name is the English version of Genevieve and not the French. Furthermore, it is likely that Genevieve Stebbins was named in honour of her second cousin.

¹²² *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, compiled by Robert Somerville Radford, (J.T. White Company 9 1899), 57.



Fig. 3. Genevieve Ward, as Queen Katherine in Henry VIII, front page of *Pictorial World*. Fig. 4. Napoleon Sarony photograph, Union Square. Fig. 5. National Portrait Gallery, London, photographer Herbert Rose Barraud.

Alta California and The Emergence of San Francisco as a New Cosmopolitan City

Seven years before Genevieve Stebbins' birth, her mother Henrietta Smith arrived in San Francisco on January 11, 1850. Her entry into port marked eleven days late of 'officially' garnering the title of a "Forty-Niner," the name coined for the first gold rush arrivals of 1849. Thereafter, San Francisco Bay's golden gates were open to thousands of newcomers who made the voyage in the hopes of striking it rich. From San Francisco Bay along the coast to the south, there were scattered remnants of twenty-one former Spanish missionary settlements (with military fort outposts) that created a connective trail from San Francisco to Sonoma. Beginning in 1769, missionaries and the Spanish military irrevocably altered the Indigenous population by enforcing religious conversions, participation in agricultural labour, and/or systematically killing those who did not acquiesce.

The Spanish benefitted from Indigenous labour as they built ranches, cleared land and farmed them. Runaways would be captured by Spanish soldiers and returned (Castillo 2019, 7).

The introduction of foreign diseases, for which the Indigenous population had no immunity or cure, cannot be underestimated as it is thought that nearly a third of local tribes died, depleting the Miwok, Pomo, Wappo, Kumeyaay, and centrally located Yokuts, Wintun, and Maidu Indians.¹²³ Additionally, the Spanish brought sheep, horses and cattle that changed the landscape, disrupting Indigenous hunting grounds, and plant habitat. While some Indigenous individuals adapted to living amongst the Californios, other groups relocated to avoid violent interactions with Spanish government agents. An Indigenous Chief of the Colma Nissenan warned a former Mexican government official that the “yellow metal he so eagerly sought ‘belonged to a demon who devoured all who searched for it’” (Castillo and Man 1999, ix).¹²⁴ This prophecy proved all to true for many, with the most appalling impact inflicted upon the Indigenous population.

Prior to the state of California being established in September 1850, the Mexican region of ‘Alta California’ was controlled by Roman Catholic, Spanish-speaking ranch owners. San Francisco emigrants arrived to meet established Californio families, who were of mixed Spanish, Mexican, and Indigenous heritage. Californios managed large *ranchos* with cattle, horses, sheep, orchards, gardens, and vineyards. These were regularly raided by Indigenous tribes. Ranches produced goods for the voluminous Spanish trade route bound for the East Coast of the United States, Japan, and China, exchanging such things as fine leather goods and tallow. Ship trade routes established during the Spanish empire transported an array of Asian luxury items including silks, fine furniture, Chinese porcelain, silver, gold, tobacco, spices, and sugar via their Spanish headquarters in Manilla, Philippines. Goods were shipped to Acapulco, Mexico (New

¹²³ Edward Castillo, “California Indian History,” *California Native American Heritage Commission* June 2019. Robert Hitchcock and Charles Flowerday, “Ishi and the California Indian Genocide as Developmental Mass Violence,” *Humbolt Journal of Social Relations* 42 (2020): 69–85. John Mack Faragher, “A White Republic,” *California*, Yale University Press (2022): 178–; State of California Native American Commission, Web.

¹²⁴ Edward Castillo and A. Cahuila Man, *Exterminate Them: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape and Slavery of Native Americans During the California Gold Rush, 1848–1868*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyers (Michigan University Press, 1999).

Spain) where merchants transferred products north or south to Spanish ports in Peru, Chile, Argentina, then around Cape Horn to the Portuguese colonial city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, before sailing to the East Coast of the United States and finally on to Spain. These established ocean routes remained in use by gold rush voyagers even after Latin American and South American colonial territories gained independence from Spain.

In 1845, according to early settlers, barely 150 people inhabited ‘Yerba Buena’ (the prior name for San Francisco) (Parker 1852–1853, 4). The Mexican American war ended in 1847 with a truce, which established a new border between the U.S. and Mexico, and vast Spanish territories were handed over to the United States. When gold was first found in 1848, there were roughly 1000 residents in San Francisco and the bay was still cluttered with military ships from the war. Gold rush forty-niners travelled to California on sailing ships which was an expensive choice, but the most expedient. Those with less financial means travelled by horse and wagon with family provisions and walked over land in the search of a prosperous future.

Gold Rush Arrival of Genevieve Stebbins’ Mother, Henrietta Smith

By 1849, San Francisco had become the “mercantile headquarters of the West” with the largest port in America after New Orleans, New York, and Boston.¹²⁵ Genevieve Stebbins’ mother, Henrietta Smith, travelled to San Francisco in 1849 from New York with her sisters Isabella Smith, Louise Amelia Knapp (Smith) Clapp, her husband Dr. Fayette Clapp, and his brother Alfred Clapp.¹²⁶ Isabella and Henrietta were unmarried. The first gold rush ships into San

¹²⁵ William Issel and Robert Chemy, *San Francisco, 1865–1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (University of California Press, 1986), 14–15.

¹²⁶ Smith-Barazini found the *Manilla* ship file in the San Francisco Maritime National Park Library and compared it to a letter written to Isabella c/o Alfred Clappe and the ship *Manilla* that was delivered to San Francisco (1999, 240). Another source incorrectly claims it was his Uncle Sylvanus Clappe, (Lawrence 2006, 64), while another states that Sylvanus Clapp was a cousin and brother and law to Fayette who had trained him as a doctor (Paul 1964).

Francisco Bay were from the northeastern states and international locales, as word spread about the discovery of gold via international ship travel routes. Tried-and-true ports around South America hosted gold rush voyagers. Some of the early crews of northeast coast ships were tightly organized companies, and passengers were selected with care, including doctors and lawyers and those of ‘good character.’¹²⁷ From 1849–1850, the incoming flood of arrivals into San Francisco Bay were mainly male east coast Americans, Germans, Irish, and others of unidentified foreign locations. Of over 2,000 ships, 736 were foreign arrivals (Parker, 1852–1853, 13).¹²⁸

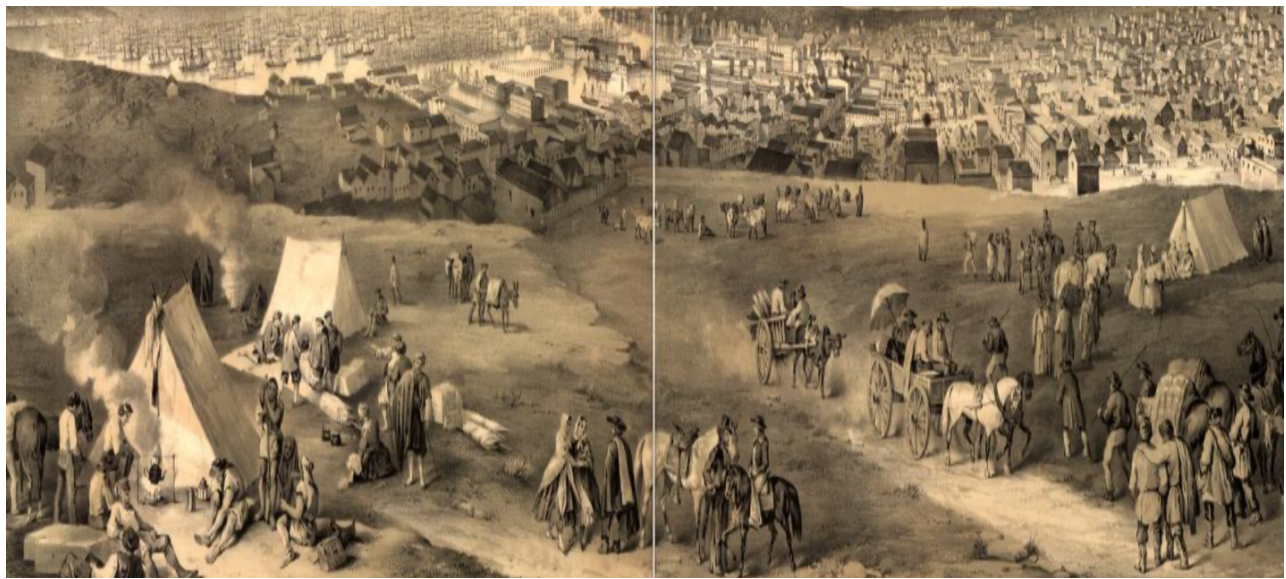


Fig. 6. April 1851, View of San Francisco, Taken from the Western Hill at the foot of Telegraph Hill, looking toward Rincon Point and Mission Valley / drawn from nature by Henry Bainbridge and Geo. W. Casilear; lith. of Sarony & Major. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/98508581/>

The Smith sisters and Clapp brothers travelled aboard the merchant ship *Manilla* (Lawrence, 1922, xviii).¹²⁹ Clearing New York’s Port Authority on August 10, 1849, they commenced their five-month sea journey. According to scholar Marlene Smith-Barazini, the *Manilla* was a 540-ton merchant sailing ship loaded with building supplies for planned

¹²⁷ Commentary by Captain Baker, *Argonauts of Forty-Nine: Journal of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Company* (David Rohrer Leeper, Library of Congress, 1894).

¹²⁸ *San Francisco Business Directory 1852–1853*, ed. James Parker, Monson, Haswell & Co.

¹²⁹ Sandra Lockhart Legacy Profile *Legacy* no. 2 (Penn State University, 1991): 43.

construction projects in San Francisco. The ship had fifty thousand boards of lumber, fifteen thousand cedar shingles, forty thousand bricks, and one hundred barrels of cement. There were five unnamed passengers on board, and no crew logs have been found.¹³⁰ The journey the *Manilla* took ran around South America's Cape Horn which was notorious for being an arduous route with tempestuous storms, possible hurricanes, shifting currents, extreme cold fronts, and seething enormous waves. Unfortunately, during the Smith sisters' journey, Isabella Smith died and was buried at sea. Henrietta and Louise were certainly devastated by the loss of their sister.

It was quite unusual for three sisters to have decided to travel to San Francisco at this early date. Very few unmarried women dared to embark on a five-month epic sea journey. However, the Smith sisters were independent of parental authority, and as such, could make their own decisions. Louise was the oldest in a family of seven (3 boys and 4 girls). The siblings lost their parents in their youth and were provided for with an inheritance. As such, the sisters were financially able to travel an expensive ocean route. During the oceanic journey around South America, gold-rush voyagers docked to replenish food and water supplies in the colonial ports of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Montevideo, Uruguay or Buenos Aires, Argentina before travelling around Cape Horn to sail north to dock in either Santiago, Chile, Valparaíso, Lima, or Acapulco, Mexico. The ship *Manilla* (that the Smith sisters arrived on) landed in San Francisco on January 11, 1850.

When Stebbins' mother Henrietta Smith and aunt Louise Smith Clapp arrived, the population in San Francisco was 90% male with between 2,500–5,000 inhabitants in the city.¹³¹ Most new arrivals headed north to the gold mines as quickly as possible to work. Ship mates who

¹³⁰ Marlene Smith-Barazini, "Weaving a Different World: Women and the California Gold Rush," *Out of the Shadows: Louise Clappe's Life and Early California Writing* 78, no. 4 (1999): 238–61.

¹³¹ Charles Kimball, 1850, cited in 1856–1857 *San Francisco Directory*, xv–xvi.

didn't return to their ships were readily hunted down to commit to their return journey, if they could be found. When the Smiths and Clapp's arrived in San Francisco in January of 1850, there wasn't a housing infrastructure prepared for such a large flux of arrivals. Few hotels existed at the time, although there were eating halls with room and board, and other sorts of temporary housing. Many arrivals slept in canvas covered, wood-framed tents. Canvas tents were built from the canvas of ship sails salvaged from abandoned ships in the bay. Others slept out in the open air as they awaited alternate housing and arranged for transport north to the gold mines.

For those lucky enough to be able to afford the comfort of a hotel, they could find beds with plush pillows and meals that left no "epicure unsatisfied." Tables were set with glittering glasses, silver cutlery, and "snowy napkins folded in the latest fashion."¹³² According to Charles Kimball's 1850 *San Francisco Directory*, the city had two doctor's offices, a hospital, an experienced midwife, city officers, some 30 police officers, two theatres, numerous popular gambling houses, and homes that had not yet received street numbers. Prices for land plots were so highly inflated they sold for more than real estate in New York or London (Swett 1968, 111).¹³³ Because there was a small police presence, "lawless persons became a terror to the well-disposed" and soon the roughly organized 'Hound Gang' robbed and rampaged well-to-do homes and spread fear amongst temporary tent occupants and general store owners. This led to a vigilante enforcement group fighting back to enforce a general sense of order.¹³⁴ It goes without saying, that when Genevieve Stebbins' mother Henrietta Smith and aunt Louise Amelia Knapp (Smith) Clapp¹³⁵ arrived, the city was a wild place to begin a new life.

¹³² Francesca, "Reminisces of San Francisco," *Pioneer Magazine* (1854): 15.

¹³³ Frank Swett interview with father, John Swett, University of Berkley oral history project, Bancroft Library, 1968.

¹³⁴ *San Francisco Directory* (1856–57), xv–xvi.

¹³⁵ When Louise married, she used 'Clapp,' but after divorce she added an 'e' to make 'Clappe.'

The winter of 1850 was cold and unusually rainy. The odor that met newcomers in San Francisco was said to be distinctly repugnant, as the smell of animal and human waste mixed with decaying food scraps and dead animal carcasses. Rats were an extraordinary problem, and some dogs became local celebrities for being the best rat catchers. Bummer and Lazarus, two stray dogs, were written about in the press as the most successful rat killers (of thousands!). When Lazarus died, he was taxidermized and put on display at a saloon. When Bummer died, he joined his friend.¹³⁶ In the winter of 1850, dirt roads quickly became mud under horse's hooves, mixing with garbage, wastewater, and sewage. This made it extremely difficult to cross the street without losing boots or getting legs stuck. The street mud and overall unhygienic conditions led to the spread of diseases such as dysentery and cholera. San Francisco was in a continual state of emergency with illnesses rapidly spreading. In Sacramento, less than a hundred miles from San Francisco, one in seven succumbed to cholera leading many to flee the city. Soon after, Boards of Health were organized to resist exploitative doctors charging high-end prices for health care (Roth 1997, 543).¹³⁷

From April 1849–January 1850 there were 39,888 Gold Rush arrivals, of which only 1,421 were women. By April 1850 there were approximately an additional 60,000 arrivals of which 1,979 were women. In 1850, San Francisco Bay received over 300 “noble ships of all nations,” that were rapidly abandoned as crews “almost invariably deserted at first chance” in their pursuit of gold.¹³⁸ Entrepreneurial men known as ‘ship scuttlers’ dismantled ships to reuse the wood for building materials. Ships were dragged to shore, grounded, converted to storehouses, and one was even transformed into a hotel. There was a veritable cacophony of languages, with French

¹³⁶ *Forgotten Characters of Old San Francisco, 1860s–1870* (Ward Ritchie Press, 1938).

¹³⁷ Mitchel Roth, “Cholera, Community, and Public Health in Gold Rush Sacramento and San Francisco,” *Pacific Historical Review* 66, no. 4 (1997): 527–51.

¹³⁸ Parker, *San Francisco Directory* (1852–1853), 13.

arrivals, German, Chilean, British, and Italians heading north to the mines where a thousand Indigenous people were already at work mining gold including Maidu men, women and children and Nissenans working in John Sutter's mill (Castillo and Man 1999, 17).

In June 1850, fires whipped through tents and destroyed over 600 structures in San Francisco. Without a fire department or water supply to fight the flames, the city faced continual destruction. In 1851 a massive fire burned almost 2,000 buildings. Winds helped to fan the flames of several fires that destroyed parts of the city again and again. One early arrival wrote that San Francisco was the “worst possible location for a city” because of strong ocean winds and sandstorms from the dunes.¹³⁹ When California became the 31st state in the union (September 9, 1850) there was a demand for water for firefighting, freshwater delivery systems, and wastewater transport (Frost 2020, 18–20).¹⁴⁰

It is unclear what the Smith's and Clapp's did when they arrived in San Francisco in January of 1850 as their names are not in the 1850 city business directory. The city was bustling when they arrived. It was a place for fast cash, spent in the form of gold nuggets or gold dust. Most men were said to have squandered it quickly by drinking, gambling, or even suiting themselves up in the latest fashions. Somewhat outrageously, men were said to dress to their own “standard of fashion independent of the rest of the world” wearing anything from bear skins to elegant high collared shirts, broad tailed and swallow-tailed dress coats, double breasted jackets, “the surtouts, the bang-ups, the Spanish wrappers, the serapes,” and all sorts of fancy hats, boots, shoes of patent leather or calfskin (*San Francisco Directory* Parker 1852–1853, 12). Once a

¹³⁹ Frank Swett's interview with John Swett, University of Berkley oral history project, Bancroft Library, 1968.

¹⁴⁰ Lionel Frost, “Water Technology and the Urban Environment: Water, Sewerage, and Disease in San Francisco and Melbourne before 1920,” *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 1 (2020): 15–30.

larger volume of women arrived, men were said to have begun to dress less outlandishly but still enjoyed the latest high street fashions.



Fig. 7. *Gentlemen's Gazette*, Formal daytime attire. Fig. 8. S.T. Gill, State Library of Victoria. Fig. 9. *Harper's Weekly*, July 1875.

From 1852–1853 San Francisco rapidly expanded with the building of 160 hotels, 10 public schools, 14 fire companies, 15 flour and sawmills, 19 banks, a music hall, a thriving German gymnasium, 12 English newspapers, plus five foreign language newspapers including Cantonese. More women were finally arriving much to the relief of heterosexual men. About half of new ship arrivals were from foreign ports, including 20,000 Chinese who excited much interest as they were “richly and gaily dressed” in traditional Chinese style. In 1852 the all-male “Hong Took Tong Dramatic Company” performed Cantonese operas composed of 123 Chinese players accompanied by a Chinese orchestra. The performance was “liberally patronized [and financed] by local Cantonese” (Foster 1936, 118).¹⁴¹ A Chinese theatre was built with framework shipped from China, called the American Theatre. Performances were likewise held in five American

¹⁴¹ Lois Foster, *Annals of San Francisco Stage, 1850–1880* vol 1 part one, part two, 1936, Federal Theatre Project.

theatres, several French, German, and Spanish theatres, lecture halls, along with sporting events, Italian operas, and German physical culture exhibitions in a specially built gymnasium (Foster 124). An enthusiastic public attended the theatres with some venues large enough to seat 2,000. The New Metropolitan Theatre featured celebrities from the East Coast such as Laura Keane and a young Edwin Booth. San Francisco was a thriving city.

The State of California and the State of the Union

In September of 1850, California became the 16th free state. The Californian gold rush began a major settlement project to obtain western Indigenous lands, supported by official federal mandates to eradicate the Indigenous population. By 1851, tens of millions of dollars from gold contributed to the national economy. The federal War Secretary armed militias in California, resulting in Native communities lacking appropriate defenses.¹⁴² In the years following, the State of California issued war bonds,¹⁴³ funded ‘Indian hunting’ campaigns to ‘clear areas’ from Mariposa to Monterey, the central Sacramento Valley, and Modoc territories in northern California. War bonds, issued as a debt security financed militias and vigilante mobs who would surround Native villages and exterminate inhabitants. The state avoided directly taxing citizens for these expeditions by taking the route of using war bonds. In 1854 Congress voted to reimburse California’s War Bonds in an army appropriations bill for the retroactive killing of Natives. Soon after the state professionalized militias with official training to help further their initiatives to remove and/or make obsolete the Indigenous population. By 1856

¹⁴² See Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (Yale University Press, 2016), and Brendan Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846–1873* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

¹⁴³ California Indian War bonds, University of Oklahoma College of Law, American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817–1899.
<https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3862&context=indianserialset>

Congress reimbursed the states War Bonds and paid a cash transfer of approximately \$800,000. After roughly 80% of the Native populace had been depleted, in 1857 captured individuals were forced to march from California to reservations in Oklahoma (Madley 2016, 198, 208–209, 250). In the twenty years since the gold rush began, over 100,000 Californian Indians died by disease or murder, along with rampant rape atrocities, kidnapping of children, and enforced labour (Castillo and Man 1999, xiii).

In September of 1850, when California became the 16th free state it also disturbed the prior 15/15 equal balance between ‘free states’ and ‘slave owning states’ in the Union. Historian Monika Trobits investigated the complicated impact the admittance of California as a new state had on politics leading up to the Civil War.¹⁴⁴ Following the 1850 Missouri Compromise, a proposal was made to extend the divisional line between ‘slave states’ and northern ‘free states’ westward from the Missouri line to California— a move which would ultimately divide California in half. The Missouri Compromise disallowed the expansion of slavery north of 36° 30’ latitude. The proposal didn’t pass. Following California’s acceptance as a state there was worry over what would happen to the Kansas Territory, and those with either pro-slavery or anti-slavery interests were deeply divided. Southern plantation owners feared if the Kansas Territory was to become another free state they would then be outnumbered in Congress. Anti-slavery guerilla¹⁴⁵ groups in Kansas included individuals such as the radical abolitionist John Brown who wanted to organize weaponizing a slave rebellion in Virginia. Northern abolitionists (The Secret Six) financed John Brown’s insurrection efforts, including Julia Ward Howe’s husband Samuel Gridley Howe, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Theodore Parker, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn,

¹⁴⁴ Monika Trobits, “The Thirty-First State,” in *Antebellum and Civil War San Francisco: A Western Theater for Northern & Southern Politics* (1st ed.), (Arcadia Publishing, 2014).

¹⁴⁵ I use the term ‘guerilla’ named after ad hoc rebel fighting groups stemming from the Spanish word for war ‘guerra’ and irregular untrained soldiers known as *guerrilleros*.

Gerrit Smith and George Luther Stearns.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately Brown was captured, sentenced, and hung for his guerilla tactics in December of 1859. Brown was also supported by the wealthy Black abolitionist Mary Ellen Pleasant, an acquaintance she held so dear she asked for her tombstone to be inscribed with “She was a friend of John Brown.”¹⁴⁷

South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860, followed by other slave states. Kansas became the 17th ‘free’ state on January 29, 1861, and slave owning states feared that more western territories would soon follow suit. The Civil War began soon after on April 12, 1861. It is remarkable to reflect on the state of the ‘Union’ prior to the Civil War. There was constant warfare between the military, vigilantes, and Indian nation¹⁴⁸ territories. Despite California being geographically distant from the war and relatively untouched as a result, there were nevertheless tensions between Confederate secessionist “Secesh” sympathizers and Union supporters. Many went back east to fight for either side. The “Secesh” faction actively engaged with the California government and even raised the Confederate flag in Los Angeles (Polos 1964, 20). Conflict was problematic enough that General Sumner organized defenses in San Francisco Bay to protect against possible rebellion in California and the threat of secession. Most importantly, the transit of gold to northern states had to be protected from ending up in Confederate hands (Trobitts 2014, 127–128). In many ways, California helped to protect the Union by financing Northern efforts in the Civil War. Money from the gold rush and 1859 silver rush brought millions into the state. Because the U.S Treasury had difficulties securing financing otherwise, more than \$100 million from California was transferred into eastern banks to support war efforts while the South was cut off (Trobitts 2014, 132–135).

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.masshist.org/features/boston-abolitionists/john-brown>

¹⁴⁷ “Mary Ellen Pleasant, (1812? 1904), legendary woman of influence,” Hutchins Institute for African American Research, African American National Biography (Harvard 2017).

¹⁴⁸ <https://nativegov.org/Native-Governance-Center-Style-Guide-published-2021-02.pdf>.

The ‘United States’ Stebbins was born into in 1857, was a different place by the end of the war in 1865. It would take more than 20 years before the country became more unified. See below maps demonstrating the ‘State of the Union’ pre- and post-Civil War.



Fig. 10. 1857 map, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.



Fig. 11. Britannica.com

From 1870–1890s the nation was mainly rural, and not yet united coast to coast. However, the goal was to establish dominion from sea to shining sea per ‘Manifest Destiny’ expectations of white settler territorial expansion.¹⁴⁹ The United States was only ‘United’ coast to coast after finalizing the reality of ‘Manifest Destiny.’ Post-Civil War there were numerous wars against the Indigenous populace until roughly 1890. In California, because of the gold rush and the growing population, Indigenous communities were depleted from an estimated 150,000 peoples to roughly 30,000. It is appropriate to regard the ‘founding’ of California, not to mention the United States of America as a whole, as resulting from the genocide of Indigenous peoples.

California was not the only state engaged in Indian Wars. After thousands of Native peoples on the east coast had been forced to march westward in the Trail of Tears and placed in reservations under governmental control, they were joined by west coast tribal groups who had been forcibly removed from their lands. When they came together, many tribes did not speak the same language. The Indian Bureau, which was meant to protect Indigenous interests, was fraught with fraud and profiteering.¹⁵⁰ Post-Civil War, the U.S. military battled with tribes with the aim of disenfranchising, removing, and forcing the remaining Indigenous off their lands and onto reservations. In 1890, the renown California historian H. Bancroft described the state’s genocide as a human hunt and one of the “most brutal of them all.”¹⁵¹ Government sponsored militias chased tribal communities off their territorial lands and captured children who were taken to residential ‘schools’ where they lost their native language, family bonds, and connection with their culture. This historical legacy is still facing a reckoning today, as the truth continues to

¹⁴⁹ Julius W. Pratt, “The Origin of ‘Manifest Destiny,’” *The American Historical Review* 32, no. 4 (1927): 795–98.

¹⁵⁰ George H. Phillips, “The Indian Ring in Dakota Territory 1870-1900,” *South Dakota Historical Society* 1972, 366.

¹⁵¹ “Genocide in California,” *JSTOR Daily*, October 6, 2023.

reveal itself through dedicated scholarship and restitution.¹⁵² While only brief acknowledgement is made here of settler influence, there is no intent to minimize the enormously destructive and genocidal historical reality that immigrants had upon the Indigenous population, but it is quite simply beyond the scope of this study. The below image describes the cultural problematics facing Indigenous, African Americans, and the Chinese that were well known issues.



Fig. 12. "Every Dog (No Distinction of Color) Has His Day," *Harper's Weekly*, February 8, 1879.

The next chapter will focus more intently on the city of San Francisco, Stebbins' family background, and the environment of her upbringing.

¹⁵² International Indian Treaty Council, iitc.org, and Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native Genocide, 1846–1873* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

Genevieve Stebbins' San Francisco Upbringing:

Stebbins' California Family

As a privileged youth, Stebbins was born into a newly established state, and her growth was matched by a rapidly emerging city. Her mother was certainly an adventurous spirit to have sailed around Cape Horn to face an unknown future and to have created a new life in San Francisco. With an international populace and burgeoning cultural scene, San Francisco must have been a fascinating city for Stebbins to have grown up in.

Very little is known about Genevieve Stebbins' mother Henrietta (1825–1859), or her father James Cole Stebbins (1820–1889) other than he had a career as an attorney, and that they married in 1856. James Cole Stebbins left his home state of New York on December 16, 1852, and arrived in San Francisco January 19, 1853, aboard the steamer *SS Tennessee*. There were 443 passengers on board, 19 of whom died at sea. Before disembarking, there was a committee to which James Stebbins was appointed, along with four other men. They were put in charge of drafting a resolution commending the captain of the ship and the doctor aboard for doing their best to tend to the unfortunate sick during the journey.¹⁵³

Genevieve was born March 7, 1857. Two years later, in 1859, her mother Henrietta died, most likely due to childbirth complications as her second daughter Lilly Henrietta also died in the birthing process (b. April 16, 1859; Ruyter 1999, 46; Smith-Barazini 1999, 257).

Genevieve's father was at a loss, as would have been her Aunt Louise at a second sister's death. There is some confusion as to who cared for young Genevieve after her mother's passing. According to one report, after Henrietta's death, Louise "adopted and raised a niece Genevieve

¹⁵³ Their report was printed in the *Daily Alta California* January 20, 1853 (The Maritime Heritage Project).

Stebbins” (Lawrence 1922, xxx). Historian Rodman Wilson Paul repeated this claim in his biographical study on Louise Clappe (1964, 144).¹⁵⁴ However, this seems to be an error. While Mary Tingley Lawrence, a close friend and former student of Clappe’s, states that Clappe adopted Genevieve (1922, intro *Shirley Letters*), there are two different transcribed versions in the 1922 publication. Lawrence’s words are from a speech she delivered. One transcription interprets her claim literally and another colloquially. In a copy of the *Shirley Letters* at the Library of Congress, Lawrence says Clappe “took her niece, Genevieve Stebbins, and reared her from babyhood to a splendid womanhood” (1922, xxx). This version is more likely true in that Clappe stepped in as a mother figure. Genevieve’s father Jame Stebbins was alive and there was no reason for a legal adoption to have had occurred.

In California’s first state census of 1860, James Stebbins (age 35) is listed as living in the 4th ward district of San Francisco. Living with him was “Jinnie” (age 3, Genevieve’s nickname presumably), her aunt “Lilly Clap” (age 33), and an Irish housekeeper named Louisa O’Conner (aged 20). As such, Genevieve’s father was certainly present in her life and Clappe fondly refers to Genevieve as her daughter (Smith Barazini 1999, 257). Although they lived together, there is no indication that Louise and James were intimate partners. Instead, their relationship was familial and meant to provide a stable home for Genevieve. It is likely the Irish housekeeper was also a nanny to Genevieve.

Historian Rodman Wilson Paul states Clappe became an educator in 1854 teaching in San Francisco. She became accomplished in her career, and by 1863 delivered a speech on primary school management at the first state teachers convention (Paul 1964, 142). Clappe was not the

¹⁵⁴ Rodman Wilson Paul, “In Search of Dame Shirley,” *Pacific Historical Review* 33, no. 2 (1964): 127-146.

only New England educator in town, as the San Francisco Board of Education in 1853–1854 was composed “wholly of New Englanders” (Polos 1966, 19).¹⁵⁵ Due to her vocation, Clappe would have overseen Genevieve’s education. John Swett was another New Englander and educational leader in San Francisco. He came to know the Stebbins’ family well and was a dear friend, as I will describe hitherto. At 5’6”, he was known as the “Little Giant” and had a massive influence establishing the Californian public school system based on educational ideals transported from New England (Polos 1964, 18).

Soon after her sister Henrietta’s death, in July of 1859, Clappe joined the Episcopalian church sponsored by her friend, the minister Ferdinand Ewer (Smith-Barazini 1999, 258). This is the same Ferdinand Ewer who had earlier published Clappe’s writings in the *Pioneer Magazine*. He had been ordained in 1857 and became a minister at Grace Church before moving to New York City in 1860. At Grace Church, Clappe helped with charitable parish work by organizing fundraising entertainments such as Shakespearean readings, recitations, tableaux, and amateur theatrical shows (Paul 1964, 144). Outside of the church, Clappe organized parlor tableaux and other popular domestic amusements (Foster 1936, 423).¹⁵⁶ Stebbins would have attended church with her aunt and taken part in Clappe’s organized social entertainments. As an adult, Stebbins came to be admired for her own tableaux creations and statue posing exhibitions.

A *tableau*, also known as a ‘living picture,’ is where participants arrange themselves in a ‘staged picture’ to dramatically depict an image taken from either a well-known biblical story, popular illustration or painting. Participants would position themselves in a tableau and remain still as the audience viewed and absorbed the scene. They might then try to guess what tableaux

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas C. Polos, “A Yankee Patriot: John Swett, the Horace Mann of the Pacific,” *History of Education Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1964): 17–32.

¹⁵⁶ Lois Foster, *Annals of San Francisco Stage, 1850–1880* (Federal Theatre Project, 1936).

was being portrayed, much like in a game of charades. Applause then congratulated the ‘posers’ for their efforts.



Fig 13. An example of a ‘living’ tableaux replicating an illustration from 1854, with Princess Louise and the Prince of Wales of the British Royal family. They are staging “Winter” from the watercolor *Tableaux of the Seasons*. Photo by Roger Fention. Fig. 14. Watercolor by Carl Haag, Royal Collection Trust.

From 1856 to 1869, Clappe is listed as working at the Powell Street School (the second public school founded in the state) as first assistant to the principal. The school was said to be the “most flourishing” and “most important” in the district.¹⁵⁷ Powell Street was a girls’ public High School, the only school of its kind in the city. In the 1859 city business directory, James Stebbins is listed as living on 375 Powell Street, while Clappe is not listed as working. Possibly, after her sister’s death, she took a break to care for two-year-old Genevieve.

In the Stebbins family genealogy book, there is little regarding James Stebbins, such as parental or sibling information, but it is said he was from Oneida, New York. Stebbins’ father was a “celebrated” land lawyer” who supposedly lost money in rash investments (Greenlee, 1904, 1110).¹⁵⁸ However, another historian found that Genevieve’s father provided for her with money from his sizable personal estate and real estate holdings (Edwards 1999, 124).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Colville, *San Francisco Business Directory* 1857, xlv.

¹⁵⁸ Ralph Stebbins Greenlea and Robert Lemuel Greenlee, *The Stebbins Genealogy* (in two volumes, Vol II, privately printed, A. A. Donohue Company, 1904).

¹⁵⁹ Paul Edwards, “Teaching Literature in the Age of Performance Studies,” *The Theatre Annual* 52 (1999): 1.

Regardless, it is clear that young Genevieve was provided with a privileged upbringing as her father had a steady and stable career as a San Francisco lawyer with business offices in the courthouse and likely property investments.

James Cole Stebbins is listed as one of five trustees for the San Francisco Water Company in February 1855, which was a significant municipal position.¹⁶⁰ In 1865 the company merged with the Spring Valley Company responsible for supplying water to San Francisco, which created a “highly profitable monopoly” for a small number of shareholders. As a trustee, James Stebbins managed the assets and ongoing business for what was a private monopoly approved by the state legislature (Frost, 2020, 16). In 1861, when Genevieve was 4, James Stebbins lived on 1121 Powell. This year is notable for the many transformations in the city. Hills were levelled to make room for expansion, streets were graded, sewer pipes installed, miles of gas pipes laid to provide for streetlamps, hundreds of homes built, and supplies of pure water established.¹⁶¹

Theatre and Race in San Francisco

As a child in San Francisco, Stebbins was said to have been a natural entertainer. Clappe undoubtedly would have been able to help guide young Genevieve in creating entertainments. Most families in the 19th century created their own at-home entertainments with games, playing the piano, violin or another musical instrument, singing, reading aloud for each other, performing monologues, skits, or reciting poetry. A family friend, the celebrated author Bret Harte, describes Stebbins in her youth, saying,

it was the delight of the little Genevieve to pose, to fling into statuary her childish frame, to tell romances in dumb show [short, pantomimic comic scenes], to sing songs without words or sound; that so vivid and widespread was the interest she excited that she was in constant demand as a show-child for youthful private theatricals, children’s dances and

¹⁶⁰ *San Francisco Gold Rush Chronology 1855–1856*, Museum of the City of San Francisco.

¹⁶¹ Information is gleaned from various years of the *San Francisco Business Directory*.

other pastimes of the wealth” (L.A.C. 1887, 289).¹⁶²

Stebbins’ youth was privileged, and she had an entrée into a vibrant cultural life. San Francisco’s theatre scene was thriving, and Clappe or her father would have taken Genevieve to a variety of entertainments to expose her to the performing arts. In the 1850s–60s there were constant arrivals of East Coast theatre talent. San Francisco also had its own stock theatre companies, such as at Maguires Opera House where the celebrity actor Edwin Forrest performed as a guest. With an in-house stock theatre company, celebrity actors could travel around the nation to play lead roles working with local theatre performers to fill other positions in the play. Laura Keene and the Booth family took advantage of stock theatre companies as they travelled to San Francisco and later Australia. Many stars and performance troupes at this time travelled from the East Coast, stopped in San Francisco, then sailed on to tour Australia.

According to historian Monica Trobits, some of the earliest established structures in the city were hotels, saloons, and theatres. Trobits found that almost a thousand theatrical productions were mounted in San Francisco in over 25 theatres during the 1850s (2014, 44).¹⁶³ Popular shows included Shakespeare’s plays. Edwin Booth, of the Booth family theatrical fame, opened San Francisco’s Metropolitan Theatre with *Richard III* in 1853. He would later have a successful career on the east coast. Booth’s brother, the actor John Wilkes Booth, famously shot Abraham Lincoln during a performance of Laura Keene’s at Ford’s Theatre in Washington, D.C.

San Francisco’s theatres had the capacity to present spectacular stage trickery with characters appearing through trap doors, or rapid seasonal scene changes from winter to summer in 30 seconds, and such things as “two lovers seen high on a stone tower who make their escape

¹⁶² Printed in *Werner’s Magazine*, New York. Historian Dr. Carrie Streeter brought to my attention that L.A.C. is most likely Louise Amelia Clapp, and I agree with her assessment.

¹⁶³ Monica Trobits, *Antebellum and Civil War San Francisco: A Western Theater for Northern, & Southern Politics* (The History Press, 2014).

as, miraculously, the tower falls apart and is transformed into a spiral staircase; a wagon becomes a menagerie, an umbrella a balloon, and so on” (Foster 1936, 388).¹⁶⁴ Growing up in San Francisco during the 1860s, Genevieve would have been able to see any kind of entertainment that would have been available in New York, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia or Washington D.C. It is quite possible that Genevieve obtained some early theatre training as a child from actors in San Francisco although there is no record of such. She could have also performed in local theatre productions in juvenile roles.

Popular entertainment in the city included pantomimes from the Martinetti troupe, Italian operas, circus shows, fancy balls, and touring Black minstrel shows (Foster 1936). Five years after the Civil War ended, more than twenty Black minstrel companies were touring, including the Original Georgia Minstrels founded by Charles Hicks, the Sam Hague Georgia Slave Troupe, Louisiana Slave Troupe, and the Plantation Minstrels. The term ‘minstrel’ derives from European travelling performers who entertained audiences with anything from music, song, dance, acrobatics, comedic versions of the town fool, or parodies of local cultural and political figures. The American minstrel era is looked at with scorn, and rightly so, as black face performers made parodies of African American experience. Notably, the first Black performance companies were advertised as minstrel shows, in deference to earlier white minstrel shows that depicted black slave culture, song and dance, from Southern plantations through blackface or ‘burnt cork’ performance. White Americans began performing racist parodies and caricatures of slaves in the 1840’s that ranged from the ‘grotesque’ and horrifically distorted while also simultaneously and strangely performing an appropriated appreciation for Black music and dance. Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison noted the grotesque, or ‘freak’ aspect of minstrel

¹⁶⁴ Lois Foster, *Annals of San Francisco Stage, 1850–1880* (Federal Theatre Project, 1936).

shows by Black artists, including such things as tableaux of slave life being depicted, yet he also appreciated Black artists exercising their creative agency to push the boundaries of self-representation (1988, 28).¹⁶⁵

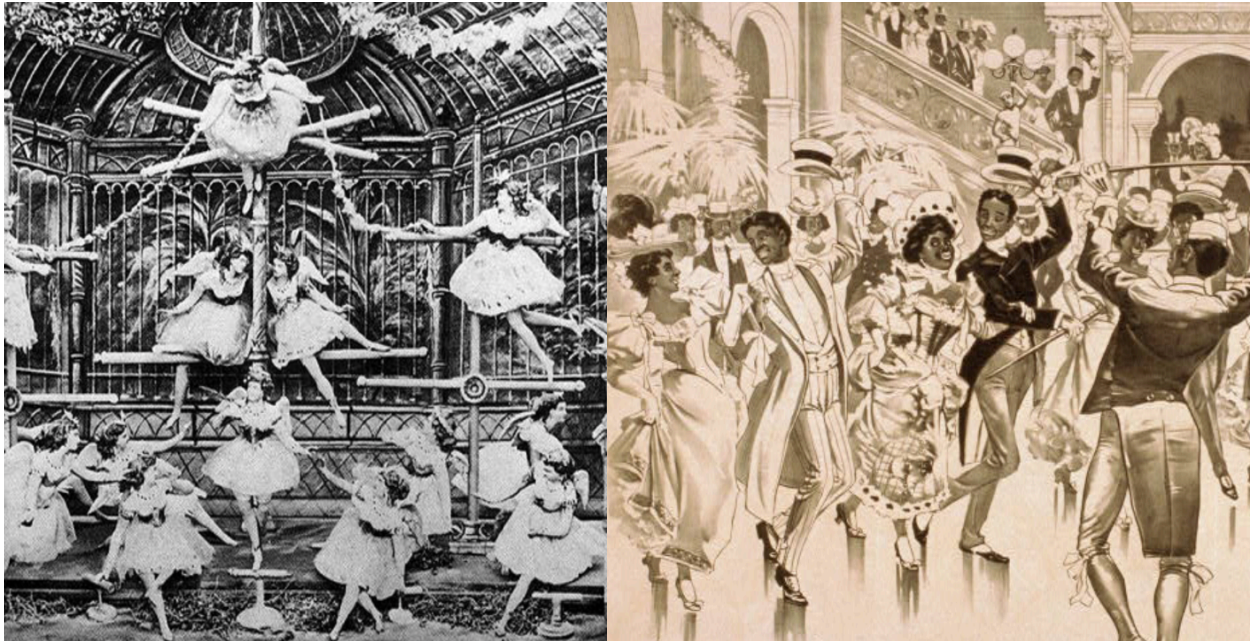


Fig. 15. Martinetti Troupe, Photo: Museum of Performance + Design. Fig. 16. Oliver Scott's Big Minstrel Carnival, Circa 1899. US Printing co., <www.loc.gov/item/2014637023/>.

Initially, Black minstrel show audiences were fascinated with the novelty of seeing ‘real slaves’ on stage. Yet, in time the sheer power and talent of Black performers packed theaters to the roof with raucous laughter responding to comedic acts, shocked awe and admiration for impressive virtuosic operatic acts, and sincere enjoyment of talented song and dance acts. The original Black groups replicated the structure of earlier white minstrel shows in which slave life and ‘amusements’ were performed, and productions were formatted within the same framework of how white acts were arranged. Performing was a route to financial independence for Black artists and managers, as many productions were resoundingly successful and Black theatre

¹⁶⁵ Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865–1910* (Scarecrow Press, 1988).

professionals were able to become independently wealthy. One manager of a Black minstrel company wore “enough diamonds to stock a store” and was stopped by police for proof of ownership, which he readily provided (Sampson 1988, 87). A challenge for Black artists was many east coast audiences expected “coon” entertainment in which Black artists parodied themselves as racialized caricatures which limited artistic innovation and made their own work a mockery. Some newspaper reviews applauded companies that didn’t offer “cork-grimed” rubbish, meaning minstrel style acts. Companies such as the Colored Minstrels advertised that they only had “top performers” and no plantation coon songs (Sampson 1988, 47). Regardless, the racial parody of minstrelsy lasted into the television age with ‘Amos and Andy.’

In San Francisco, Black entertainment prospered. The Hyers Sisters (Anna and Emma) trained in classical opera in Sacramento and came to be resoundingly appreciated in San Francisco and across the nation. Trained by a German specialist, the sisters made their debut at the young age of 9 and 10 as musical prodigies on the San Francisco stage of the Metropolitan Theater on April 22, 1867. Stebbins was 10 at the time, and it is plausible that she saw them perform. The sisters came to be active leaders within the San Francisco theatre community (represented by Boston based Redpath Lyceum Bureau). San Francisco had the largest Black population in California and the city had the earliest Black schools, press, churches, and Black political conventions in the state.¹⁶⁶

There were many abolitionists in San Francisco, and the city was known for promoting racial integration. For example, San Francisco resident John Swett, the Civil War Superintendent of Public Instruction in California, won his election in 1863 despite the state being flooded with handbills depicting him as a “Yankee school master teaching a mixed class of whites and blacks,

¹⁶⁶ Albert Broussard, “Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954,” University Press of Kansas, 1993.

with a Negro boy at the head of the class” (Polos 1964, 21). Swett changed state laws, created standards for school instruction, and established free public schools for every child no matter their race. Swett was said to abhor segregation of any kind and argued that all taxpayers had a right to state funding for educating youth (Polos 23). His success was such that he came to “legalize his philosophy of education” (25).¹⁶⁷

The Hyers sisters would have benefitted from Swett’s reforms, and from the welcoming theatre community in San Francisco. They later performed commissioned plays in their own touring theatre company producing musical dramas with themes of freedom from slavery, and portrayals of dignified Black experiences (Buckner, 2012).¹⁶⁸ The Hyers Sisters, imitable opera singers, were resoundingly appreciated across the nation. The public was deeply touched by the emotional depth of their performances as noted in a newspaper article which said, “There’s a weird witchery about these southern songs, which like a curlew tell a story of the soul” (Sampson 1988, 58). A curlew is a bird with a haunting call and audiences were often moved to tears listening to the Hyers sisters sing.¹⁶⁹

Black entertainment was so admired that The Fiske Jubilee Singers performed for Queen Victoria in 1875. By the 1880s Black companies performed to packed audiences across the northeast and west, in the South (for mainly white audiences), California, and abroad to England, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand. One newspaper review stated that “there is many a white comedian who could sit at the feet of these Negro actors and learn a thing or two” (Sampson 1988, 140). The popularity of Black theatre shows just fifteen years after the Civil War ended

¹⁶⁷ Nicholas C. Polos, “A Yankee Patriot: John Swett, the Horace Mann of the Pacific,” *History of Education Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1964): 17–32.

¹⁶⁸ Jocelyn L. Buckner, “‘Spectacular Opacities:’ The Hyers Sisters’ Performances of Respectability and Resistance,” *African American Review* 45, no. 3 (2012): 309–323.

¹⁶⁹ Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865–1910* (Scarecrow Press, 1988).

slavery, is a testament to the extraordinary resilience and spirit of free Black Americans overcoming insurmountable challenges to have their voices heard in public forums. Black companies were so successful that white theater managers copied them with their own white minstrel versions of popular Black acts, and theatre managers desired to take over Black companies. Theatre impresario Charles Frohman and his brother Gustave gained control of the Georgia Minstrels to schedule shows in New York City, which led the original manager, Charles Hicks, to create another company called Hicks Georgia Minstrels. Hicks's company then left to tour Australia in 1889 with enormous success, in their second such tour (Sampson 1988, 47).

The Chinese community by 1870–80 in San Francisco also had a thriving theatre scene. The majority of the Chinese population was still men, with only 7% women, most of whom (two-thirds) were prostitutes brought from China (1994, 203).¹⁷⁰ Chinese Theatres accommodated between 1,000–3,000 patrons of both white and Chinese descent. One famous house was the Royal Chinese Theatre on Jackson Street. The theatre was not fancily decorated and had wooden benches with a small, segregated area for women. Neighbours complained about loud Chinese music such as gongs from the orchestra as a nuisance, and the city issued a curfew for Chinese theatres to close earlier, which were promptly defied. This led to police raids, stampedes, audiences being crushed in the chaos, and large riots (Boyd 2012).¹⁷¹ Regardless, Chinese theatres repeatedly sold out as they were extremely popular and served as social hangouts.

¹⁷⁰ Maria Jaschok, Suzanne Miers, eds., *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude, and Escape* (Hong Kong University Press, 1994).

¹⁷¹ Morgan Gerard Boyd, "Gold Mountain Theater Riots: A Social History of Chinese Theater Riots in San Francisco during the 1870s and 1880s" (Master Theses, San Jose State University, 2012), 20–40, 48.

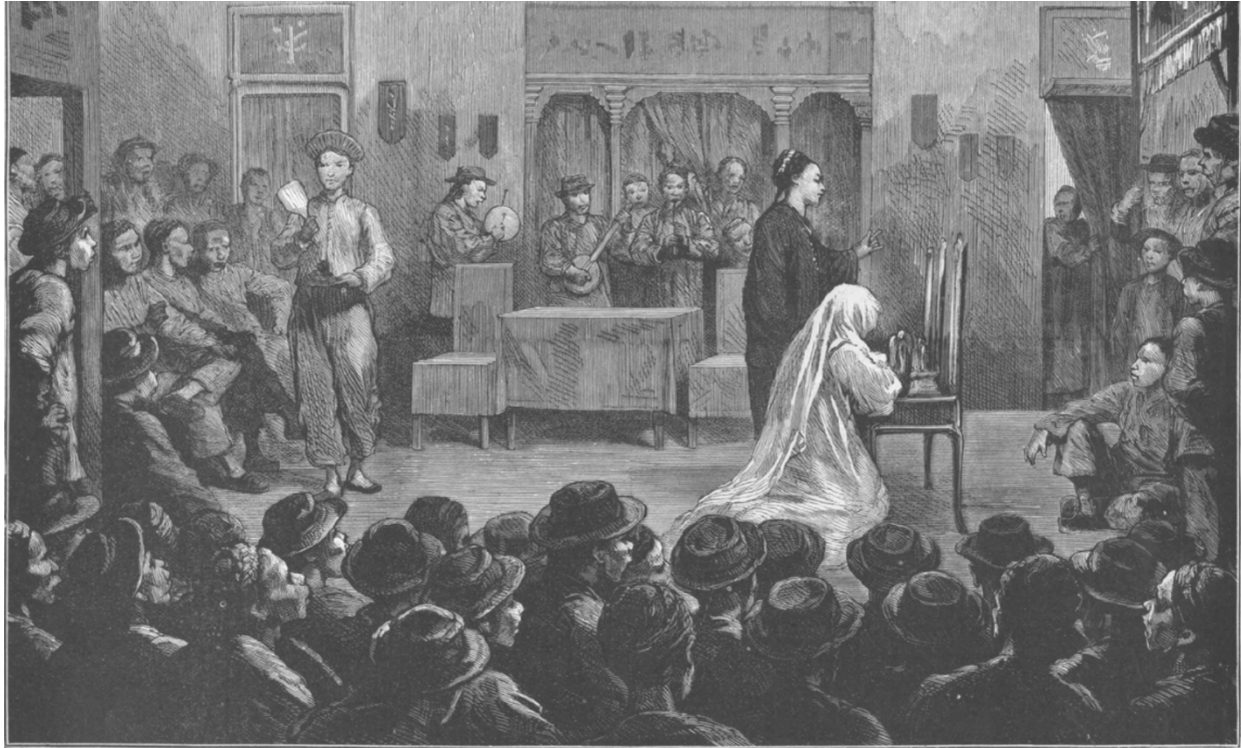


Fig. 17. Scene from San Francisco Chinese Theatre, *Harper's Weekly*, January 25, 1879. 77.

“Dame Shirley,” aka Louise Amelia Clappe

Returning to explore Stebbins’ family in San Francisco, while there is little known of Genevieve’s mother Henrietta, there is significantly more information about her Aunt Louise Clappe (1819–1906). Seeing as Clappe took on a maternal role in Genevieve’s life, observing Clappe’s background provides insight into the quality of care and guidance her ‘daughter’ Genevieve obtained as a result. As an accomplished educator and author, Clappe would have guided a young Genevieve in her own compositional skills. Stebbins clearly benefitted, as later in life she became an accomplished published author.

Louise Clappe was a “well-educated upper-class lady” (Paul 1964, 134), something that was atypical for the time. Women had limited access to higher education and, unlike men, were not educated for specific professions. If anything, for those who could afford it, private tutoring provided only a basic education for women. Upper middle class and well-to-do families intended

for their daughters to possess the ability to carry themselves well in conversation with professional men and in charitable leadership positions. As a child, Clappe was said to have studied books on metaphysics, a subject that became a passion of hers (and later one of Stebbins'). Henrietta and Louise's father, Moses Smith, was an alumnus and Professor of Mathematics at the eminent Williams College. When his children were young, Moses Smith became a school headmaster in Elizabethtown, NJ, before relocating to his childhood hometown of Amherst, MA.¹⁷² Moses made certain all his children— regardless of gender— were well-read and formally educated. Louise was the eldest in the family of three boys and four girls. Moses Smith died when Louise was 12, and her mother died when she was 18. A legal guardian was appointed to protect the children's inheritance and needs.

At age 14, Louise went to a seminary boarding school in Keene, New Hampshire, founded by educational pioneer Catherine Fiske (Lawrence 2006).¹⁷³ Miss Fiske's Young Ladies Seminary was the second girls school established in the nation. 'Seminary' schools, later known as academies, were founded in the mid 19th century to provide serious educational training for young women. Women trained in academies often became teachers, like Louise Clappe. The school's four-year program had studies in math, geography, French, chemistry, Latin, intellectual philosophy, natural theology, composition, and logic.¹⁷⁴ In 1838, at age 18, Louise went to college at the Female Seminary boarding school in Charlestown, Massachusetts (now a neighborhood in Boston). After graduating, Louise attended Amherst Academy from 1839–1840, where she possibly helped teach (Paul 1964, 132),¹⁷⁵ although, she is listed as a student in the

¹⁷² *History of the town of Amherst, Massachusetts 1731–1896* (Carpenter and Morehouse, Amherst, 1896).

¹⁷³ Deborah Lawrence, "Louise Smith Clappe: A Feminine View of the Elephant," in *Writing the Trail: Five Women's Frontier Narratives* (University of Iowa Press, 2006), 64.

¹⁷⁴ Gardner Hill, "A Famous Institution: Miss Fiske's Boarding School of the Early Days," *The Granite Monthly: A New Magazine Devoted to New Hampshire History* 39, (1907): 336.

¹⁷⁵ Rodman Wilson Paul, "In Search of Dame Shirley," *Pacific Historical Review* 33, no. 2 (1964): 127–146.

Amherst Academy course catalogue (as “Louisa Smith”). Amherst Academy later became Amherst College. Amherst Academy was co-ed with 189 students. Louise took advanced studies in Latin, Greek, Ancient History, Classical Literature, Math, Intellectual Philosophy, and Rhetoric (according to the school program from her year). The Academy followed classical Seminary curriculum including such things as reading, grammar, rhetoric, composition, ancient and modern geography, sacred geography, history, astronomy calculations, and gymnastic exercises [physical culture].¹⁷⁶ The poet Emily Dickenson was a famous graduate of Amherst, and Clappe was said to have been “an intimate of Emily Dickenson.”¹⁷⁷

Soon after, Louise had a different kind of education through a significant intimate friendship with an older man, Alexander Hill Everett. Alexander was a diplomat, author, editor, contributor to the *North American Review*, and former private secretary to John Quincy Adams. Alexander and Louise (before she married Clapp) had a nine-year friendship and letter correspondence until his death in 1847. Scholar Suzanne Bordelon and Marlene Smith-Barazini argue that Everett guided Clappe in establishing her expertise in the epistolary style of writing, a traditional component of rhetorical education.¹⁷⁸ Oddly, their precious letter exchanges are preserved (now housed in Louise Clappe’s archive at the California State Library), while no known letters exchanges have been found between Genevieve Stebbins and Clappe. The Everett letters were found by diligent researchers in the house where Louise Clappe died (Paul 1964).

Most relevant to her legacy, Clappe is included in *Notable Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary by Radcliffe College* (1971), the “first large-scale scholarly work in its

¹⁷⁶ Frederick Tuckerman, *Amherst Academy; a New England School of the Past 1814–1861*.

¹⁷⁷ *New York Times*, November 20, 1949, 1.

¹⁷⁸ Suzanne Bordelon, *Courtship-Through-Correspondence: Seduction through Mentoring* 36, no. 3 (2018): 296–319. Marlene. Smith-Baranzini, “Out of the Shadows Louise Clappe’s Life and Early California Writing,” *California History* 78, no. 4 (1999): 238–61.

field” committed to women’s history (ix).¹⁷⁹ Clappe is recognized as an accomplished Californian author, and the “first lady of Gold Rush literature” (Smith-Barazini 1999, 239).¹⁸⁰ She is seen as California’s “first acclaimed literary figure” (Kowalewski 1992, 68)¹⁸¹ who established the short-lived genre known as “sage brush realism.”¹⁸² Marlene Smith-Barazini asserts that Clappe’s relevance as a writer documenting “pioneer women’s experience” was particularly secured with the emergence of women’s history as a scholarly domain in the 1970s (1999, 239). Clappe’s stories are significant as they challenged expectations of ‘appropriate’ women’s behavior.

Scholar Suzanne Bordelon argues that Clappe was particularly adept with her use of “indirect critique” and a form of “indirect feminist rhetoric.” At a time when women were not meant to have a public written voice, Clappe “responded to such constraints by devising alternate tactics” to make her voice heard. Bordelon builds on an argument of Jason Barrett Fox’s to state that Clappe’s letters function to “undermine conventionally masculine social power structures” (2018, 457; 2012, 222). Clappe uses humour and levity to “reveal problematic aspects of imagined male ideals of domesticity and femininity” (457).¹⁸³ It was a significant tactic, and one that her readers enjoyed.

One interesting aspect of San Francisco culture was an appreciation for ‘pioneer’ women and their role in creating a new society. Early Californian life wasn’t easy, and women who

¹⁷⁹ Edward T. James ed, Vol I, A-F, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁸⁰ Marlene Smith-Baranzini, “Out of the Shadows Louise Clappe’s Life and Early California Writing,” *California History* 78, no. 4 (1999): 238–61.

¹⁸¹ Michel Kowalewski, “Imaging the California Gold Rush: The Visual and Verbal Legacy,” *California History*, University of California Press, 71, no. 1 (1992), 60–73.

¹⁸² Deborah Lawrence, *Writing the Trail: Five Women’s Frontier Narratives* (University of Iowa Press, 2006), 62.

¹⁸³ Suzanne Bordelon, “Louise Clappe and The Shirley Letter’s: Indirect Feminist Rhetoric and the Contradictions of Domestic Space,” *College English* 80, no. 5 (2018): 449–470. Jason Barret Fox, “Rhetorics of Indirection, Indiscretion, Insurrection: The ‘Feminine Style’ of Anita Loos, 1912–1925,” *J.A.C: A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, Politics* 32, no. 1–2 (2012): 221–49.

found the fortitude to deal with hardship garnered respect. One female author advised against women coming to California unless they had “strength, willingness, and skill [...] fortitude, indomitable resolution, dauntless courage, and a clear self-respect which will alike forbid her doing anything unworthy herself” (Eliza Farnham, *California, Indoors and Out; or How We Farm, Mine and Live Generally in the Golden State*, 1856). As early as 1849, California’s first constitution included the right of married women to control their own property. As such, they had far greater economic liberty than other women in the nation. Clappe was one such woman who forged her own career, beginning initially with her work as an author.

The Shirley Letters, a Californian Pioneer Study

Clappe wrote the earliest depictions of Californian gold mining life in 23 letters to her sister in Massachusetts. A private printing of *The Shirley Letters* was published in 1922 from letters written between September 13, 1851, to November 21, 1852. These letters were first published as essays in *The Pioneer; or California Monthly Magazine* between January 1854 vol. 1, through the final vol. 5 of *The Pioneer*, December 1855. The *Pioneer* was “well received in the East, and Eastern magazines viewed it favorably” (*Shirley Letters* 1922, foreword). The first volume of *The Pioneer* was 400 pages, which is surprisingly large for a literary magazine. *Pioneer Magazine* was California’s first literary periodical, created by Harvard graduate and Episcopalian minister Ferdinand Ewer.¹⁸⁴ Apparently, Ewer and his wife lived in the same neighborhood (Jackson Street five blocks west of Powell) as Clappe and her sister “Betty Smith” (perhaps Henrietta’s nickname), Mr. Stebbins, and members of an opera troupe.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Ferdinand Ewer, ed., *The Pioneer; or California Monthly Magazine* I, Jan 1854–June 1854 (Published by W.H. Brooks and Company, San Francisco), digitized for Hathitrust by University of California Davis.

¹⁸⁵ Henry Raup Wagner, “The Life of Ferdinand C. Ewer: May 22, 1826–October 10, 1883,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 14, no. 1 (1935): 74–79.

Clappe's "letters" were published under her chosen pseudonym "Shirley." Ewer describes the *Shirley Letters* as "penned in the light, graceful, epistolary style," recording the "impressions which the condition of California affairs, two years ago, made upon a cultivated mind" (*The Pioneer* 1854, 41). Many women in the mid- to late 19th century chose a pseudonym as an author, as it wasn't considered proper for women to use their voice publicly. A pseudonym offered a veil of protection from public scrutiny and scorn. Male journalists also often used pseudonyms, such as the dramatic critic, A.C. Wheeler who went by 'Nym Crinkle'¹⁸⁶ perhaps as a way of avoiding anger being pointed directly at him for his critical reviews. Despite her pseudonym, Shirley was later identified in the table of contents of the *Pioneer* as "Mrs. Louisa Clapp" (Paul 1964, 141) and thereafter was reverentially referred to as '*Dame Shirley*.'

Historian Rodman Wilson Paul argues that for over a hundred years "historians and aficionados of California history" praised the *Shirley Letters* as the best account of life in early mining camps (1964, 127). When Paul was asked to write a short biography of Clappe for Harvard University Press on notable American women, he found a "surprising scarcity" of information about 'Dame Shirley,' not her birth or death date or who her parents were, despite her profound influence on Californian authors (127). This is still the case for many historically relevant women. Paul's significant genealogical research and biographical findings provide the basis for more recent scholarship (Lockhart 1991, Smith-Baranzini 1999).¹⁸⁷ More recent studies of her letters have emerged as interest in western pioneer women has increased, particularly for literary anthologies (Smith-Baranzini 1999, 241).

¹⁸⁶ John Frick, *New York's First Theatrical Center: The Rialto at Union Square* (UMI Research Press, Theater and Dramatic Studies, 1985), 115.

¹⁸⁷ Sandra Lockhart, "Louise Clappe (Dame Shirley), 1819–1906," *Legacy (Amherst, Mass.)* 8, no. 2 (1991): 141–3.

Clappe's letters are said to have provided "tantalizing glimpses of situation or character in which might be found material for a full-length novel" (*New York Times*, Moffet July 23, 1933, 15). 'Shirley' wrote her letters in the style of travelogues, or epistles, in "belletristic verse" with a "clear-eyed, but warmly tolerant view of the rowdy masculinity of the mines" (Kowalewski 1992, 65). As a curious scholar living amongst gold miners in her small cabin, Clappe wrote unprecedented narratives of mining life, resulting in a fresh and enduring record of the independent and spontaneous spirit that characterized the California Gold Rush. She wrote stories about the craft of mining, fascinating characters she interacted with, encounters with 'curious natives' visiting her cabin, and absurd or horrific sights she witnessed such as an amputation without anesthesia, burials, hangings, and race riots.

Clappe enjoyed the freedom and simplicity of camping life and living outside the norm. She travelled to the mines to meet her husband Fayette Clapp where he was working as a doctor. En route she came across a group of Indigenous women gathering acorns naked but for grass skirts, "with their dark shining skins, beautiful limbs and lithe forms, they were by no means the least picturesque feature of the landscape" (1851/1854, 54). The journey included a perilous mule ride down a terrifically steep hillside. They settled in Rich Bar on the Feather River in Sierra Nevada, at first staying in the rough shod Empire Hotel before moving into a small log cabin amongst 40 other dwellings, which she delighted in. Some 500 men were working the site, and she was one of only four women. Clappe loved being in nature, describing in reverent detail the green and purple beauty of

these majestic, old mountains, looks lovelier than ever, through its pearl like network of foaming streamlets, while, like an immense concave of pure sapphire, without spot or speck, the wonderful and never-enough-to-be-talked-about sky of California, drops down upon the whole its fathomless splendour" (*Shirley Letters* 1851/1854, 113).

Apparently “F” (her husband) was a “perfect devotee of the Indian weed,” which I would take to mean marijuana! (113). Their log cabin was basic and small, with little furniture, a rustic fireplace built out of rocks, and a window with no glass. Clappe was able to dine on oyster soup, fresh salmon, roast beef, potatoes and onions made by the “mulatto chef Ned.” She admired his radiating face and his grand air that was “ceremonious in every motion” making her feel like she was dining in a palace. Chef Ned also played violin for her and treated her like a queen (113). When the gold dried up, miners left in droves. Upon their own return to San Francisco, Clappe and her husband separated, and Fayette Clappe left town. Oddly, her former student Mary Tingley Lawrence wrote that Fayette Clapp had died, though in fact he had not (1918, 49).¹⁸⁸ It is possible that Lawrence claimed this to protect Clappe from public shame related to marital separation, as Lawrence was in the same situation.

In 1922 publisher Thomas Russel organized a private reprint of Clappe’s letters with a tribute to Clappe in the foreword, by her former student Mary Tingley Lawrence who was by now an accomplished biographer.¹⁸⁹ Lawrence admired Clappe for having documented life in the gold mines in what was an “unheard-of opportunity for her facile pen” (48). Miners were an unruly group, and having an educated lady in their midst was quite unusual. A ‘good woman’ risked sullyng her reputation by being in such a place. Clappe said other women chastised her with “outraged modesty” by the very idea of her living in a camp amongst rough men (‘Shirley’ *Pioneer Magazine* 1854, 42). Regardless, Clappe continued to defy convention and, as a result was able to capture the makeshift and short-lived community at the Rich Bar mine.

¹⁸⁸ In fact, he left for the Sandwich Islands, later re-married in the South, and served in the Civil War as a surgeon for the Union side out of Missouri (Paul 1964, 140). It is most likely that Fayette initially went to *Hawaii* as there was a later name change from Sandwich to the Hawaiian Islands. He later moved to the South and remarried.

¹⁸⁹ She wrote *A Diplomat's Helpmate: How Rose F. Foote, Wife of The First U.S. Minister And Envoy Extraordinary to Korea, Served Her Country in The Far East* (1918).

Lawrence describes Clappe's writing as existing in a "unique and unchallenged place as the background of typical California literature. Here the Pioneer pen blazed the trail to western romance for the brilliant early California writers" (1918, 48).¹⁹⁰ Scholar Deborah Lawrence posits that Clappe provided a "feminine view of the gold-rush" (2006, 62), while scholar Cathryn Halverson argues that Clappe offered an alternative version of domesticity for women that was in distinct contrast to strict social gender coding on the East Coast (2013).¹⁹¹ Clappe wrote bluntly of the men around her who swore at all hours, and quoted one man angrily shouting, "Only let me get hold of your beggarly carcass once, and I will use you up so small that God Almighty himself cannot see your ghost!" (88).

Dr. Josiah Royce, a Californian historian, writes that Dame Shirley was a "very intelligent woman" who was the "right kind of witness to describe for us the social life of a mining camp from actual experience" (*Shirley Letters* 1922, foreword Library of Congress). The *New York Times* reviewed the 1933 edition of the *Shirley Letters*, admiring Clappe for writing with an "eye for picturesque detail and a viewpoint surprisingly free from prejudice." Clappe "sympathized with the Indians" and was "awake to the frequent unfairness of the Yankee newcomers to the Spanish inhabitants" (Moffat July 23, 1933, 2). Moffat states while the work of later Californian writers might be more well-known, it is Dame Shirley's work that provided a "rich mine" of "rare nuggets" from which later writers drew inspiration.¹⁹²

Clappe's style of writing, and character depictions, are noted by many as being imitated by the writers Brett Harte and Mark Twain— although they did not credit her and garnered far

¹⁹⁰ *Literary California: Poetry Prose and Portraits*, gathered by Ella Sterling Mighels, Harr Wagner Publishing Co. San Francisco, California, 1918.

¹⁹¹ "Playing House on the Frontier: Caroline Kirkland and Louise Clappe," in *Playing House in the American West: Western Women's Life Narratives, 1839–1987* (The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 14.

¹⁹² Anita Moffett, "California in the Great Gold Days: THE LETTERS of DAME SHIRLEY. Introduction and Notes by Carl I. Wheat. Illustrated, no. 5. Rare Americana Series, San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press. California Gold Days." *New York Times*, July 23, 1933, 2.

greater historical glory than Clappe received in her lifetime. In the Library of Congress copy of the *Shirley Letters online*, there are side by side comparisons of Clappe's writing next to Bret Harte's in what is a clear depiction of plagiarism. It's unclear who placed them there. The renowned Californian historian and gold rush settler, Hubert Howe Bancroft, argues that Harte was indebted to Clappe's firsthand experience, which he lacked (Paul 1964, 128).

A 1949 article in the *New York Times* spoke of the "gay-hearted Dame Shirley [...] a small New Englander [...] a born describer," whose writing skills exemplify "sharp observation, wit, a sense of the ludicrous, just appraisal of character and hard sense, [that is] unmatched by any other work descriptive of mine camps of that period. Small wonder that Harte, who came later, drew heavily upon them for incident" (*New York Times* November 20, 1949, 1).¹⁹³ Indeed, Clappe's student Charles Stoddard compares their writings saying Clappe's work was "as much ahead of Bret Harte's stories as champagne is ahead of soap suds." Harte's writing was said to be "inspired by events and characters Shirely describes in her letters" (Moffett 1933, 2).¹⁹⁴ Mark Twain notably said "Harte is a liar, a thief, a swindler, a snob, a sot, a sponge, a coward, a Jeremy Diddler [con artist]." ¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Clappe wrote that she did not hold a grudge against Bret Harte, and in fact, when she moved to New York City, she remained close with his wife and children whom he had abandoned when he moved to England.¹⁹⁶

Another former student of Clappe's, the poet Charles Stoddard, credits her influence for generating his love of literature (Paul 1964, 142). He admires Clappe's writing style for expressing brilliant wit with "a real women's enthusiasm" (1875, quoted in Paul 1964, 146).

¹⁹³ Clappe wrote that he "unconsciously plagiarized my work," (*Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary* by Radcliffe College 1971, 338). Today, there are numerous schools named after Bret Harte in California and not one after Louise Clappe. Mark Twain also missed the Gold Rush entirely, as he arrived in 1863, 13 years after Louise had already lived inside of it.

¹⁹⁴ Moffett, Anita, *New York Times*, July 23, 1933, 2.

¹⁹⁵ <http://twainhartevisitor.com/bretharte/>

¹⁹⁶ Sandra Lockhart, "Louise Clappe (Dame Shirley), 1819–1906," *Legacy* 8, no. 2 (1991):141–146.

Stoddard compares Clappe to Ariel with a “magic wand” [as in the spirit Ariel, from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*] (Lawrence 1918, 50). Lawrence thought Clappe’s natural “magic” lay in her ability to encourage students in their personal growth by helping them develop their own unique written voice. Lawrence wrote she was “quick to discover any unusual promise in a pupil [and] masterfully” stir students into doing their best (1922, foreword). As a literary celebrity, Genevieve Stebbins likewise benefitted from Clappe’s guidance and example. If Stebbins loved Clappe as a mother, as she did her as a daughter, the two would have been quite the cultured ladies ‘about town’ in San Francisco. One would imagine that Stebbins looked up to her as a maternal figure, a woman of intelligence, charm and humour, and as a woman capable of standing on her own, forging her own destiny.

Genevieve Stebbins’ Education, and a Young San Francisco.

In 1865, when Genevieve Stebbins was 8 years old, San Francisco had more than 100,000 inhabitants, 40% of whom were women, and one in three were from Germany, Ireland, or Italy. Multiple international languages were heard in the streets. The populace was mostly working-class people living along the waterfront area in overcrowded housing. Higher paying merchant and civil service positions were most often held by white men, while Blacks, Hispanics, and Chinese worked in the labour or hospitality sectors in a racialized caste system of employment. Blacks made up approximately 1% of the population and Chinese 8%. Black men primarily worked as cooks and Black women as domestics, yet some became successful entrepreneurs such as the bootmaker Miffin Gibbs (Broussard 2006, 14), and Black millionaire New Englander Mary Ellen Pleasant who funded an Underground Railroad to California and engaged in successful legal battles for civil rights in San Francisco. Interestingly, one source states that San

Francisco had few recorded instances of violence against Blacks, although white civility was said to be a mask for “antipathy, disdain, and hostility” (Broussard, 1993, 7).¹⁹⁷ Yet, this article is dated, and historical digitized newspapers likely would reveal instances of violence that would counter this statement.

Many Chinese owned laundries, but most worked in the laundries, cigar factories, and/or in various physical labours. There was widespread Sinophobic sentiments and ongoing harassment of the Chinese populace including legislative efforts for their exclusion from mining and vigilante violence aiming to reduce Chinese access to mining claims. In one particularly horrible Chinese purge, a mob of white miners invaded a Chinese camp in Shasta and force marched them through town while they were pelted with rocks. The sheriff and his deputies broke up the mob and arrested as many as they could, freeing 200 Chinese men. The aggression was such that the Sheriff had to deputize another 200 men to prepare for future interactions. However, whenever rioters were arrested, their court cases were regularly dismissed by judges.¹⁹⁸ By 1867, there were approximately 130,000 people in San Francisco, 1,100 of whom were African American or of West Indies/ Caribbean descent. Sinophobia grew after a ship arrived from China with smallpox. A decade later, the Black population had risen slightly to 1,850 while there were 30,000 Chinese, 2,000 of whom were women and children. Blacks lived throughout the city, but the Chinese lived primarily in the ghettoized district of America’s first Chinatown.¹⁹⁹

Grammar schools were intended to be interracial, and by age 6 all children were required to attend, although it wasn’t heavily enforced.²⁰⁰ While John Swett strongly advocated for

¹⁹⁷ Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954* (University Press of Kansas, 1993).

¹⁹⁸ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (Random House, 2007).

¹⁹⁹ Information gleaned from San Francisco yearly business directories.

²⁰⁰ John Swett, *History of the Public School system of California* (A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1876).

interracial schooling, he was met with pushback by later superintendents.²⁰¹ Swett passed several laws to create a state Board of Education, obtained state taxation to finance public education, funded school libraries, and funded teacher training institutes which professionalized educators. Under his leadership, the state passed the most progressive school bills of the 19th century. He established school curriculum standards “to pursue an intelligent system of education... despite prejudices of parents” (Wood 1987, 92–93).²⁰²

Between 1864–1867, when Genevieve Stebbins was the ages of 7–10 years, Clappe and James Stebbins are listed in the *San Francisco Directory* as living at 814 Bush Street in the growing neighborhood of what would become the upscale neighborhood of Nob Hill. Clappe moved teaching locations several times from the High School to the ‘first class’ all-girls Denman Grammar School from 1864–1868, then back to the Broadway Grammar School for two years only to return to the Denman Grammar School in 1870.

In 1869, when Stebbins was 12, the much-anticipated transcontinental railroad connecting the East Coast to the West Coast was finally finished. The rail was built by the labour of over 15,000 Chinese men of the Central Pacific Railroad company who met the eastern division workers at the Utah line, comprised mainly of Irish men from the Union Pacific Railroad company. In 1869, Genevieve Stebbins, James Stebbins, and Louise Clappe lived at 516 Taylor in the 4th (IV) Ward.

²⁰¹ David Tyack Thomas James and Aaron Benavot, *Law and the Shaping of Public Education, 1785–1954*, (University of Michigan Press, 1987).

²⁰² Will C. Wood, “Early Vision of Semple, Swett, Realized in Broad, Firm Educational System,” June 30, 1870, *The Bulletin Diamond Jubilee Edition* (September 1925).

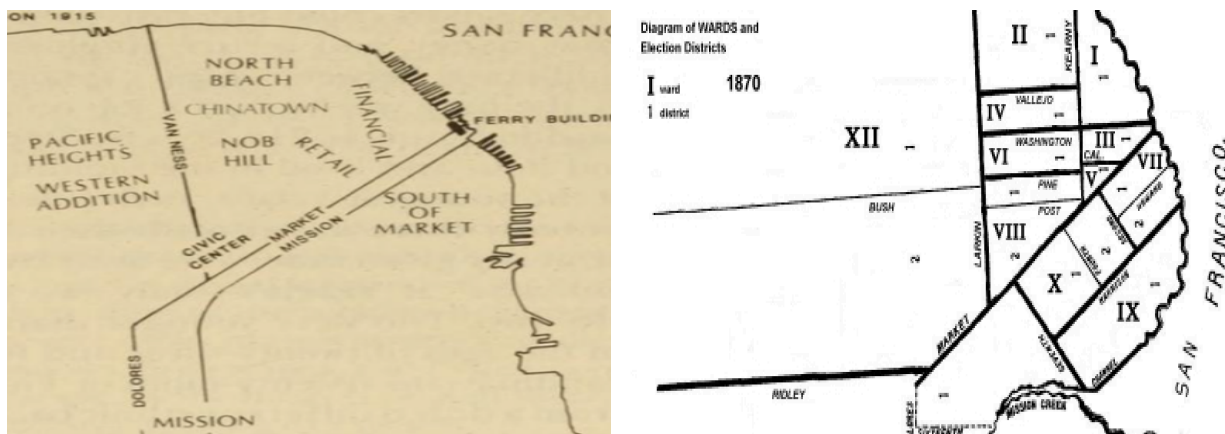


Fig. 18. *San Francisco Directory*, Fig. 19. *San Francisco Genealogy Voting Ward Maps*

This area was bound by Vallejo Street to the north, Kearny Street to the east, Washington Street to the south, and Larkin Street to the west. The 4th Ward sat up high on the hill with a central view of downtown and San Francisco Bay. The neighborhood was a mix of middle to upper class families, including police officers, constables, merchant brokers and other common occupations such as carpenters, labourers, bookkeepers, hatters, dress makers, painters, cigar makers, bankers, shop keepers, and teachers. The community was incredibly diverse, with people from Bavaria, Ireland, France, China, Sweden, New Zealand, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, Denmark, West Indies (listed as a black family), Wales, England, and Mexico as well as various states in the union. The 4th Ward was densely populated, in the 1870 census, 421 pages list 7–10 dwellings per page. The area became known as “Nob Hill” named after four massively wealthy men who built mansions in the neighborhood in the late 1870s. Apparently, the higher one went up the hill on Taylor Street to Nob Hill, the higher the income levels and property value. From Pacific Heights to Nob Hill, one third of the families were significantly wealthy and deemed to be of ‘good social standing’ and of the ‘highest respectability.’ San Francisco’s first cable streetcar provided easy access from Nob Hill to the business district downtown.

From Stebbins' home in Nob Hill, it was a short walk to the Denman Grammar School she attended until the age of 14 (grades 5–8). Stebbins studied Latin and Greek, French, classics of Western civilization, philosophy, history, math, astronomy, grammar, logic, and rhetorical debate. Both Clappe and Stebbins were fluent in French. Historian Carrie Streeter found in 1868, at age 11, Stebbins was noted by the press for her “exquisitely recited” poem performance of Maud Muller.²⁰³ It's an odd choice of a poem about a farm ‘girl’ (young woman) who falls in love with a judge from the upper echelon of society, though the judge is attracted to the girl for different reasons. While being from different class backgrounds, the judge envisions moving to a farm, while she aspires to be a wealthy wife in town. In the end, the judge and the girl don't voice their feelings, marry within their circles, and live to regret ‘what might have been.’

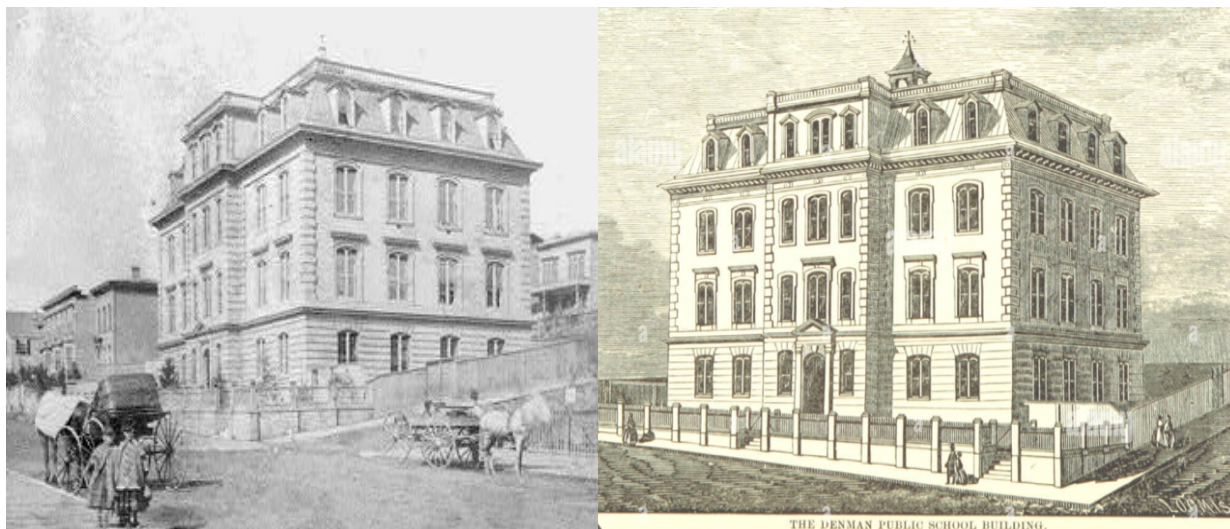


Fig. 20 and 21. Denman Grammar School, Taylor and Bush Street, 1866 Library of Congress Prints and Photograph Division.

Stebbins is listed in the 1869 Denman Grammar School Roll of Honor.²⁰⁴ At the yearly school exhibition, she recited Cato's Soliloquy displaying her “oratorical powers to excellent advantage.”²⁰⁵ Cato's Soliloquy is from *Cato, A Tragedy*, an 18th century play written by Joseph

²⁰³ “The Denman School Exhibition,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 17, 1868.

²⁰⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 1869, 3.

²⁰⁵ “Denman School,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 9, 1869, 3.

Addison. At the age of 13, it would have been a challenging dramatic monologue to deliver. Stebbins also performed in the short play “Earth Child in Fairy Land” with several other girls, who “sustained their characters credibly” (1869, 3). While Stebbins was a student, John Swett was the principal of the Denman Grammar School from 1868–1876.

918	1289	Swett	John	40	M	W	School Teacher	10,000	2,000	New Hampshire			
			Mary	30	F	W	Washing House			Connecticut			
			Emily	7	F	W	At Home			California			
			Frank	7	M	W	"			"			Prod
		Stebbins	James	42	M	W	Lininger	40,000	20,000	New York			
			Genevieve	13	F	W	At Home			California			
		Clappe	Louisa	40	F	W	School Teacher	2,000	1,000	Massachusetts			
		Mary	Emily	56	F	W	At Home			Connecticut			
		White	George	20	M	W	"			Illinois			
		Soule	Maria	20	F	W	School Teacher		1,000	Massachusetts			
		Landschnepper	Leonard	13	M	W	Office Boy			Australia	1	1	
		for	Upper	24	M	W	Domestic			China	1	1	

Fig. 22. Excerpt from 1870 census record including John Swett’s family and Stebbins’ father.

According to the 1870 census, James Stebbins, Genevieve, age 13, and Clappe lived in the John Swett family household in Nob Hill. It’s unclear why they moved there, other than it was a large home with an active household that welcomed many guests. John Swett, as stated previously, was a legendary Californian public-school advocate and former California State Superintendent (from 1863–1868). Swett’s son shared that his father had disagreements with Leland Stanford (when he was a Governor), as Stanford wanted tax money from the sale of public lands to be used for the railroad, while Swett wanted to use money to help fund poor school districts.²⁰⁶

Swett had a unique pedagogical outlook. He appreciated the importance of nature and fresh air for children, and had students take an hour and a half of recess every day. He could have been

²⁰⁶ Recollections from Frank Swett “Biographical Sketch” Oral history project for the Bancroft Library, 1968.

influenced by German immigrants known as ‘Turners,’ as there were Turnverein clubs in San Francisco at the time promoting physical culture, exercise for children, and time spent enjoying nature. Swett valued engaging the five senses as a “means of communication between the outer world and the spirit within” (Wood 1925, 85). His pedagogical viewpoints were holistically inclined. He believed that physical movement was so beneficial, he even passed a state law requiring physical exercise in school. California was first state to have done so.²⁰⁷ As an adult, Stebbins similarly was an advocate for psycho-physical culture.

According to the 1870 census, the home of John Swett (age 40) included his wife Mary (age 30), daughter Emily (age 7), son Frank (age 7 months), Emily Lacy (age 56, most likely Mary’s mother), James Stebbins (42), Genevieve Stebbins (13), Louise Clapp (40), schoolteacher Maria Soule (age 20), George White (age 20), Leonard, an Australian ‘office boy’ (age 13), and a Chinese male domestic (age 24). John Swett and James Stebbins each listed property worth \$40,000, which would be around a million dollars today.

The ecologist and geologist John Muir described the Swett home as a “big, three-storied house” located at 1419 Taylor Street. As a lifelong friend of Swett’s, when he wasn’t living in his cabin in Yosemite, Muir was a guest at the Swett home over a period of five years (with his own room on the third floor). He said the home was warm and welcoming. Co-founder of the Sierra Club, Muir worked to preserve Yosemite Valley as a national park with support from President Theodore Roosevelt. Muir said the Swett home was “only a few minutes’ walk from the festering, disease-vice-crime-begetting Tar Flat slums on the waterfront. The Swett home on Taylor Street lay between these concentrations of wealth and poverty.”²⁰⁸ Swett was a great

²⁰⁷ Barbara J. Hoepner, “John Swett’s Experience with Physical Exercise at the Rincon School: Foundation for the First State Physical Education Law in the U.S.,” *Research Quarterly. American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation* 41 no. 3 (1970): 365–70.

²⁰⁸ Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (Plunkett Lake Press, 1945, 2019).

advocate for his friends and encouraged Muir to develop his theory of how glacial movements shaped land features such as in Yosemite Valley, which he later published in *Harper's*. Muir became a leading proponent for the protection of Yosemite and advocated for a National Park system amongst other significant environmental initiatives. Of his impressions of Indigenous people, Muir admired how “Indians walk softly and hurt the landscape no more than birds and squirrels.” He regretted how different the impact of white men was in contrast. Speaking in support of Natives at the Swett household, Muir confronted a Colonel involved in campaigns against the native population saying it was a mean and brutal policy. He later travelled to Alaska in a canoe manned by Indigenous guides to explore glacial formations.²⁰⁹

The Swett's third child, Helen, shared that as children they gathered around Muir to listen to stories of his adventures in Yosemite and the Sierras, saying he was a “fantastic raconteur”²¹⁰ Such events would have included Stebbins. The Keith family lived nearby and spent many evenings in the Swett home. William Keith was a great friend of Muir's and a famous painter of Californian panoramic landscapes. It is highly likely that Stebbins would have visited the redwoods and witnessed the incredible Californian vistas that her neighbor William Keith painted, if not the paintings themselves.

²⁰⁹ johnmuir.org, vault.seirraclub.org recollections of John Swett.

²¹⁰ Helen Swett, “Reminiscence of John Muir by Swett, Helen” (2021). <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/muir-reminiscences/31/>



Fig 23. Bancroft Library, William Keith, Sentinel Rock Yosemite California 1872.

Social theorist Henry George was another good friend of Swett's who authored the wildly popular book *Progress and Poverty* with editorial help from Swett. George advocated for a single tax system to invest in a national basic income system to help eliminate poverty and provide for needed social services, while Swett favored progressive income taxes to limit the accumulation of great wealth. George's book came to inspire numerous social reform activists across the nation. Notable scholars regularly visited the Swett home, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, poet Julia Ward Howe, and the biologist Louis Agassiz. When Emerson travelled to San Francisco in 1871, he visited the Swett home and attended a salon held by Clappe.²¹¹ John Muir gave Emerson a tour of Yosemite Valley, and they certainly would have heard Emerson speak in San Francisco at Horatio Stebbins' Unitarian Church.²¹² Horatio Stebbins and

²¹¹ Lawrence, "A Literary Light of the Early Days," *Literary California* (1915): 49.

²¹² *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1884).

Genevieve Stebbins are in the same family genealogy book. Horatio was an 8th generation American descendant. The ‘Stebbins’ roots are from the English town of Stebins, or parish of “Stibbing” in Essex County, 44 miles northwest of London. Their family heritage is traced back to the year 1201 from land record surveys commissioned by the Norman king of England, William the Conqueror. Horatio Stebbins, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, was renowned for giving the memorial address for Abraham Lincoln in San Francisco attended by thousands.²¹³

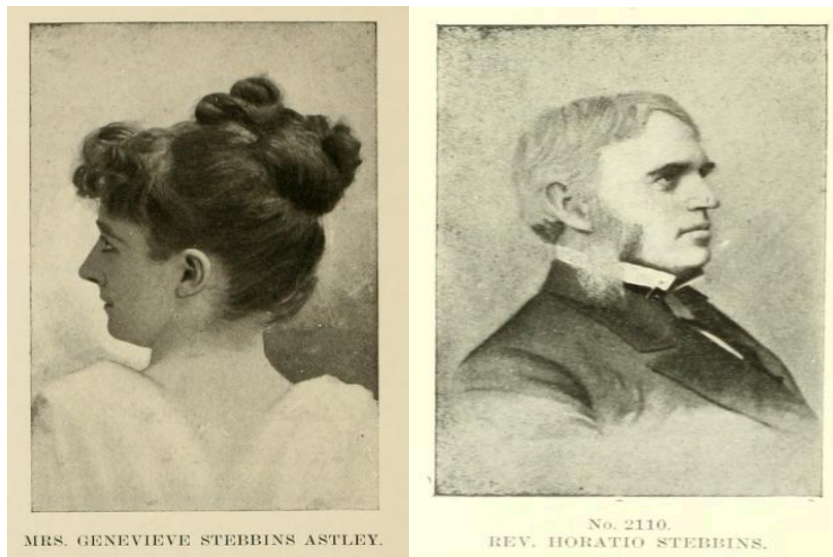


Fig. 24. *Stebbins Genealogy* (Vol. II, 1904, 1099). There is a page dedicated to her life achievements (1100).
 Fig. 25. Horatio Stebbins illustration (*Stebbins Genealogy* Vol I., 1904, 561).

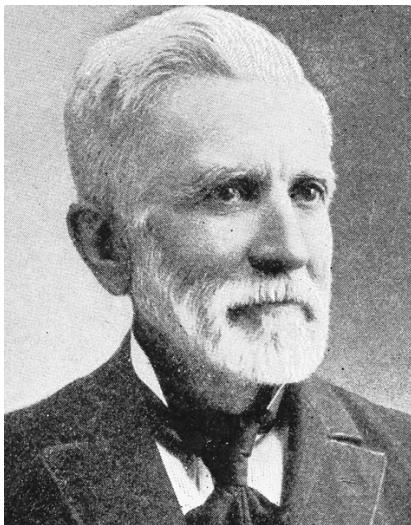
In the Swett home, Clappe gave weekly evening classes on art and literature (Lawrence 1922, foreword). She held a weekly salon “drawing the best minds about her,” said to have been the first salon established in the city (Lawrence 1922, 32). Like European salons, both men and women were welcome, private entertainments were given, and ideas would be exchanged and debated freely. Formal dress was expected in salon gatherings and, historically speaking, the evening was hosted by a woman who managed guest invitations. As a teenager, Stebbins would have been introduced to an incredible array of adult guests.

²¹³ *Stebbins Genealogy* 1904, 568; San Francisco digital history archive <https://www.foundsf.org>.



Fig. 26. A view of a salon gathering. Austrian painter Julius Schmid's *Schubertiade*, 1896, Public Domain.

John Swett



Mary Tingley Lawrence



John Muir.



Fig. 27. *Public Education in California, its origin and development, with personal reminiscences of half a century* (American Book Company, 1911). Fig. 28. John Singer Sargent painting of Mary Tingley Lawrence, 1881. Fig. 29. John Muir, Yosemite National Park collections.

Mary Lawrence shared how she visited Mariposa Grove with Clappe to admire the giant Sequoia trees. They were joined by Galen Clark, a “rare scholar” and guardian of Yosemite

Valley, James Hutchings of the *Illustrated California Magazine*, and John Muir who organized a botany exploration. Growing up in this milieu of accomplished scholars and artists must have had a profound influence on Genevieve Stebbins' developing intellect, with a steady stream of visitors to the home, social engagements, and the bustle of the Swett family life.

Stebbins graduated from Denman Grammar School in 1871 when she was 14 during Swett's tenure as principal.²¹⁴ They would have all attended her graduation with delight. By 1882, John Swett purchased a ranch adjoining his dear friend John Muir's property in the Alhambra Valley. The land had 20 acres of fruit trees and vineyards. His son managed the property and recalled some of the hardships his father experienced in preserving the integrity of the teaching profession against the moneyed class he had "scraps" with.²¹⁵ He stayed on as San Francisco's superintendent from 1891–1894 to protect the educational system he helped establish.

Mills College

After graduating from Denman Grammar School, Stebbins continued her education. Most teenagers in San Francisco stopped their schooling at age 14. Further education was deemed impractical for working class families, as teens were meant to start supporting the family and learn a trade. Those who could afford it invested in further schooling. After graduating in 1871, Stebbins became a boarding student at the college preparatory institute 'Mills Seminary' (now Mills College) in Oakland, California across the San Francisco Bay.

Mills Seminary was founded by Mary Atkins, a graduate of Oberlin College, one of the first colleges to admit women. Mills Seminary was later transferred to the minister Cyrus Mills

²¹⁴ "Local Intelligence," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 3, 1871, 3.

²¹⁵ Recollections from Frank Swett "Biographical Sketch" Oral history project for the Bancroft Library, 1968.

and his wife Susan Mills. Susan Tolman (Mills), born in Enosburg, Vermont, was a student at the women's college Mount Holyoke and after graduation taught there for three years. After marrying Cyrus in 1848, she travelled with him to British Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where they did missionary and educational work before moving to California.



Fig. 30. Lithograph Mills Seminary, Alameda Co., Cal. Published by Thompson and West, 1878.



Fig 31. Eadweard Muybridge, "Mills Seminary, Seminary Park, Mammoth albumen print, 1873.

Mills Seminary was the first women's college west of the Rockies. When Stebbins began her schooling at Mills the school had just moved to new grounds. A building was constructed for 200 students with high ceilings, wide hallways, sunny rooms, gas lamps, running water throughout, pupil's rooms with a "lighted closet, marble basin" and their own bathroom. Students came from as far away as Maine, Vermont, and other East Coast states, as well as from Chile, England, Canada, Australia, India, and China.²¹⁶



Fig. 32. Mills Seminary, Library of Congress Images.

On the East Coast in the 1870s, there were five women's colleges— Wellesley, Smith, Vassar, Radcliffe, and Hunter modelled after East Coast men's colleges and European schools. Those who attended women's colleges were from privileged families able to afford the cost of higher education. At Mills, students boarded with teachers as supervisors and did not visit their homes other than during official school breaks. Visitors were welcomed on Saturdays. They had

²¹⁶ Rosalind Keep, *Fourscore Years, a History of Mills College*, published by Mills College, 1931, 78.

a reading room, library, recitation rooms, dining hall, art room, two large school rooms, parlour, and the west wing was for the principals. The upper levels were student rooms, two to a room.



Fig. 33. “Photograph of gymnasium at Mills College,” image Lothers and Young. While this image is from a 1920 class, and the women’s outfits are not representative of what would have been worn in 1871, the view of the school’s gymnasium is impressive. The gym has Swedish Ling apparatus on the left side and a basketball net.

Health and well-being were essential at Mills, and a gymnasium for recreation was provided. The school had daily exercise classes taught by Elizabeth King for “healthy young amazons” in the system of Dio Lewis (an East Coast physical education pioneer) to give the young women “strength and vigour” (Keep 1931, 78). They were also expected to walk a mile every day to enjoy the fresh air.



Fig. 34. Rosalind Keep, *Fourscore Years, a History of Mills College*, published by Mills College, 1931, 70.

Genevieve Stebbins is listed in the 1871–1872 school catalogue in the Junior Class. Mills Seminary was a private school with the hopes of being endowed like Vassar and Mount Holyoke (which was later obtained). The school was established as a “consecrated undertaking for the higher culture of young women” (Keep 1931, 70). In the first term, Stebbins studied Robinson’s Arithmetic, Greene’s Analysis, and Anderson’s Ancient History. In the second term, she studied Robinson’s Algebra (to Quadratics), Cutter’s Anatomy and Physiology, and Anderson’s Modern History. Greene’s Analysis was a system for analyzing sentences as expressions of thought to create accomplished writers as thinkers according to Samuel Green, principal of Phillips Grammar School in Boston. Students also had classes in French, German or Spanish, vocal music, drawing and painting, elocution with Eliza Cardinell, and the craft of creating wax flowers.²¹⁷ This intricate craft for women was a Victorian parlour botanical art, thought of as an “elegant amusement to while away the leisure time of the fairer sex,”²¹⁸ although some women had their work displayed in public expositions. Wax botanical displays would be placed in glass domes to protect the delicate items.²¹⁹

“The Alarm” painting on the next page depicts Mills Seminary students, commissioned by a wealthy Nob Hill homeowner. In the painting, artist Tobey Rosenthal depicts a comical story he was told. Apparently one evening the young women heard noises coming from the attic cupola and they woke Mrs. Mills to go investigate. They grabbed brooms as ‘weapons’ and went up to the attic, when out of a closet jumped three kittens scaring the lot in their nightgowns. Mills College archivists were unaware that the painting existed until I contacted them, and it is not

²¹⁷ From the school catalogue 1871–1872, US School Catalogs 1765–1935.

²¹⁸ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, December 1838.

²¹⁹ Ann B. Shteir, “Fac-Similes of Nature”: Victorian Wax Flower Modelling,” *Victorian Literature and culture* 35, no. 2, (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and David Marsh, “Wax flower modelling, a Lost Victorian Parlour Art,” theschoolofforgottenarts.com

known where the painting is today. The painting could be considered humorous or pandering to the idea of women's irrational fears and weaknesses, depending on one's perspective. I for one think it's funny! It seems Stebbins had left Mills by the time the painting was made, but it is amusing to think of her as one the boarders depicted in the painting awoken in the middle of the night. The image of a woman behind Mrs. Mills with her hand to her chin does look strikingly like an illustration of Stebbins from a later date. The painting hung for many years in the grand home salon of Mrs. Hopkins-Searles before being given to an art society. Hopkins-Searles' California Street mansion was said to be magnificent, and she held entertainments with the best of local society talent.²²⁰



Fig. 35. The Alarm. Illustration for *The Graphic*, 23 March 1878.

²²⁰ "The Call's Portrait Gallery: Ladies who Shine in San Francisco Society," *The Morning Call*, San Francisco, February 1, 1891, 3.

Clark Institute

Stebbins was at Mills Seminary for one year, before moving back to San Francisco to attend Clarke Institute from 1872–1873. It's not known why she moved back, perhaps her studies at Mills weren't to her liking, or she missed her family. Clark was a private school said to be “one of the best in the city” from which leading society ladies graduated. Clarke Institute gave a public exhibition in May 1873, which was so well attended it was standing room only.

Stebbins was one of 14 students graduating in 1873, and she gave the valedictory address. Daniel Coit Gilman, the President of the University of California, Berkely, gave the graduation speech which was resoundingly applauded.²²¹ There is little information on Clarke Institute that I could find except for a few images. In 1873, in San Francisco, there was one boy's public high school and one girl's public high school that turned out perhaps ten graduates a year. Attending Clarke Institute would have been an exemplary educational opportunity for Stebbins, far superior to the public high schools.



Fig. 36. San Francisco Public Library, “Clarke Institute one of the oldest and most popular institutes on the Pacific Coast.” Fig. 37. 1880 corner of O’ Farrel and Mason Streets. San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection.

²²¹ “Educational Institutions,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, May 31, 1873.

For her graduation ceremony from Clarke Institute, Stebbins, now 16, recited a monologue from ‘Cato.’ Being chosen to deliver this dramatic reading demonstrates that Stebbins was already being recognized for her expressive capabilities. It’s not known if she chose the reading, or if it was chosen for her by a teacher. Theatre scholar Marlis Schweitzer notes in American theatre history, Cato is often viewed as “America’s founding tragedy” (direct message 2024). Cato represents the fight for liberty, and respected political leaders were referred to as an “American Cato.’ The piece, first performed in 1713, represents opposition and resistance to Caesar’s tyranny, self-sacrificing courage and freedom of speech. It was a well-known, popular play during the American Revolution, read by Senators and military men. George Washington presented Cato to inspire his exhausted troops at Valley Forge in May 1778.²²²

Cato, A Tragedy (in excerpts)

It must be so— Plato, thou reason'st well [...]
Through what variety of untried being,
Through what new scenes and changes must we pass!

The wide, th' unbounded prospect lies before me;
But shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it.
Here will I hold. If there's a power above us,
(And that there is, all Nature cries aloud
Through all her works,) He must delight in virtue;
And that which He delights in must be happy.

But when or where? – This world was made for Caesar. [...]
But this informs me I shall never die.
The Soul, secured in her existence, smiles
At the drawn dagger, and defies its point [...]
Unhurt amidst the war of elements,
The wreck of matter and the crash of worlds.

²²² mountvernon.org.

In 1873, Clappe was still teaching at the Denman School and apparently living on her own at 912 Sutter, while James Stebbins was working as an attorney on Clay Street and living at 759 Clay. It is unclear who Genevieve lived with at this time. In 1875 and 1876 James moved his offices and lived at the Commercial Hotel, while Clappe lived on 130 Tyler Street. In 1878 or 1879, James Stebbins remarried. He is listed in the 1880 census as married to Adila Stebbins, born in Kentucky, with a child Edna Hall Stebbins, age 11 months (born in June), and Gracie Hall, age 15 born in Alabama. Therefore, James Stebbins had another child and a stepchild, and Genevieve had a half-sister and a stepsister. It is not known if she ever met them, as at some point in 1875, Genevieve had moved to New York City to pursue an acting career.

Genevieve Stebbins was provided with exemplary educational opportunities. She was able to attend the best schools available in San Francisco. Although not much is known about her father's character, her Aunt Louise was admired for being bright, vivaciously inspiring, and an admirable guide for her students. Not only was she a scholar, but she was also an entertainer who organized theatrical events and educational home salon gatherings. Stebbins had a vibrant home atmosphere and was able to develop her intellectual and performance capabilities. It is not known if she performed outside of the home other than at her school graduations or church functions but seeing as the next step forward in Stebbins' life was to pursue a career on the stage, she certainly had developed an abiding love for the art form during her teenage years. Not long after leaving San Francisco Stebbins stepped into a leading role with one of the nation's most prominent theatre companies in New York. The next chapter will explore this period of her growth.

Chapter Five

From San Francisco to the Broadway Stage, 1875–1879:

Stebbins Arrives in New York City

This chapter will explore Stebbins' move to New York City in 1875. I will explore the influence of her mentor Rose Eytinge, the production of *Rose Michel* in Stebbins' first theatre tour, Stebbins' performance in *Our Boys*, working with Steele MacKaye, and troubles with MacKaye. Following her graduation and valedictory address in 1873, is not known what Stebbins did in the intervening two years. It is possible that before she left, Stebbins saw a performance given in 1875 by surviving members of the Modoc Indigenous community. As historian Boyd Cothran describes, they presented a lecture/play at a San Francisco theatre with staged tableaux based upon the Californian Modoc War (1872–1873). Attacks between the U.S. military and the Modoc's were widely covered by the national press in a highly dramatic manner. The theatre narrative revolved around the Modoc woman 'Toby Riddle' who had become famous for saving the peace commissioner Albert Meacham from being harmed by Modoc warriors. Audiences were familiar with Riddle's fame. Under the stage name of *Winema*, Riddle translated Modoc stories into English for the audience. The Modoc group travelled with Albert Meacham under the Boston-based management of James Redpath (who also organized Mark Twain's tours and the first American Gilbert and Sullivan tour). The surviving Modoc hoped that if they shared their stories, it might help spread a message of peace and educate the American public about the forced relocation of Indigenous peoples (Cothran 2017).²²³

When Stebbins left San Francisco, she travelled on the new transcontinental railway. Stebbins' father, his new wife, child, and stepdaughter remained in California. She likely

²²³ Boyd Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (The University of American Press, 2017), 83–92.

travelled first class in a Pullman railcar that had berths which could be modified and changed into beds for the evening. At this time railcars were separated by class, race, and marital circumstance. There were cars for single men, families, and separate cars for Chinese. Stebbins probably travelled in a separate women's car with a chaperone to ensure her safety. There were kitchen cars serving food, but trains also stopped at eating houses enroute. The train went about 20 miles an hour, which seems dreadfully slow by today's standards, however it was the fastest speed anyone had yet travelled. It would have created a strangely fascinating visceral sensation for passengers. The voyage cross country took about a week.

When she arrived in New York City as a California girl, Stebbins would have been looked upon as an intriguing individual in her new social milieu. Soon after her arrival, New York publisher Edgar Werner recollected that Stebbins was "young and beautiful and aspiring and energetic."²²⁴ Stebbins' upbringing in California would have been considered unusual for most New Yorkers. She represented a new kind of woman. Stebbins was unique not only as a Californian, but also because she was raised by a scholar within an influential community of intellectuals, artists, and successful entrepreneurs. Women who had travelled west, and those born in California, were admired as being strong, independent, and fearless. The famous New York City actress Rose Eytinge describes 'Western' women, as follows: "Women born and reared in the West is a grand and goodly type of womanhood. She is strong and keen and comprehensive; she is full of life and grace and freedom; she is quick to feel an injury, and she is quite equal to being her own avenger." She continues by asserting that "Her eye is keen, and her tongue is sharp; but her heart is warm, and her hand is open."²²⁵ Eytinge wrote this after working

²²⁴ *Werner's*, 1899, 84.

²²⁵ "The Women of the West," *Bedford's Magazine* I, no. 6 (November 1888): 815.

with Stebbins and certainly could have been thinking of her when cataloguing a Western woman's attributes.

In the mid 1870s, the post-Civil War depression had left the nation struggling to recover. America was largely divided by wealth or lack thereof, and the middle class as such did not yet truly exist. Many working-class urban families lived in overcrowded tenements, working conditions were often unsafe and without regulation, and child labour was pervasive. There were few, if any, public social services available. There were limited possibilities for working labourers to gain upward mobility due educational disadvantages. Life expectancy was exceptionally low with a national death average of fifty-five. Fewer than 10% graduated from high school, and roughly 50% of children went to school. Poor families needed their children to work and contribute to the family's needs. Boys did things such as selling newspapers, collected rags for rug making, or helped their fathers in small jobs. Girls helped mothers with house chores, doing craft labour, or providing laundry services. Child labour laws weren't passed until 1916.²²⁶ Most working-class families were semi-literate, their homes did not have books, and there were very few public libraries. The working poor relied on social assistance through church aid, charitable organizations, and bread lines. There was a dire need for a citizenry who could participate in advocating for societal needs such as health and social services.

With the advent of the industrial age, in a single generation America was transformed as new professions developed. During the Reconstruction era, the U.S. population exploded by 25 million and the middle class slowly began to grow with an increase in available jobs (mainly for whites). When Stebbins arrived in New York City, the Bowery district had exploded in growth when numerous factories were built surrounded by tightly packed tenement housing. More

²²⁶ Michael McGerr, *Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (Oxford University, 2003).

women began to work outside the home in textile mills, as maids and governesses, or as seamstresses in garment shops. With the rise in employment, a growing middle class were then able afford entertainments such as seeing the circus, dining out, and going to the theatre. As newly founded public schools spread, the former parochial church funded schooling structure faded. The literacy rate grew, and a “new science of pedagogy” instituted educational standards across the nation (Wiebe 1966).²²⁷ Dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter positioned Stebbins as middle-class (1999, 46), although I would argue that Stebbins was upper middle-class— yet still below the 1% elite of society such as the Astor, Carnegie, Vanderbilt and Rockefeller families. In standards of upward mobility, Stebbins was amongst the more privileged.

By 1870, New York City’s population had increased 250% in thirty years, with a continual influx of Irish and German immigrants and later Jews, Italians, Greeks, Hungarians, Syrians, French, Russians, Romanians, Serbs, Bohemians, and some Chinese. Most of these immigrants settled in tenements situated around manufacturing factories in the Bowery. New businesses downtown rapidly popped up such as hat stores and floral shops, dime museums, saloons, gambling venues, dance halls, opium dens, darkly lit gay bars, “fairy” resorts for trans women and drag queens, and the most popular—brothels (Alexiou 2024, 135–143, 152).²²⁸ The lower Manhattan ‘Bowery District’ was densely populated and rather chaotic. Men frequented the theater for lighthearted fare and Shakespeare alike, smoking and drinking in the theater as if it were a private clubhouse. Working girls roamed the room. The ‘bowery boys’ were a rowdy bunch who would loudly applaud or express disdain if an actor’s talents weren’t up to par. Popular theatre post-Civil War was largely Shakesperean repertory or English plays, performed by lead actors like Edwin Booth, Helene Modjeska, Rose Eytinge, John McCullough amongst

²²⁷ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877–1920* (Hill and Wang, 1966), 118–119.

²²⁸ Alice Sparberg Alexiou, *Devil’s Mile: The Rich, Gritty History of the Bowery* (Fordham University Press, 2024).

others. As the city's infrastructure expanded, privileged elites moved away from the din and dirt of factories in lower Manhattan, north past 14th street to 26th and beyond. The cities geographic theatrical district moved from the tawdry lower east side Bowery area to between Union Square and Madison Square. Still, many would continue to visit the Bowery and Hell's Kitchen underbelly for various entertainments.

After arriving in New York City in 1875, Stebbins described herself as a "lady of leisure," meaning she was financially well off, and did not have to work to support herself.²²⁹ She was likely immersed in social obligations, entertainments, and making new acquaintances. Stebbins would have been welcomed, cared for, and housed by wealthy relatives or family friends. She was unusual not only because she was a well-educated Californian, but her family background positioned her to be conversant with privileged, learned society. At her young age, Stebbins was considered a 'debutante.' The American *nouveau riche* mirrored European aristocratic traditions, in that as a debutante, Stebbins would have been 'brought out' into society by being 'officially' introduced at parties, balls, and other social gatherings. In high status families, formally presenting young single daughters was a matter of pride. Marriageability and arranging appropriate matches were of paramount importance. Young women were expected to demonstrate formal social graces, and embody 'respectability' or *politesse* in public discourse. According to the *Education of the Female Sex* (1868) from the Office of Education, Washington D.C., young women were meant to be cultivated to have moral qualities and characteristics

appropriate to the female character, such as softness and tenderness of feeling; depth of sensibility; mildness; pliability; patience; self-forgetting and self-sacrificing love. contentment; and submission to limitation within a narrow sphere; a quality the most important of all. [... She should] learn to live with reference to others than herself. Instead of permitting herself to be absorbed in silent fancies and reveries, she should be conversable and sociable, cheerful and joyous, and should bring cheerfulness and

²²⁹ From court testimony in 1884, "Francis B. Carpenter Against Sheridan Shook and Albert M. Palmer," June 17, 1884, 1891, 4 (Court of Appeals: New York Supreme Court: No. 543).

pleasure into life, so often troubled and burdensome” (1868, 378–379).

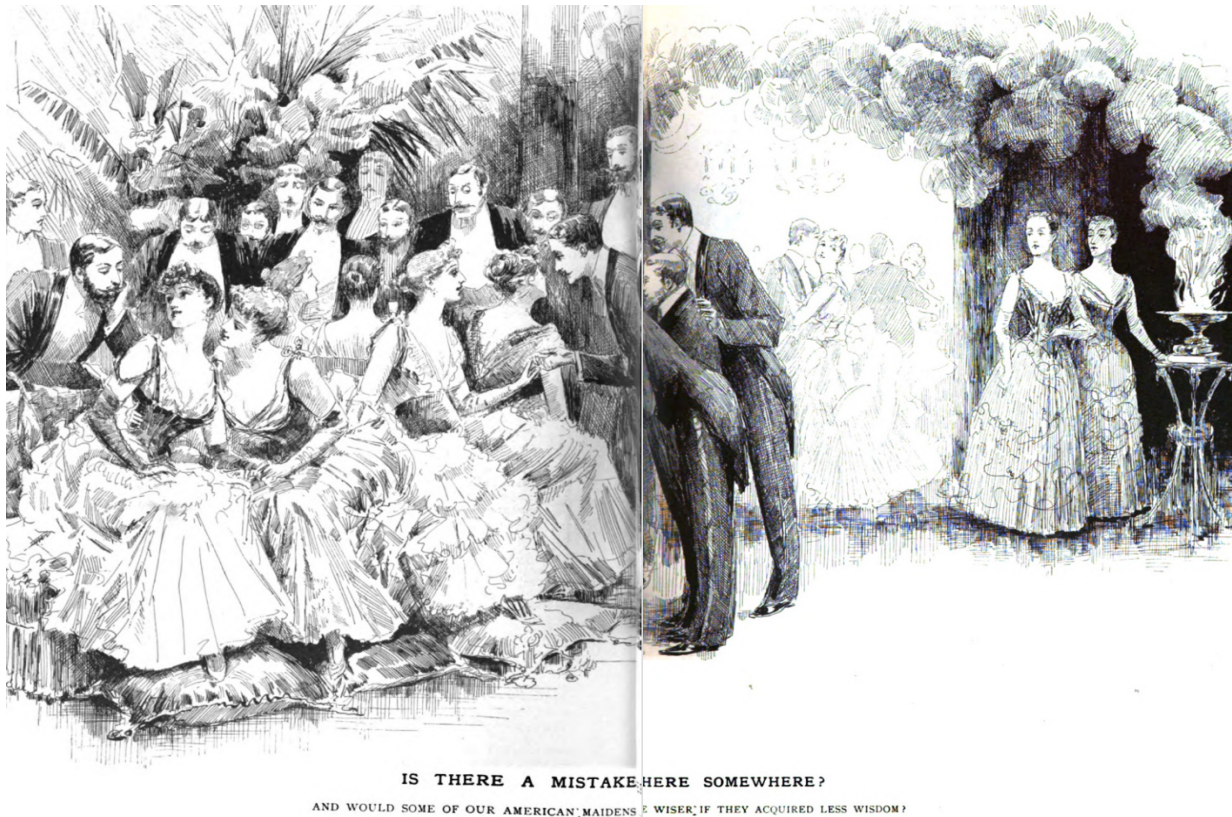


Fig. 38. “Is There a Mistake Here Somewhere? And would some of our American maidens be wiser if they acquired less wisdom?” *Life* 13 (1889): 286–287.

With such a long list of expectations for young women to cultivate— some which continue to resonate today— mothers, aunts and grandmothers began preparing their female kin at a young age. Such ‘education’ seems to emphasize submission and pliability over intellect and wit. The image above presents two women on the right who are in possession of ‘forbidden’ knowledge, symbolized by the smoking cauldron, and as a result are not getting male attention while the other women are fawned over. Clearly there was a price to pay for being over-educated.

While Stebbins was a debutante, she wasn’t interested in marriage prospects and instead focused on finding performance opportunities. As discussed in the previous chapter, her family relations included Clappe’s first cousin, Genevieve Ward. Ward was a successful tragic actress

in London widely followed by the American press. In 1875 a rumour of Ward's arrival in New York was announced in the *Dramatic News*, "Miss Genevieve Ward, who is now the best female 'star' in Great Britain, will probably come to this country in January, under Max Strakosch."²³⁰ Ward had connections with the Union Square Theatre Company where Stebbins obtained employment, and it is likely Ward helped to arrange proper professional introductions.

Mentor Rose Eytinge

Stebbins arrival in New York City was announced saying she had the "unusual design of going upon the stage."²³¹ At age 18, Stebbins was introduced to the actress Rose Eytinge who thereafter became her first mentor (Ruyter 1999, 46). Eytinge (1835–1911) was one of the leading ladies at the renowned Union Square Theatre in a highly respected stock company of actors. Stock companies were the standard theatrical organization in the mid-19th century, presenting shows from a company repertoire on a rotating basis, often with actors known for performing certain character types. Many actors created stock roles they kept in their repertoire throughout their career. Plays filled entire evenings with five or six acts being performed. Old line producers such as Laura Keane, James Wallack and his son Lester Wallack were actors who ran stock companies along with businessmen A.M. Palmer, and theatre manager Augustin Daly.

Historian Marlis Schweitzer notes that in the mid-nineteenth century most towns across the United States had stock theatre companies led by a manager overseeing all aspects of production. Stock performers of local theatre companies not only staged their own repertoires but also played supporting roles for touring stars. However, by the mid-1870s, stock companies came to be

²³⁰ *Dramatic News* 1, no. 5 (October 30, 1875), and another announcement was printed in "Amusement Notes from Other Points," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 18, 1875, 4.

²³¹ L.A.C., *Werner* 3, 1887, 289–90.

replaced by stars touring with ‘combination companies.’ Combination companies produced a show in one city before going on tour. By the 1880s, “282 combination companies were established while only 8 stock companies remained.”²³² In many ways, this was a result of more actors being trained for the profession as they sought out lucrative careers.

Stebbins came to the Union Square Theatre to be rehearsed for a ‘juvenile role’ in a production that was running at the time in the theatre. The Union Square Theatre was one of Manhattan’s most prominent ‘legitimate’ theaters alongside Wallack’s and Daly’s Theatre.²³³ The term ‘legitimate theatre’ comes from the English stage, to denote a play licensed in an official manner (Oxford Reference). It also signified plays presented by a professionally organized company of actors in an established theatre that presented classics, serious dramas, tragedy or comedy as opposed to other ‘less serious’ forms of entertainment such as vaudeville, music hall or burlesque.

As the theatre district moved further north, in the early 1880s theatre director Augustin Daly made efforts to publicly ‘clean up’ the image of theatre life and restore the integrity of actresses in the public eye. Theatres were rumored to be linked to the prostitution trade, mainly because working women obtained clients from nightlife venues. As such, at Daly’s Fifth Avenue Theatre, he presented strict rules for actresses to not interact with male audience member’s post-show. He wrote editorials encouraging the public to respect actresses, and that scorn for a woman on the stage was unjustified.

Rose Eytinge, Stebbins’ mentor, was one of Daly’s favourite actresses. Daly spoke of her as being the “best actress in New York [...] singularly good in these phases of deep feeling [...] To

²³² *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and American Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 16.

²³³ John W. Frick, *New York’s First Theatrical Center: The Rialto at Union Square* (UMI Research Press, 1985), 25.

find anyone natural in these days— largely, humanly, sobbingly, even violently natural, is a rare thing.”²³⁴ While famous in her day, there are only brief biographic details known about her today. She was recently mentioned in an article about her wild husband, the “mini beast,”²³⁵ and in a study on nineteenth century actresses (2018).²³⁶ Eytinge received great acclaim for her starring role in Daly’s melodrama *Under the Gaslight* (Premiering August 7, 1867). The play was to “became one of the best-known, most frequently produced classic melodramas of the 19th century.”²³⁷ Daly made so much money from the production it allowed him to open his own theatre.²³⁸

At the Fifth Avenue Theatre, in the production of *Under the Gaslight*, Eytinge played the heroine, Laura Courtland. Daly’s heroines often had empowered transformations on stage, demonstrating strength and resilience in the face of adversity. In one ‘sensation scene,’ Eytinge is locked in a shed and dramatically uses an ax to escape. She then runs to undo the ropes that are restraining a soldier tied to the railroad tracks, saving him from peril at the last minute before a train roars past— a stark reversal of the damsel in distress trope.

Theatre historian Nan Mullenneaux states that after the heroine Laura Courtland unties the soldier from the tracks, she then faints against the railroad switch turning into a “helpless female.” She argues that audiences and critics expected women to appear weak (2018, xi). However, while some directors perhaps later staged Courtland fainting, this isn’t the direction given Eytinge when she played the role. In the original script from 1867, while the soldier is tied

²³⁴ Quoted in *Strange Duets*, Kim Marra, 2006, 9.

²³⁵ Mary Block and John P. Dunn, “The Mini-Beast—George H. Butler (1838–1886),” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 14 no. 2 (April 2015): 222–242.

²³⁶ Nan Mullenneaux, *Staging Family: Domestic Deceptions of Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Actresses* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

²³⁷ James Fisher, *Historical Dictionary of American Theater: Beginnings* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), xxxix.

²³⁸ Kim Marra, *Strange Duets: Impresarios and Actresses in the American Theatre, 1865–1914* (University of Iowa Press, 2006), 9.

to the tracks he shouts out (as she hacks her way out of the shed) “Courage! Courage! (*The steam whistle is heard again...*) That’s a true woman! Courage!” She runs, unfastens him, and then “leans exhausted against a switch” (which changes the rail line and the direction the train takes, thereby saving his life). The soldier then proclaims, “And these are the women who ain’t allowed to have a vote!” The heroine then helps him up from the track as “*the train of cars rushes past with roar and whistle from L. to R.E*” across the stage.²³⁹

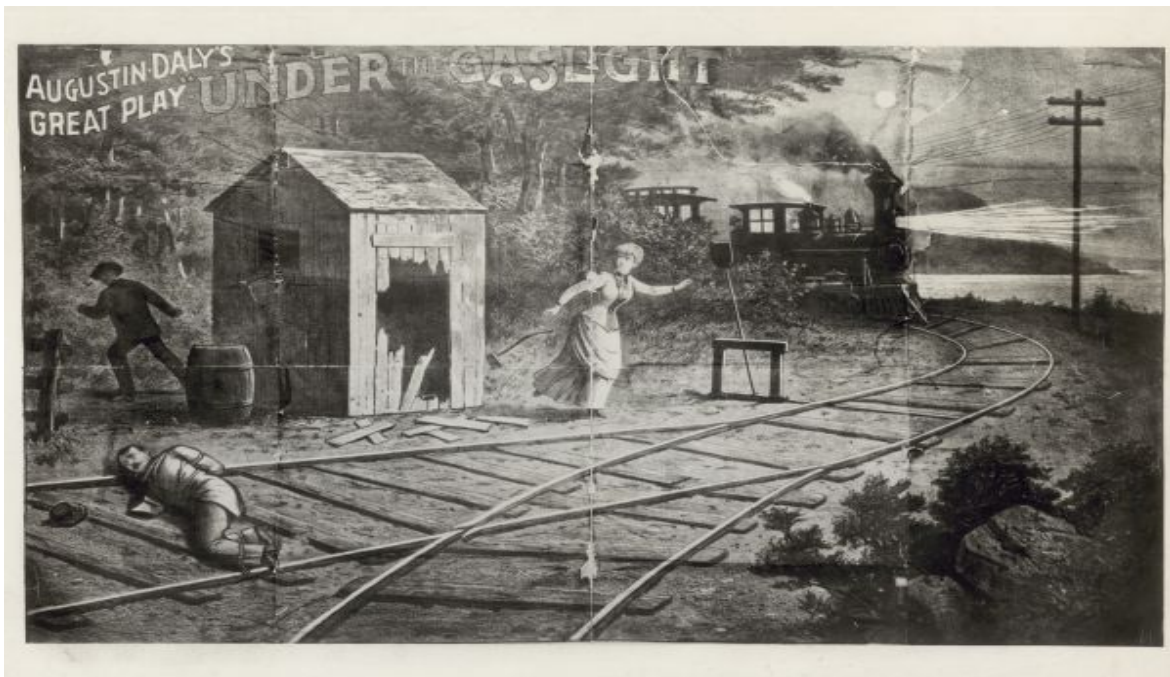


Fig. 39. Lithograph poster circa 1876, Wisconsin Center for Film and Research.

When Stebbins met the acclaimed actress, she was eighteen and Eytinge was forty years old. She had been working on the stage for over twenty years as one of the highest paid actresses in the nation.²⁴⁰ Eytinge was essentially a ‘super star’ when she took Stebbins under her tutelage. Eytinge was respected for her ability to portray fiery women with “emotional force.” One critic

²³⁹ *Under the Gaslight* (Augustin Daly 1867, 43), “As originally played at the New York Theatre in the months of August, Sept. and Oct. 1867,” New York and London Samuel French Publisher. In the cast was A. H. Davenport, J.K. Mortimer, J.B. Studley, Blanche Grey, among others.

²⁴⁰ Kim Marra, “Rose Eytinge,” Jewish Women’s Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/eytinge-rose>

stated there was no character in which “she cannot breathe the inspiration of dramatic life into.”²⁴¹ When Stebbins met Eytinge she was performing the lead character in the play *Rose Michel* at the Union Square Theatre.



Fig. 40. January 1881, Thomas Lith Studio, Grand Opera House Rochester. Fig. 41. Lithograph of Eytinge as Cleopatra by Joseph Baker, Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photography Division. Fig. 42. Eytinge circa 1878, photographer Jose Maria Mora, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. Fig. 43. *Dramatic News* March 18, 1876. Vol 1, no. 25, 1.

From November 1875 into the new year of 1876, Eytinge rehearsed Stebbins to replace another actress in the lead juvenile role. Stebbins’ training took place in the center of the entertainment district, and as a young woman inside the Union Square Theatre witnessing the whirl of activities behind the scenes must have been absolutely thrilling. Once Stebbins was prepared, Eytinge brought her before the theatre’s manager Albert M. Palmer to audition. Stebbins said Palmer “started me in my stage career” by accepting her to play the part of Louise Michel.²⁴² Stebbins was chosen to perform on tour, which was an extraordinary opportunity. As there were no theatre schools in the United States at this time, performing with Eytinge would

²⁴¹ “Favorites of the Footlights: Rose Eytinge,” *National Police Gazette*, December 3, 1881, 6.

²⁴² New York Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Francis B. Carpenter Against Sheridan Shook and Albert M. Palmer. June 17, 1890, 5.

have been the best actor training available. Aspiring actors learned by getting private lessons, by being understudies, learning on the job through trial and error in small roles, or by emulation and obtaining guidance from fellow actors.

Eytinge had performed with leading celebrities such as Laura Keane, Lester Wallack, William Wheatley, Fanny Morant, Kate Claxton, Edwin Booth, Edward Loomis Davenport and James W. Wallack. She had leading roles in *Led Astray*, *The Two Orphans*, *The Geneva Cross*, *Arrah Na Pogue*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Oliver Twist* (as Nancy Sykes), *Iron Mask*, and *Richelieu* among others. She had done many tours around the Northeast and to Washington D.C. where she was introduced to Abraham Lincoln. According to *The Times*, “in the conception of character, Miss Eytinge displays the well-read and cultured artist; the actress who has studied not only her lines and the necessary business that they involve, but the full intent and scope of the authors meaning [...] We have long considered Miss Eytinge the leading actress of the American stage.”²⁴³ The fact that Stebbins was considered qualified to play opposite Eytinge in *Rose Michel* was a high honor, and Stebbins seized the opportunity.

Rose Michel was a French play that had been ‘rearranged’ and adapted for the American stage by Steele MacKaye (1842–1894). It opened in November 1875 with MacKaye overseeing rehearsals. Eytinge apparently was bothered by his continual interruptions over minor corrective details and got so irritated she walked out during rehearsal, and A.M. Palmer had to intervene. He arranged an agreement that MacKaye be required to take notes during run-throughs to discuss after rehearsal. Despite her irritations, Eytinge eagerly awaited MacKaye’s approval on opening night and was pleased to receive it.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ November 12, 1866, cited in Odell Vol. 8, 213.

²⁴⁴ *Memoirs of Rose Eytinge* 1905, 236–239.

Union Square Theatre and the Rialto

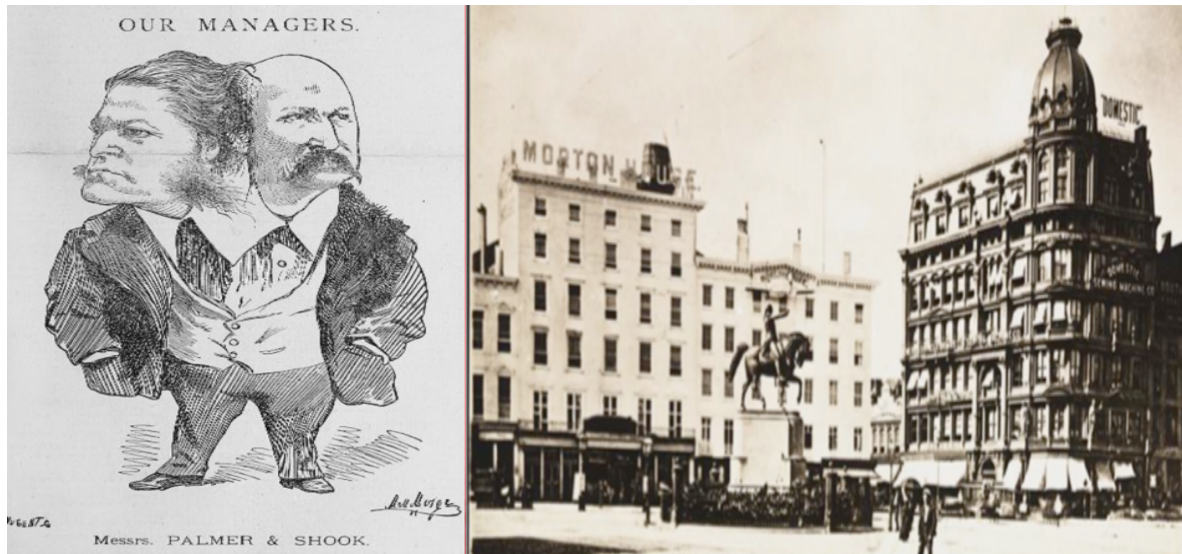


Fig. 44. Palmer and Shook, *Dramatic News* Nov. 27, 1875, 1. Fig. 43. The Morton House is in the upper left corner.

In the 1870s–1880s, New York City’s theatre and music venues, fancy restaurants, bakeries and hotels lined Union Square and ran north along Broadway to Madison Square Park. The city had 41 legitimate theatres, whereas London had 39, and Paris 24. Union Square, as the epicenter for the city’s theatre district, was known as the ‘Rialto.’²⁴⁵ Union Square Theatre adjoined Wallack’s Theatre on the south side of the square between Broadway and 4th Avenue. Union Square Theatre’s owner was Sheridan Shook, Albert M. Palmer was the ‘stage manager’ (meaning theatre director) and Willie Seymour had the double role as actor and assistant stage manager. The Union Square Theatre was built in 1870 inside the Union Place Hotel, soon renamed Morton House. Before apartments existed, many actors lived in hotels in the area to have easy access to work.

South of Union Square, at Broadway and 9th Street, stood the mammoth department store A.T. Stewart, marking the southernmost end of what was known as ‘Ladies Mile,’ with stores

²⁴⁵ John Frick, *New York’s First Theatrical Center: The Rialto at Union Square* (UMI Research Press, Theater and Dramatic Studies) 1985, 10.

running up the length of Broadway all the way to Madison Square Park. Entertainment venues around the 'Rialto' area included Palace Gardens, Irving Hall, Fourteenth Street Theatre, Steinway Hall, Chickering Hall, Byrant's Minstrel Hall, and the Tammany Variety Place in Tammany Hall (Frick 1985, 10).²⁴⁶ The Academy of Music was situated at 14th and Irving Place, at the time it was the largest performance venue in the nation. The Variety Place gave popular entertainments in its performance hall in the basement called Café Amusant. It had an "oyster saloon and a promenade hall where an orchestra played popular music, Punch and Judy shows were performed, and panoramas were occasionally presented." On the main floor was a theatre with shows such as Marie Bonfati in a *ballet d'action*, trapeze shows by the Victorellis, and popular operas (Frick 1985, 53).

The famous Pastor's Theatre and other area venues programmed vaudevillian acts such as song and dance, tap and clogging, comics, acrobatic exhibitions, quick change artists, and lighthearted burlesques (playful skits that lampooned successful shows playing in legitimate theatres) (Frick 1985, 56). To cater to theatrical needs, in the area of Union Square there was Dazian's Theatrical Emporium, several costume shops, wig shops, booking agents, several photography studios such as Sarony's, fancy restaurants, script seller shops such as Samuel French & Sons, shops selling musical scores for French, English and German operas, and printing houses for theatrical publications like the *Dramatic Mirror*, *The Dramatic News*, *Leslie's Sporting and Dramatic Times*, *Illustrated Dramatic Weekly*, and *The Stage* among others (Frick 1985, 115, 120). The *Dramatic News* stated that part of its purpose as a publication was to fill a void for the theatrical profession that was so often maligned in the press, and to provide

²⁴⁶ John Frick, *New York's First Theatrical Center: The Rialto at Union Square*, 1985.

worthy critics to counter others such as the “musical critic of the *New York Times*, who appears at times to be very much of an ass” (October 1874, Vol I, 4).



Fig. 45. Union Square illustration with the statue of George Washington and the Union Place Hotel in center frame. You can see depictions of a newspaper boy to the left and in the center a poor girl in bare feet begging for money. *Harper's Weekly*, March 24, 1866, titled “Union Square, New York, On a Windy Day in March.”

By March 1876, *Rose Michel* had reached its 100th performance and the *Dramatic News* said it was to go on a “starring tour” with “Rose Eytinge, one of the “very best of American actresses.” The weekly celebrated Eytinge, saying she “displayed the possession of fine stage instincts, remarkable emotional powers, and rare tact. I have never seen anything more profoundly realistic and natural than her *Rose Michel* [...] conquered step by step through sheer

intellect.”²⁴⁷ *Rose Michel* transferred to the Brooklyn Theatre (also under Shook and Palmer’s management) and played to full houses before beginning its three-month tour under the name of The Shook and Palmer Combination Company. The tour’s cast included established performers such as Union Square Theatre Company members actor James Collier, Willie Seymour, popular legitimate actor J.B. Studley, Broadway star T.J. Hind, and H.V. Daly, W.F. Edwards, George Jordon, J.V. Barry, Broadway star Mrs. Cecile Rush, and Fannie Cleves. Many actors were listed by abbreviated names in the newspaper and even in theatre programmes, and therefore it is often difficult to discover their full names. This group of accomplished actors would have made for great professional peers for Stebbins.



Fig. 46. Union Square Theatre, Houghton Library, Harvard Theatre Collection.

In the tour of *Rose Michel*, Stebbins said she performed under the stage name “Edith Lee.”²⁴⁸ Many women at this time took stage names, due to various reasons. Some initially took

²⁴⁷ *Dramatic News*, March 11, 1876, vol I, Issue 24.

²⁴⁸ After this tour, Stebbins used Genevieve Lee, then Agnes Loring before using her own name publicly in 1880 at the Madison Square Theatre (from Stebbins’ testimony in the Carpenter court proceedings, 1884, 1890, 4).

a stage name while they developed their professional skills. When they felt they had achieved an appropriate level of success, and received good press, they reverted to their own name. Others took stage names because working as an actress/actor was disparaged by their families.

Anonymity helped to protect the family name from any possible scorn. While for men, acting could be seen as a foolish career choice, for women, acting was disparaged since it entailed ‘displaying’ themselves in public. Some likened the profession of an actress as being akin to selling one’s body to the prying eyes of objectifying men. However, this did not dampen the public’s love for the theatre as it was the most popular form of entertainment before the film industry emerged. Stars of the stage were idolized in much the same way film celebrities are today. Despite using a stage name, news travelled that a new star was on the rise. On March 16, 1877, *The New Orleans Republican* ran with the statement that “since the success of Geneviève Ward [...] a new actress has come forward called Genevieve Stebbins, she is too much.”

The Romantic Narrative of *Rose Michel*

Rose Michel is a romantic melodrama with intense emotional scenes and comedic interludes. Rose is the ‘tender-hearted mother’ trying to ensure a good marriage for her daughter Louise. The narrative requires Eytinge and Stebbins to portray an intimate mother-daughter relationship. Playing opposite Eytinge surely would have been a valuable learning experience for Stebbins as she would have had to match Eytinge’s emotional timing and acting capabilities for their performance to seem genuine. Though Stebbins has never been situated as an accomplished, exceptional actress, I hope to demonstrate over the next few chapters that Stebbins had a successful career as an actress.

Melodramas in the 19th century provided great spectacle, with over-the-top sets, décor, costuming and special effects designed to transport the audience into another reality. Often great attention was paid to historical design details. Sensational plots provided shocking twists and turns, and highly dramatic scenes kept the audience enraptured. Often, contemporary film and media depict late 19th century actors in historical melodramas as delivering ‘exaggerated’ performances or ‘over acting.’ It is generally thought that at the turn to the 20th century, when American theatre began to turn towards ‘realistic’ narratives, that actors then began to deliver more ‘natural’ performances. Melodramas included stock character types such as archetypal heroes/heroines, where villains entrapped innocent maidens and heroes made unrealistic last-minute rescues. By the mid- to late 19th century however, these theatrical tropes and character types became more “complicated” requiring more complex emotional situations (2018, 212).²⁴⁹

In “Melodramatic Acting” scholar George Taylor explores the nature of physically expressive theatrical techniques.²⁵⁰ Acting skills for melodrama include such things as portraying actions of ‘startled emotions’ where an actor would suddenly ‘start’ or enact a moment of heightened surprise, followed by a transitional phase of ‘gradual realization.’ There might be a ‘transfixed moment’ on stage in which the actor holds an ‘attitude’ representing a particular emotional response followed by psychological realization and character change (117). Taylor argues that although this style of acting might not be concerned with “subtleties of unconscious motivation,” nevertheless the actor’s talent relied on their ability to play the moment fully with the emotional intensity required. Such performances were often met with enthusiastic applause from audiences captivated by these intense portrayals (2018, 119).

²⁴⁹ Editor Carolyn Williams, “Melodrama and the Realistic Novel,” in *Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁵⁰ in the *Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* (2018).

Taylor argues that late 19th century acting relied on physically descriptive emotional expressivity (120–123) and “suggests” that Delsarte might be to blame for perceptions of clichéd ‘mechanical’ acting styles in the late 19th century. American Delsartism included specific physical ‘attitudes,’ presentations, and postures linked to emotional attitudes and behaviors, and is often mistaken by theatre scholars as therefore developing ‘mechanical’ and overwrought acting styles. Yet, while Delsartist training included learning ‘emotional attitudes,’ this does not mean that every ‘Delsartean’ actor relied on exact codified movements, as it was clearly expressed by Stebbins and others that ‘attitudes’ were to be utilized as educational tools during the initial learning process and were not meant to be mechanical. Through time and practice, Stebbins describes the intent for an actor is to master embodied emotional experiences and be deliver powerful performances for the audience to resonate with.

Regarding Stebbins’ acting experience in a melodrama, what follows is a synopsis of *Rose Michel* offering a rich opportunity to imagine Stebbins performing the role of Louise Michel. In Act I, the scene is set in late 18th century Paris, France, at the Du Vernay Palace grand entrance with a grand view of the river Seine and Notre Dame Cathedral. The setting was extravagant, as the production bore extraordinary expense for the décor, fashionable attire, technical wizardry and lighting effects. Louise’s father, Pierre Michel, is an innkeeper and miserably abusive man. He forced Louise to leave home to go and work for the town goldsmith where she falls in love with his son, André. Louise’s beauty is central to the narrative as her admirers become involved in a comedy of errors.



Fig. 48. An illustration of the end of Act I from *Rose Michel*, "Illustrating Extraordinary Events of the Day: The Grand Entrance to the Du Vernay Palace, with a view of the River Seine and the church of the Notre Dame," *The Days Doings*, December 4, 1875. In the upper right corner is a drawing of Milounet and his trick dog.

When Louise (Stebbins) first walks onstage filled with grace and youthful charm, the Baron is enamored, and gasps "By the Saints! She's beautiful—aye, divine enough to tempt an angel out

of heaven.” He proclaims (to no one in particular) his desire to marry her. André subsequently enters and beckons to Louise to come speak with him. She rushes over as André presses Louise to, “Look closely, and see the angel face that’s mirrored there. Look but deep enough and you will see that same fair image graven on the living walls of my heart’s core.” André pledges to her “Guess no more, dear one, for ‘tis you I love.” Louise is overcome with delight and rests her head against his chest in a delicately staged endearing moment. Suddenly Louise’s mother Rose enters, and as they haven’t seen each other in months, they embrace and weep. As an actress, Stebbins is swung from one emotional moment to the next from young romantic love to the sweet grief of familial embrace.

Act II takes place in Pierre Michel’s inn. The narrative builds in intensity into a ‘sensation scene,’ revolving around a fatal incident. The acting troupe required quick-witted acting and collaborative work to keep up the momentum and dramatic timing. According to scholar Hayley Jayne Bradley, “sensation scenes” are designed to “excite, thrill, and enthrall” and ultimately to make the audience “sit up and gasp” in an engaging sensory experience (2018, 127).²⁵¹ Bradley cites the playwright/director Dion Boucicault as initiating dramas with epic sensation scenes around 1882, although Augustin Daly’s 1867 *Under the Gaslight* play was presented much earlier, with the sensation scene being a highlight moment when the train roared past. Massive stage effects that enraptured audiences with impending catastrophic events was popular in American and Britain (Bradley 138). The expected thrill is comparable to audiences today going to the cinema to watch car chase scenes, undercover agent shootouts, things being blown up, war dramas. etc.

²⁵¹ “Stagecraft, Spectacle, and Sensation,” in *Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* (2018).



Fig. 49. At the theatre, *Harper's Bazar*, May 15, 1897, 416.

Act II of *Rose Michel* begins with a comedic interlude where Pierre's servant Moulinet is training his tiny dog to perform tricks for clients at the bar. The *Dramatic News* credits the dog 'actor' who received his own well-deserved share of applause (Jan. 22, 1876, 2). During Act II, both Rose and her husband Pierre realize they have promised Louise to the opposite man for marriage (André and the Baron respectively), leading to a dramatic unravelling of events. Pierre and Rose argue, and he violently throws her across the floor (this would have involved practice in choreographed 'stage business,' for Eytinge to not get injured). Rose runs away and closes herself in a room. Later that evening, the Baron comes to give Pierre money to secure his marriage with Louise. However, Pierre has crafted an alternate plan and attacks the Baron with a knife stabbing him to death, throwing his body out of the window and into a river below. Rose, hearing the commotion, runs downstairs to see Pierre with a bloody knife in his hand. He is holding a candle that frighteningly illuminates his face (in one performance it was amusingly noted that he accidentally set fire to his wig before it was able to be stamped out and the show continued). Pierre grabs Rose by the throat but is stopped in the moment when he hears knocks at

the door. Rushing on scene is the prefect of the Seine, Louise, the goldsmith, and his son André - all of whom hear that Pierre ‘sold’ Louise to the Baron. They demand answers. Pierre denies everything and insists he saved money for a dowry for Louise and André, much to Rose’s bewilderment.

Act III begins with mass confusion when the Baron is found in the river. However, instead of Pierre, the Count DeVarnay is arrested on suspicion of murder. Rose is distraught and in a rather histrionic moment, she becomes choked “*with emotion*” and screams out!! The actors freeze in the moment to create a heightened moment in “*Tableau. They stand back amazed. Rose’s lips move. She tries to speak. Her face becomes convulsed, she sways to and fro for a moment, and then falls insensible to the ground. Louise with a wild cry, lifts her mother up]* Mother! Mother!”²⁵² For both Eytinge and Stebbins, this intense moment with authentic emotions would have been challenging to portray in order to garner sympathy from the audience. In Act IV, the scene is set back at Pierre Michel’s inn. Rose has a heart-to-heart conversation with Louise warning her of the possibility that something could prevent her marriage with André. Louise is so completely distraught, the stage notes say “[*Louise starts as though she were stabbed, stares stonily a moment, closes her eyes, sways and falls insensible*]” Rose with a wild cry Louise!]]” (38).

Melodramas in the 19th century frequently included overwrought moments of feminine emotional distress. Fainting for dramatic effect on stage was common. The actress needs to fall convincingly and realistically for the audience to be convinced of her distress. Stage falls were somewhat standard for the ‘business’ and would be practiced by actors to such an extent that they could perform falls without personal injury, the same way that actors do today. As Act III

²⁵² Steele MacKaye, *America’s Lost Plays: An Arrant Knave and Other Plays by Steele MacKaye*, ed. by his son Percy MacKaye (Indiana University Press, 1940), 33.

continues, Rose grabs Louise from the floor and embraces her while she lies on her lap sobbing. (Again, another challenging moment requiring skillful acting as the audience would have expected nothing less than true talent from the calibre of the actors on stage). The prefect arrives at the inn to search for evidence as their investigation spreads and Rose, unable to keep the truth to herself, declares that the Count is innocent of murder. However, she doesn't reveal the full truth and says she cannot say why, resulting in Rose's arrest, *much to Louise's horror*. A weepy commotion is staged as Rose leaves the stage.

The final scene unravels in another string of blunders. The scene is set in jail as the Count awaits his execution, and Rose is under torture on the rack. But bravely, she hasn't revealed who the murderer is. Her reasoning is that she is terrified that if Pierre is found out to be the murderer, the goldsmith will not allow Louise to marry André. Still, not wanting the Count to die an innocent man, Rose arranges for his prison escape, which Pierre unwittingly reveals as the prison guards arrive. This causes Rose to finally turn on her husband and denounce his crime. Pierre panics and runs across the stage away from the prison guards, who shoot him in the back. Pierre falls over the roof's edge and disappears! Voila!!

Rose admits to the Count that she had kept silent to protect Louise from her father's crime. In his kindness, he forgives her and asks the goldsmith to likewise not judge Louise as a result, as Rose has suffered enough, "Let not the sins of the father fall upon the child" (52). The goldsmith kindly agrees and asks Louise and André to embrace Rose in forgiveness. Kneeling beside Rose, the play ends with her proclaiming "Ah, my children, my children! May Heaven forgive my sins of my maternal love! [Soldiers look over roof's edge for Pierre]. Curtain. The play has pathos, an edge of sardonic humor and many heightened emotional moments leaving the

audience in states of despair, suspense, admiration and relief when order is restored. It would have been a spirited and thrilling play to perform with all the hijinks, mystery, and romance.

As scholar Katherine Newey posits, melodramas often centered around “an active, feeling, suffering woman at the center of the action” (2018, 148). Newey finds that this character type has been so completely absorbed within popular culture that one no longer recognizes the revolutionary nature of this role for women in the 19th century. While noting that melodramas were not intently political, subversive or feminist per se, melodramas situated women as capable beings, and impassioned individuals with the ability to meet a range of challenging experiences beyond the domestic sphere. Theatre historian Kim Marra finds that women characters were very much a draw for the public and they ultimately determined the success of a production. Marra notes that women were thought to have some sort of innate ability to be overtly emotional, therefore audiences flocked to see productions of “virtuosic emotionalism,” moments of madness, and extreme despair (2006, 36). Performing in *Rose Michel* with Eytinge would have given Stebbins the opportunity to present such emotional range with love for her mother, love for her amour, and distress over her father’s cruel nature.

Stebbins certainly would have practiced the expected ‘stage business’ such as working with established blocking, vocal projection, breath control, negotiating on the spot errors, dealing with stage nerves, travelling across the stage smoothly, working dynamically in the moment with other actors, finding authentic gestural expression, pacing her energy, and keeping up the tempo of dialogue. Stebbins also learned about life ‘on the road’ and the nature of tour life. Being on tour requires a lot of patience as the company moves from place to place by train and stagecoach, packing and unpacking bags, shlepping belongings, trying to find places to eat in unfamiliar neighborhoods, sleeping in different beds and putting up with the emotional highs and lows of

company and crew. Touring can be exhausting and boring, but even the boredom often inspires company members to joke, josh, and entertain each other, building a tight rapport and bonds.

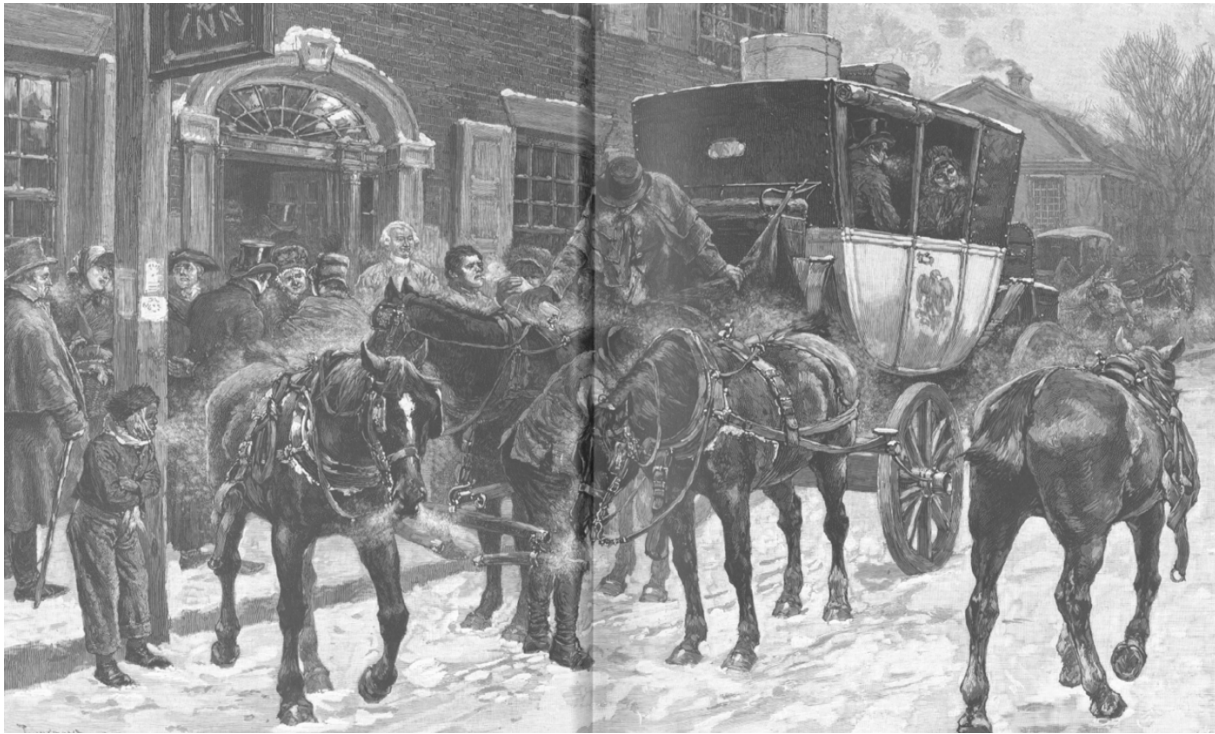


Fig. 50. Life on the road. Image from *Harper's Weekly*, February 1886, 153.

An Epic Dramatic Tour

On tour, Stebbins performed “seven times a week; sometimes eight, with matinees” in what would have been a total of over 80 shows.²⁵³ She recalled travelling to Bridgeport and Hartford, Connecticut, Springfield, various New England towns, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington D.C, smaller New York towns until the tour ended in Chicago in June. She also thought they played in Ohio in the larger cities. According to the *Dramatic News*, they began their tour April 1, 1876, in Utica, New York at the Opera House.

²⁵³ This statement was from court testimony from 1884 for a tour held years prior, therefore her memory was only somewhat exact. The case involved arguments regarding paying for rights to perform the play, and who owned the rights. Printed at conclusion of the court case begun in 1884, 1890 Court Proceedings ‘Francis B. Carpenter Appellant against Sheridan Shook and Albert M. Palmer Respondents (1890, 2–60).



Fig. 51. The Opera House in Utica, New York. Wood carving (of a New York Republican Convention) by W. Parker Bodfish, published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated March* 1880. Fig. 52. *Saturday Evening Mail* 6. no. 47, Terre Haute Vigo County, May 20, 1876.

Utica was followed by a couple nights in Syracuse for “one of the largest and best playing houses of the season” then on to Elmira, New York and Baltimore, Maryland at the Academy of Music (seating 1,000).²⁵⁴ The tour was hectic even by today’s standards, and would have required a mix of rail travel, water transit on the Erie Canal, stagecoach or horse drawn omnibus. At the end of April, *Rose Michel* was at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia “opening to crowded houses.”²⁵⁵ Arch Street was successfully managed by Louisa Lane Drew (commonly known then as Mrs. John Drew, Grandmother to the Drew and Barrymore theatrical families). At week’s end, the show “drew immense audiences.”²⁵⁶

Rose Michel then travelled to Washington D.C for a successful week at the National Theatre. The tour proceeded with non-stop travel to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with a “very successful” week at the Opera House, then onto Cincinnati, Ohio at the Grand Opera House. The week of the May 15th-20th had showings in Evansville, Indiana on the 22nd; on to Terre Haute,

²⁵⁴ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 30, April 22, 1876, 3.

²⁵⁵ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 31, April 29, 1876, 3.

²⁵⁶ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 32, May 6, 1876, 2.

Indiana the 23rd; Indianapolis, Indiana at the Academy of Music the 24th and 25th [with the largest houses of their summer season]; Lafayette, Ohio 26th; Bloomington, Indiana the 27th, and then a two-week engagement in Chicago, Illinois commencing May 29th.²⁵⁷ In Chicago at Hooley's Theatre, Rose Eytinge was "supported by an excellent company," opening May 29th "to a large audience," and closing June 10th. The play was "splendidly mounted and well rendered throughout. Miss Eytinge is too well known to need any special laudation."²⁵⁸

From Chicago the company travelled to Milwaukee to finish their tour at the Grand Opera House in June. However, under troubled circumstance once they arrived, the rest of the tour was cancelled. Tragically, Rose Eytinge attempted suicide. The *Dramatic News* reported Eytinge ingested a "three-ounce bottle marked laudanum" (opium poisoning). Their headline said, "And an Almost Successful– Determination to Die– The Sufferings of a Deserted Wife– Trials That Were Too Hard to Bear."²⁵⁹ Eytinge's marriage had been faltering. Either before tour or during, Eytinge separated from her husband due to his violent nature and alcoholism. Nevertheless, going forward, she continued to financially support her husband while he himself was unwell.

When she met her husband, Colonel George H. Butler (1838–1886) a former Civil War soldier, he was a playboy type and dramatic critic for the *Spirit of the Times* reporting on sensational stories. In November of 1869 they married. Unfortunately, he had the habit of getting into public brawls and once stormed into Niblos Garden to beat the manager of Lydia Thompson's burlesque group. As a result, Eytinge apparently attempted to dissolve her marriage on February 12, 1870, before he was appointed to Consul-General for Egypt (*Public Ledger* Tennessee, 1) but she was unsuccessful. The *Dramatic News* reported "After some hesitation,

²⁵⁷ All dates are compiled from *Dramatic News* advertisements. *Dramatic News* 2, no. 34, May 20, 1876, 3.

²⁵⁸ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 37, June 10, 1876, 5.

²⁵⁹ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 39, June 24, 1876, 5.

she finally accepted him as her husband; the peculiarity of the marriage ceremony being one of the most striking incidents of her career” (June 24, 1876, 5: Vol 2, Issue 39). In March 1870 they moved to Cairo, Egypt where he was posted (Block and Dunn 2015, 234). Their social life and goings-on in Egypt (mainly Butler’s misdoings) were followed by New York papers.

In 1871 Eytinge had a son, named Benjamin Franklin. Their life in Egypt proved to be short-lived after Butler got into a gunfight in a restaurant and wounded an Egyptian soldier. They had to depart quickly. Butler travelled back to the U.S. via Europe while Eytinge returned to New York with her infant son in 1872 (Block and Dunn 2015, 234). Her misfortune was reported, “Rose Eytinge, Consul Butler’s wife, is about to return to the stage. When Butler married her, he was too drunk to remember it afterward.”²⁶⁰ In 1873 she joined the Union Square Theatre company. Eytinge filed for divorce but not before having their second child, Florence.²⁶¹ It’s not clear when Florence was born, although it was reported that Eytinge found caretakers, a character-actor, and his wife, who were ‘sponsors’ for her daughter.²⁶² If the date for this source, January 1875, is correct, her daughter would have been born in 1874.

It’s impossible to know if Eytinge’s ‘sponsors’ included a wet nurse, or if Eytinge fed her newborn during breaks at the theatre. Eytinge took a leave in late 1873, probably giving birth between September and November 1874. By December 20, 1874, she was performing in *The Two Orphans* at Union Square Theatre but was replaced by mid-January 1875 “at her insistence” (Eytinge 1905, 230). Thereafter, while under exclusive contract with Shook and Palmer, she did

²⁶⁰ ‘Personal.’ *Frostburg mining journal*, September 21, 1872, 1.

²⁶¹ Block and Dunn say she was born in 1875, yet it’s not clear where they acquired this date of birth (2015, 234). According to an article in 1882 for the ‘General News Summary,’ Benjamin was age 11, and Florence age 7 (*The Princeton Union* April 6, 1882, 4). This would mean that Benjamin Franklin was born in 1871, and Florence 1875, but it’s questionable. Another report by the actor John Barrymore states that he was close friends with “Frank” (short for his full name Benjamin Franklin) the son of George Butler and Rose Eytinge. Drew wrote that Frank was “one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met” and his article tells of some of their escapades from his youth (“Confessions of an Actor,” *Ladies Home Journal* November 1925, 12–13, 56–59).

²⁶² *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1875, 9.

not perform for six months except for a benefit at the Academy of Music, in Brooklyn (230). It's possible they gave her a break to tend to her children. Eytinge didn't perform again until around October 1875 at the Union Square Theatre in Dion Boucicault's *Led Astray*, followed soon after by the opening of *Rose Michel*. Her return to the stage so soon after having her third child could have been due to financial troubles. Or perhaps it was simply what she knew how to do best, and it was what she loved.

Before or during the *Rose Michel* tour Eytinge and Butler separated. She sent him to a private "Inebriate Asylum" (rehab program) in D.C., but he left and came to visit her in Chicago. He attempted to reconcile, telling her that he would travel with her to California for her next engagements, but it seems they were not in agreement, and he returned to Washington D.C.²⁶³ It was said her suicide attempt was a result of being "overtaxed which brought about a consequent depression of spirits. Other troubles enhanced this condition."²⁶⁴ Other troubles was her husband.

At the end of this tour, Eytinge would have been exhausted. It's unclear if her baby Florence and young Benjamin travelled with her and her maid, or if they were left behind with caretakers. Whether breastfeeding on the road or worrying about your children left in the care of others, either would have been quite stressful. Combined with an unhappy marriage, this would have been an extremely difficult time for Eytinge. The *New York Times* said Butler's presence and "constant persecution of her were cause of this insane attempt made by her own life."²⁶⁵

Apparently, when Eytinge did not open her hotel room door, her maid and fellow company members broke into her room and found her unconscious. A medical team was summoned, her stomach pumped, and she was given an emetic. When she regained consciousness, she fought

²⁶³ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 39, June 24, 1876, 4.

²⁶⁴ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 40, July 1, 1876, 4.

²⁶⁵ "The Condition of Miss Eytinge," June 19, 1876, 8.

people in the room requiring three men to hold her. Disturbingly, to keep her conscious, she was pricked with pins while she pleaded to die. The *Dramatic News* reported “it is a matter of congratulation that Miss Eytinge failed, not alone because she is an estimable woman, wife, and mother, but because the American stage does not possess good actresses enough to lose any one of them so suddenly. The trials must have been indeed severe that would have brought a woman to such a pass, for few have seen more earthy trials than this one.”²⁶⁶

This whole event would have been disastrous for the theatre company. Anyone in proximity to a suicide attempt suffers from the morbidity of the action. Surely it impacted Stebbins as Eytinge’s cast mate. Seeing Eytinge saddened by her marital situation could have made Stebbins question future relationships. Stebbins did not marry until a decade later. It could have made her question having children of her own while a woman of the stage, seeing the stress it brought to Eytinge. Stebbins never did have children although we don’t know why, but many ‘professional’ women with a career at this time did not have children.

When Eytinge attempted suicide, she had a one-year-old, a five-year-old son, and a 15-year-old daughter Courtney Barnes (from her first marriage) who resided at a boarding school, the Convent of Sacred Heart, in Manhattanville.²⁶⁷ Of note, Barnes became an actress, said to look “precisely as her mother did twenty years ago. A perfect little beauty of the red and brown brunet type, and her wit is keen and bright as well.”²⁶⁸ Eytinge’s son Benjamin (known as ‘Frank’) was a childhood buddy and dear friend of the famous actor John Barrymore.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ *Dramatic News* 2, no. 39, June 24, 1876, 5.

²⁶⁷ “Rose Eytinge’s Daughter,” *Daily Gazette*, February 14, 1877.

²⁶⁸ *Cincinnati daily star*, December 20, 1879, 6.

²⁶⁹ John Barrymore states that he was close friends with “Frank” Butler, son of George Butler and Rose Eytinge. He wrote that Frank was “one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met” and shares some escapades from their youth (“Confessions of an Actor,” *Ladies Home Journal*, November 1925, 12–13, 56–59).

²⁶⁹ *New York Herald*, Oct 1, 1873, 4; Odell Vol. 9 1870–1875, 444.

The Union Square Theatre company ended their tour, returning to New York while Eytinge convalesced. Stebbins left the company, after having worked only one season, and later told A.M. Palmer that she regretted leaving his employment.²⁷⁰ It seems he did not hold a grudge as he later hired her at the Madison Square Theatre when he became manager there. Stebbins was also engaged in 1883 by Union Square Theatre partners, Shook and Collier (when the actor William Collier replaced A.M. Palmer as manager), as one of the leading ladies touring *Lights o' London*. By and large, for Stebbins to have worked with such an elite cast of actors in *Rose Michel* would have been a formidable experience. She would have honed her acting skills in over 80 performances and experienced the professional life of a touring theatre production. To have been in the shadow of one of America's leading ladies would have been a steep learning curve for Stebbins at the young age of 19. Performing night after night with such a cast, observing her fellow actors in action, would have been thrilling. She would have learned how a cast works as a team to deliver cohesive performances and to keep the show 'fresh.' The cast was lauded for their professionalism, and their consistent, positive stage reviews demonstrates that they were a dependable and successful ensemble. Stebbins honed her talent and would have been supported by her fellow actors as they encouraged her professional development. When she moved on to perform other roles, artists from the company could have put in a 'good word' for her.

A New Theatre Opportunity in 'Our Boys' as a Leading Lady

After returning to New York City, Stebbins obtained a role in the production of *Our Boys*.

According to the *Successful American*, Stebbins accepted an engagement by Dion Bouccicault (one of New York's most established playwrights) and was cast to perform as the lead female

²⁷⁰ At the time of her testimony Stebbins said she was employed as an elocution teacher at Mrs. Reed's school. New York Supreme Court 1890, Evening Post Job Printing Office.

character of ‘Violet’ in *Our Boys*²⁷¹ (although it seems that Augustin Daly owned the rights to the play, not Bouccicault). *Our Boys* was presented in Baltimore and Washington D.C. before premiering at the New Broadway Theatre on February 19, 1877.²⁷²

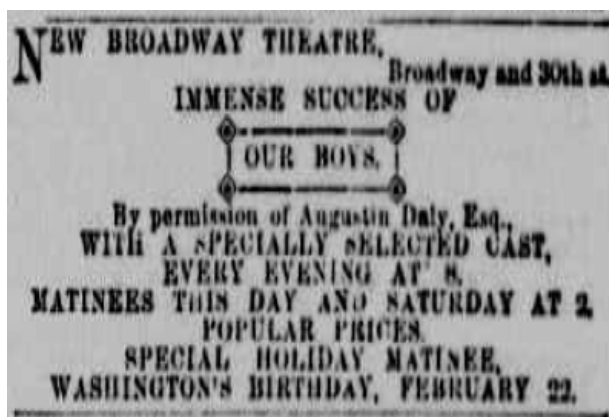


Fig. 53. The *New York Herald* February 21, 1877.

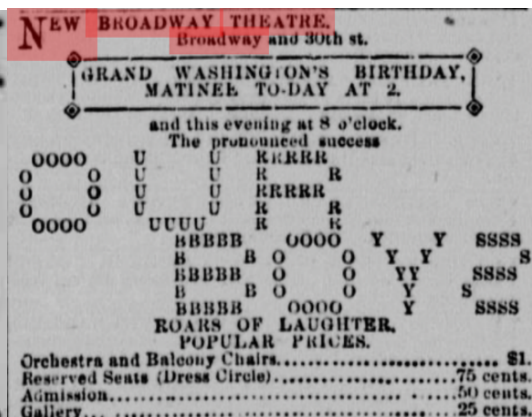


Fig. 54. The *New York Herald* February 22, 1877.

The New Broadway Theatre was located ‘uptown’ at the northern edge of the Rialto theatre district on Broadway and 30th just north of Madison Square. *Our Boys* had previously played in England at the Vaudeville Theatre in 1875 and was the first production in London to reach 500 shows. By 1879, it was the longest running play in Europe. Subsequently, news that the play was coming to New York was met with great anticipation.

Our Boys is an English comedy in three-acts written by Henry James Byron, a respected playwright who had worked with Gilbert and Sullivan. The plot was said to be slow, yet each character described as being quite humorous. The dialogue was rapid, with a tongue and cheek manner to it that made the audience laugh when they “ought not do so.”²⁷³ Stebbins’ role was that of a young heiress, Violet Melrose. The story revolves around the love lives of two young comrades. ‘Charles Middlevick’ is the quick-witted son of a tradesman, and ‘Talbot Champney’

²⁷¹ “School of Expression. Prominent Musical and Dramatic People of New York City,” 1902, 106–107.

²⁷² “Dramatic Diary” *Spirit of the Times, Music and Drama*, January 5, 1877, 618.

²⁷³ “Our Boys at the Theatre,” *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, April 8, 1875, 3.

the wealthy son of a baronet. Champney is amusingly “listless in manner and drawling in speech” and his character “appears to possess not an idea beyond self.”²⁷⁴



Fig. 55. The character Violet, as portrayed in *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 1890.

The men predictably fall in love with women from the opposite social class. The poor but brilliant Middlewick falls in love with the heiress (Violet Melrose) and the wealthy dim-witted Champney's with her fortuneless cousin (Mary Melrose). Champney and Middlewick both get engaged, yet when their fathers find out they are furious, forbid them to marry, and the young men are sent abroad. However, the fathers come to regret their decision and call their sons back home to forgive them. The third Act was said to “make one cry almost” in sympathy with the characters. In the role of Violet, Genevieve Stebbins was said to be “pretty, vivacious, pleasing and promising.”²⁷⁵ Thomas Wiffen was admired in his role as Middlewick.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Cited by Ruyter 1999, 46, “Dramatic Notes,” *New York Tribune*, February 27, 1877.



Examples of gowns, MET Costume Institute. Fig. 56. Gift of Mrs. Charles D. Dickey, Mrs. Louis Curtis Jr., and Mr. S. Sloan Colt, 1957. Fig. 57. Gift of Mrs. Phillip H. Gray, 1950. Fig. 58. Gift of Mrs. Lyall Dean, Mrs. Borden Helmer, and the Estate of Bliss Reed Crocker, in memory of Mrs. William Reed Thompson and Mrs. Edward Reed Bliss, 1965.

As an heiress, Stebbins would have been costumed in ostentatious gowns. The following description provides an idea of what Stebbins gowns could have been like,

The more elaborate ones consist of silver-gray silk and royal purple hat to match- the costume trimmed with gold and mother-of-pearl ornaments, the hat with gray feathers and a brilliant clasp of gold and mother-of-pearl. A dinner dress of lemon colored silk, with blue velvet train, trimmed with white lace, and ornamented with crimson and pale tea roses, a garland of these surrounds the skirt.²⁷⁶

The *New York Herald* reported the opening night was attended by a large audience, and the “comedy was acted with great spirit, and the cast, though by no means remarkable, was quite satisfactory.” The article continues,

Mr. Thomas Whiffen wants the breadth of humor which the part of Perryn Middlewich requires, but compensated for this deficiency by his cockney accent and fine drollery. An intelligent performance of Sir Geoffrey Champneys was given by Mr. Charles Loveday. The ever-youthful boys were well represented by the Messrs. J.G. Saville and Mark Bates. One of the most delightful personalities of the evening was that of Belinda, the

²⁷⁶ “How New Actresses Get Their Gorgeous Dresses,” *New Orleans Republican*, October 22, 1875, 1.

maid of all work, and Miss May Gallagher. Miss Genevieve Stebbins looked and acted charmingly as Violet, and Miss Annie Edmundson played Mary with grace and feeling. Soi Smith, Mr. A. Forrest and Mr. Roberts were excellent (February 20, 1879).



Fig. 59. "Our Captious Critic," *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* 1892, 116. The pompous aristocratic father Sir Geoffrey Champney, the young heiress Violet Melrose, and Mary Melrose her fortuneless cousin.



Fig. 60. Aunt Champney, the young Talbot Champney, Charles Middlevick and his affable father.

On February 25, 1877, the director and playwright Augustin Daly brought a lawsuit against *Our Boys* and Hart Jackson of the New Broadway Theatre. He obtained a temporary injunction restraining Jackson from presenting the play, as Daly claimed to own exclusive rights (*New York Herald*, 4). It appears this situation ended the short run of the production, as on February 26th

Our Boys was replaced with the Irish drama *Inshavogue* from the Theatre Royal in Dublin with the Irish comedian John T. Hinds performing.²⁷⁷ As a result, Stebbins needed to look for another performance opportunity.

‘Delsarte Expression,’ and Studies with Steele MacKaye

During 1877–1878, Stebbins began studying ‘Delsarte Expression’ with Steele MacKaye at his School of Expression, located at 23 Union Square. MacKaye was working on developing his own system of dramatic training based on Delsarte’s theories of expression. As the sole American to study with Delsarte in Paris, he was able to charge extraordinary fees for his coaching. Building on his popular lectures beginning in 1871, he had a reputation as a speaker yet likewise promoted himself as an actor and acting coach with varying levels of success.

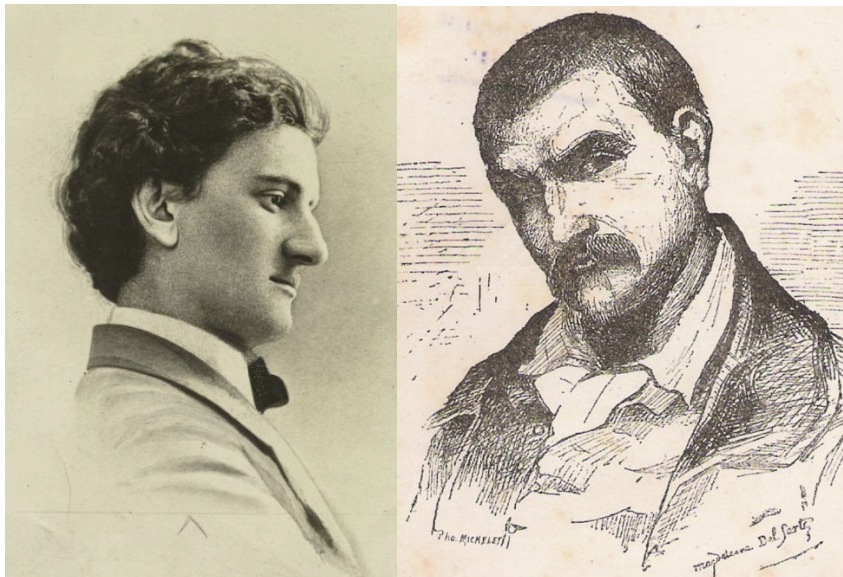


Fig. 61. Steele MacKaye, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection. "Steele MacKaye" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Fig. 62. Engraving of François Delsarte by his daughter, Madeleine.

²⁷⁷ *New York Herald*, February 25, 1877, 16.

MacKaye promised students (mainly wealthy women) that they would be able to perform in his productions after training with him. Around this time, there were reports of aspiring actors being taken advantage of. The following anecdote is quite like a situation Stebbins soon found herself in after working with MacKaye. In an article titled “Actors Made to Order Cheap” by a special correspondent from the *New York Tribune*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on fraud in the theatre business, with “played out actors” or “poor teachers” giving expensive lessons to hundreds of “stage-struck” wannabees. They claim that young women in New York were especially prone to getting “fleeced” by acting coaches offering lessons, only for most of these young women to enter the stage and soon disappear.²⁷⁸ Their prime example is a lady whose “*nom du theatre* is Blanche Meda.” Meda was a student of Steele MacKaye’s.

MacKaye’s fees for actor training were certainly excessively high, thus the *Chicago Tribune*’s critique that ‘some teachers’ were rather unscrupulous in taking advantage of students. Apparently, “Mrs. James Delphin, née Pratt” (stage name of Blanche Meda)²⁷⁹ had a ready supply of funds to pay for her theatre tutelage. Meda was a student at MacKaye’s School of Expression.²⁸⁰ According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, MacKaye helped her prepare to perform in a production called “My Lady Blanche.” Meda underwrote the cast for rehearsals and rented Dan Bryant’s Opera House, yet, when the show premiered it was deemed a failure. However, neither MacKaye nor Meda was deterred, and she proceeded to pay MacKaye for a further six weeks of training in another role in his play *Won at Last*. At this time, MacKaye had achieved success adapting a selection of European plays. Many American directors and playwrights used British, German or French plays and translated or ‘adapted’ them, without crediting the original.

²⁷⁸ No title, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 30, 1878, 10.

²⁷⁹ “Actors, their Stage Names and their Private Names,” *Werner’s*, December 1890, 324.

²⁸⁰ Percy Mackaye *Epoch* 1927, 281.

MacKaye presented *Won at Last* at New York's leading playhouse Wallack's Theatre in December 1877. The play was well received and the acting admired, although it was met with mixed critical reviews as to the strength of the narrative. After the play closed, MacKaye re-worked it and re-named it *Aftermath, or Won at Last*. MacKaye then looked for someone to purchase the rights to perform the play. Blanche Meda was a woman with great wealth at her disposal and, at her expense, a new cast for *Aftermath, or Won at Last* was organized, some of whom were from the original production at Wallack's. She continued to rent Dan Bryant's Opera House, and the cast was rehearsed on stage by MacKaye who also took on the lead male role. She paid MacKaye to be the director and paid the actors to rehearse, which was unusual for the time as rehearsal fees were generally not included in salaries.

Aftermath, or Won at Last then proceeded to go on a two-week tour of the "Eastern circuit" as 'Blanche Meda's Combination Company.' Meda paid for the tour and contracted MacKaye to finish the "season" with her, but he "felt sick" and did not continue. Instead, it seems Meda found another actor to replace him, and the group continued their tour.²⁸¹ Funnily enough, in MacKaye's son's biography he does not mention this, but makes note that there was a one-month (not two weeks) tour of "Steele MacKaye's Company" (not Meda's), from April 1878 until the end of May. It was thought Meda spent an initial \$3000 "training" with MacKaye, and overall paid \$25,000 for the tour.²⁸² Accounting for inflation, \$3000 in 1878 would be the exorbitant price of \$90,000 today, and \$25,000 would be more than \$700,000.

In 1878 in a similar scenario, Stebbins began studying with MacKaye at his School of Expression. She also paid \$3000 (equivalent to \$90,000 today) to study with him. These fees seem extravagant, but MacKaye was able to convince his clients that he had exclusive techniques

²⁸¹ "Actors Made to Order Cheap," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (by a special correspondence of the *New York Tribune*).

²⁸² No title, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 30, 1878, 10.

and specialized knowledge that was worth the price. When Stebbins met MacKaye it was said she was a “Californian, with youth, with money, and with enthusiasm equal to his own, [who] found him out.”²⁸³ She became his star pupil having “thrown herself into the new series of studies opening before her, with an ardor scarcely second to that of MacKaye himself [...and] from pupil to business partner rapidly followed.”²⁸⁴ Stebbins studied ‘Delsarte Expression’ with MacKaye periodically over a two-year period, during which time she became efficient enough that he appointed her his assistant. She was more than capable of illustrating Delsarte ‘Expression’ as she had acquired advanced acting skills by this point in time.

MacKaye worked with Stebbins experimenting with applying Delsarte’s aesthetic theories to the art of acting. As Francois Delsarte’s sole American student in Paris a decade prior, he studied oratory and ‘aesthetic gymnastics’ in Delsarte’s home salon. In the 18th and 19th century the term *aesthetic gymnastics* was used to denote practical training for public speaking in pulpit or lectern, and for performance training in theatre or opera. The term ‘gymnastics’ in this sense, comes from the German word meaning any exercise, or physical/embodied learning, and is rooted in Ancient Greek concepts. ‘Aesthetic expression’ refers to how the body communicates emotional states of being and portrays sensorial experience.²⁸⁵

American Delsarte scholar Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter describes Delsarte’s theoretical system as a set of “general principles that he believed applied universally to expression in any medium.”²⁸⁶ Indeed, a review of one of MacKaye’s earliest lectures on the subject concurs, saying that the system of Delsarte “appears to be a method of development [...] which is

²⁸³ Wilbor, “Delsartism in America,” *Werner’s*, xiv, no. 3, March 1892, 60.

²⁸⁴ L.A.C., Elsie Wilbor ed., *Werner’s Directory of Elocutionists, Readers, Lecturers and other Public Instructors and Entertainers* (Werner Publications 1887), 290–291.

²⁸⁵ Kelly Mullan (my former married name), “European Antecedents to Somatic Movement,” in *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*, ed. Martha Eddy (Intellect Press UK, University of Chicago Press, 2016).

²⁸⁶ “Genevieve Stebbins,” *American National Biography Online*, 2000.

common to all the arts and to the rules of which the art of dramatic expression is in common with all others in subject.”²⁸⁷ Delsarte spoke broadly about how aesthetic expression applies to painting, sculpture, the art of oratory, and the performing arts.

Delsarte saw emotions as *motion*, in that emotions can be ‘seen’ through minute actions of the face, hands and body that are communicative, symbolic and meaningful. The semiotic is the sign, or outer representation of inner emotions, whereas ‘aesthetic’ is the expression itself.²⁸⁸ The ‘motions’ Delsarte studied were essentially that of non-verbal bodily communication. In MacKaye’s lectures, he said Delsarte maintained “there is anatomical or physical gesticulation or manifestation for every emotion and thought, and so all the various phases of expression may be scientifically accounted for.” However, MacKaye’s lecture demonstrations were critiqued, as it was said “there is a good deal, we cannot refrain from remarking, of the theoretical in the system rather than the practical” (*New York Star*, 1871).

In a stated ‘scientific’ manner, Delsarte coded emotional expressions into gestures and facial expressions known as a successive series of “emotional gamuts.” Expressions ranged from representing joy, fury, adoration, jealousy, drunkenness, distress, madness, horror etc. and these coded emotional “gamuts” could be replicated one after another in a series of performative acts. At his lectures, MacKaye performed a range of these “gamuts” as Delsarte had done in his home salon “moving very slowly through a dozen grades of emotion.”²⁸⁹ Described as thus, MacKaye’s

refined handsome face was in repose, then a gleam of satisfaction lighted his eyes, a glow of pleasure stole over his face, it softened into winning tenderness, deepened into love, and finally, into adoration, and the fact was that of the noblest of the saints; then it went

²⁸⁷ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 24, 1871.

²⁸⁸ Iris Smith Fischer, “Theatre at the Birth of Semiotics: Charles Sanders Peirce, Francois Delsarte, and Steele Mackaye,” in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 49, no. 3 (Indiana University Press 2013), 371–394.

²⁸⁹ J. A. Sokalski, *Pictorial Illusionism; The Theatre of Steele MacKaye* (McGill Press 2007), 27.

slowly back to rest and passed through dislike and all the immediate stages to fury. Again, through jollity to drunkenness, and through degrees of mental weakness and disturbance to idiocy and insanity [...] it was an astonishing exhibition of power” (*Worcester Daily Spy*, March 27, 1871, 2).

While MacKaye was able to perform this display of emotional expressions, when he applied theories of Delsarte ‘expression’ and gesture to the art of acting, his own acting abilities were not especially admired. His coded expressions did not translate to the stage. Some five years before meeting Stebbins, MacKaye’s acting debut was in the play *Monaldi* at the St. James Theatre on January 8, 1872. He used the occasion to “exemplify the practical utility of the Delsarte system of dramatic expression” (1884, 2). His performance relied excessively on gesture and was said to be rather reductive, eliciting one critic to note that “if to grow stiff and limp by turns, to roll the eyes uncomfortably, to gasp convulsively, to make wry faces of a distracting variety were sufficient to constitute acting, one would easily become a great actor.” The critic continues relaying that,

Mr. MacKaye believed the efficacy of the theory he practiced being so great that a mere mechanical application of its so-called principles would make an actor out of anybody. Will a simple knowledge of the rules of elocution make an orator? Does knowledge of the principles of vocalization make an orator? Will the study of law make a successful pleader? That actors need to be educated to a certain extent in their art is not to be denied, but that anyone is competent to become an actor merely receiving elementary education, is too nonsensical for discussion.²⁹⁰

MacKaye enlisted his student “Miss Griswold” to star with him in *Monaldi* and trained her to illustrate ‘Delsarte expression.’ This was her first stage appearance, and the press regarded his whole experiment with humour and “light raillery” (1892, 60). Reviews of his theatrical experiment were harsh remarking, “he carried the theories of the Frenchman to such an extreme in representation that his acting was grotesque and absurd.”²⁹¹ Undeterred, MacKaye went to

²⁹⁰ T. Allston Brown, *History of the New York Stage from the first performance in 1732 to 1901* (1903), archive.org.

²⁹¹ *The Times* (Philadelphia), March 13, 1886, 14.

London to produce a solo performance. However, reviews in London were also not spectacular. In Tom Taylor's production of *Hamlet* at the Crystal Palace with MacKaye as Hamlet, it was said that "the acting is decidedly and distinctly bad. As ill luck will have it Hamlet is the very worst played character."²⁹² Unfortunately for MacKaye, his enthusiasm simply did not match his acting talent. MacKaye as Hamlet was "disappointing" as only a "rare talent" can perform the role, and "MacKaye is certainly not to be cited as an example of united excellence."²⁹³

Rose Eytinge likewise complained about MacKaye's acting skills, describing him as a "man of extraordinary and exceptional brilliancy [...] master of all dramatic work, and, as an ardent disciple of Delsarte it was he who introduced the Delsarte system into the United States. He thoroughly understood the art of acting, but he could not act" (1905, 235). She continues,

This fact was demonstrated many times as a matter of fact it was clearly manifested every time he went upon the stage; but I am convinced that it was a fact of which he himself had no suspicion, and, although failure inevitable followed his every attempt to act, I do not believe that he ever for one moment attributed those misfortunes to his own ineffective work [...] while it must be confessed that Steele Mackaye could not act himself, he knows all about acting, and his stage direction was masterly (1905, 235).

J.A. Sokalski, author of *Pictorial Illusionism; The Theatre of Steele MacKaye* (2007), said the majority of roles MacKaye performed were in plays he directed, and he cast himself in the lead. Sokalski argues that although MacKaye never truly rose above amateur status as an actor, his undying enthusiasm for the theatre was just reason for his peers to have admired him. At his death, the *New York Times* eulogy concurred saying "he was always an amateur" actor but he had a magnetic personality ("Death of Steele MacKaye," February 28, 1894, 1). While MacKaye was a middling actor, he was a brilliant and engaging lecturer. He mounted many successful theatre productions, and established actors flourished under his guidance. As a theatre director

²⁹² "Hamlet at the Crystal Palace," *Birmingham Daily Post*, May 5, 1873.

²⁹³ "Hamlet at the Crystal Palace," *Daily Telegraph and Courier*, May 5, 1873.

his eye for arranging stage pictures and ensemble action was readily admired such as helping to stage Buffalo Bill's Wild West show at the Madison Square Garden.

Stebbins was interested enough in 'Delsarte' to dedicate herself to intensive training with MacKaye. Stebbins was said to be his sole student with the "requisite degree of aptitude and zeal combined with the power of labor, to thoroughly master the art and to become its chief exponent" (1892, 61). It's unclear when exactly Stebbins studied with MacKaye. He was in New Hampshire in August and September of 1877, back in New York City by October working at his School of Expression and then in December 1877 mounted his production of *Won at Last* at Wallack's Theatre with Rose Coghlan as Grace Fleming. In January 1878 he was lecture touring before returning to New York to work with Blanche Meda for *Aftermath or Won at Last* to tour in April 1878 (Percy MacKaye 1927, 280-282). MacKaye performed in Worcester, MA at the end of April 1878, then the Walnut Theatre in Philadelphia in May 1878. In June 1878, he sold his rights to *Won at Last* to Blanche Meda²⁹⁴ and in the next school year was preparing new theatre work. Stebbins would have studied with him during his busy schedule when he was in New York. The next chapter will explore Stebbins' role as a Delsarte educator.

²⁹⁴ *New York Dispatch*, June 23, 1878, 5.

Teaching in Boston 1878–1879 to Falling Out with MacKaye:

The Boston University School of Oratory



Fig. 63. “Boston School of Oratory,” *Werner’s*, April 1894, 117.

After Stebbins completed her *Cours d’esthétique appliquée* (applied aesthetic course) studies with MacKaye at his School of Expression, she became his teaching assistant and taught in his place when he was away. During her training, according to the *North American* (March 24, 1884), MacKaye imparted all that he knew of Delsarte and collaborated with Stebbins compiling notes to “put things into writing that Delsarte had only demonstrated in his teachings.” It was reported that “Delsarte had never written down anything pertaining to his art and method, and these rambling notes of what he remembered were all that MacKaye could give as texts to Miss Stebbins.” Stebbins was later critiqued for repeating ‘errors’ taught her by MacKaye in her first publication, but when she travelled to Paris to meet with Delsarte’s family and former students, she made corrections, additions and alterations, to create a “new edition of her work, which has the right to stand as the textbook for all that can be known of Delsarte” (*North American*, March 24, 1884). It is unclear what is meant by a ‘new edition’ as Stebbins had not yet released her first

publication by this date, however it is interesting to pinpoint that Stebbins relied only on her notes as a guide.

In February 1878, MacKaye gave a lecture at the Boston School of Oratory.²⁹⁵ Soon after on March 8, 1878, in a letter replying to MacKaye, the Dean Lewis Monroe of Boston University's School of Oratory said he would receive Stebbins as a student even though he would be breaking the rules of admission in doing so. It was late in the school year, yet Monroe "proposed to justify it this way, that she will exemplify some of the movements in which you have trained her before the class."²⁹⁶ Therefore, she was accepted as a student *and* as a teacher.

Established in 1873 and located at 20 Beacon Street, Boston University's School of Oratory (BUSO) was the first school of its kind in the U.S., solely dedicated to the oratorical arts. In organizing the school, Dean Monroe built upon 20 years' experience as an administrator and educator in oratorical methods and physical culture (Streeter 2023, 36-41). BUSO was created to train students to become professors of oratory and public speakers when few programs in the nation met this need. The school's two-year program accepted male and female students, with its first graduates in 1875.²⁹⁷

In her 2023 dissertation, Streeter asserts that BUSO engaged in subversive embodied elocution practices by encouraging the "physical empowerment of suppressed voices," along with supporting white abolitionist organizations who had "broken cultural rules" formerly forbidding "public speeches by white women and all Black Americans" (14). BUSO invited several social reform speakers to lecture at the school including Lucy Stone, William Lloyd Garrison, and Henry Ward Beecher (14). From BUSO, Streeter traces an educational lineage of

²⁹⁵ *Cincinnati Daily Star*, February 7, 2.

²⁹⁶ Thanks to Dr. Carrie Streeter who shared the letter from Monroe to MacKaye from Dartmouth Library archives.

²⁹⁷ *Historical Register of Boston University: Fifth Centennial Issue, 1869-1911*.

progressive teachers including graduates who moved on to establish their own institutions nationwide.²⁹⁸ In the first chapter of her dissertation Streeter specifically focuses on ‘vocal vitality’ in the work of Mary Adams Currier at Wellesley College (teaching from 1875 until 1896) and Black elocutionist Hallie Quinn Brown of Wilberforce University (graduate and later teacher between 1895 until 1920s). An empowered voice was obtained through overcoming the timid, quiet, and whispering female voice to that of a woman learning to speak with breath, volume, clarity and confidence, which elocutionists such as Brown and Currier advocated for (Streeter, 61). Women literally needed to practice how to speak publicly with powerful ease.

Students at BUSO would have interacted with Stebbins as a fellow student and lecture/demonstrator. Mary S. Thompson, graduate of 1875, was a head teacher of oratory when Stebbins arrived. Thompson notes Stebbins was both one of her students and a lecturer at Boston University in 1878. Thompson states “MacKaye trained her for his assistant. In this capacity Miss Stebbins visited Boston to lecture and to illustrate this system in the place of her teacher.”²⁹⁹ MacKaye’s son said that MacKaye gave a total of 12 lectures, between the autumn and winter of 1878–79.³⁰⁰

The School of Oratory’s curriculum developed skills for public readers, orators, professors of elocution, and assisted actors in vocal culture. Courses included such things as vocal exercises, expressive reading, the use of gesture, dramatic art, Shakespeare, mechanisms of speech and physiology. Faculty included Alexander Graham Bell teaching ‘visible speech’ based on the study of vocal articulation, the vocal organs, and clear pronunciation. This course of study

²⁹⁸ For further historical information regarding BUSO’s influence see historian Carrie Streeter’s 2023 dissertation, chapter one, “Freeing the Channels of Expression: Women’s Vocal Health and Reconstruction Era Elocution Reform.”

²⁹⁹ *Werner’s*, March 1892, 61.

³⁰⁰ Percy MacKaye, *Epoch* 1927, 289.

could inform educators as to how to aid someone with a lisp, help a student learning a foreign language, teach phonetics, or for deaf students to learn lip reading.³⁰¹ Bell's revolutionary telephone experiments 'sending sounds' occurred during his tenure,³⁰² leading to his invention of the first telephone. Stebbins took a class with Bell (*Who's Who in the Lyceum*).³⁰³

Students were most likely surprised to see Stebbins show up at the end of the school year demonstrating 'Delsarte Expression.' While Stebbins was at BUSO in the spring of 1878, MacKaye was on tour with Blanche Meda in *Aftermath, or Won at Last*. Mary Thompson wrote that Stebbins taught "as MacKaye's representative [and] nearly every well-known graduate" was under her instruction. Thompson concluded that students were "indebted" to Stebbins for their "entire knowledge of the Delsarte system."³⁰⁴ This is possibly an exaggeration because MacKaye also lectured at BUSO during this period, however Thompson asserts that until Stebbins taught "we knew little of what could be done in the way of illustrating these fascinating theories, as MacKaye lacked the necessary temperament."³⁰⁵ I take this to mean that while MacKaye's lectures were popular, Thompson didn't like his teaching style. Stebbins wrote that when she came to BUSO she fulfilled the "double function of student and teacher. James Steele MacKaye, the first lecturer of the system of Delsarte in America, had been announced in Boston. He was unable to keep his engagement, and so sent me, then his most advanced pupil, to represent him at the school. I gave the lessons."³⁰⁶

In Stebbins' classes, she modelled for students' visible expression, gesture, attitudes in action, and how the body can express emotional experiences or different states of mind. Streeter

³⁰¹ Professor Alfonzo Butterfield, "Visible Speech," *The Voice* II, no. 8 (1880): 101–102.

³⁰² "Boston University School or Oratory," *The College Courant*, September 20, 1873, 117.

³⁰³ Edited by A. Augustus Wright, Pearson Brothers, Philadelphia, 1906, 61.

³⁰⁴ *Successful American*, 1902, 106.

³⁰⁵ *Werner's*, 1894, 272.

³⁰⁶ *Frances Stuart Parker Reminiscences and Letters* (Privately printed, 1907).

positions BUSO as a pivotal educational center that built upon previous prescriptive rhetorical methods to develop a more natural expressive system that came to be known as ‘New Elocution’ (2023, 12). She asserts that BUSO’s “curriculum proved especially influential– particularly for those interested in refashioning expressive norms.” This work was embraced by school administrators, women club leaders, programs for immigrants, and schools across the nation (22). Streeter convincingly argues that New Elocution significantly contributed to a cultural reform movement for women as the range of “respectable feminine expressivity” expanded past previous acceptable norms.

BUSO’s progressive program included classes in vocal sciences and body-mind practices. According to Streeter, ‘vocal science’ studies, involving the physiology of speech, lent an air of rationality and rigour to BUSO’s program– and to the field of elocution. The curriculum included developing an understanding of the science of vocalization, the science of breath, the function of breathing in relation to the nervous system, and how deep breathing promotes relaxation and reduces anxiety. Streeter views these studies as being extremely relevant in an age when serious illness’ like consumption affected the lungs, and many needed exercises to help them breathe better (36). Breath was linked to vigor and vitality.

Lessons included finding a strong and confident voice and, for some female students, Streeter states, “their voice lessons felt like a revolution” (40). An integral piece of BUSO’s training assisted women in liberating their voices, which was especially important as the burgeoning profession of education came to attract mainly women as new teachers. To be a competent professor of oratory, educators had to speak with authority and decisiveness, projecting their voice across the room to demand attention. Women had to learn to overcome timidity, nervousness and to appear at ease, capable of commanding a room. This was somewhat

contrary to expected feminine delicacy and social graces popular in the day. In these classes women were given permission to explore greater self-expression. As Streeter finds, the idea of empowered behavioral changes for women was met with derision by some male authorities, including those in the medical profession who argued that women could not physiologically withstand the pressures of public speaking. However, BUSO's institutional legitimacy and acceptability supported women endeavouring to forge a public voice (Streeter 2023, 57-64).

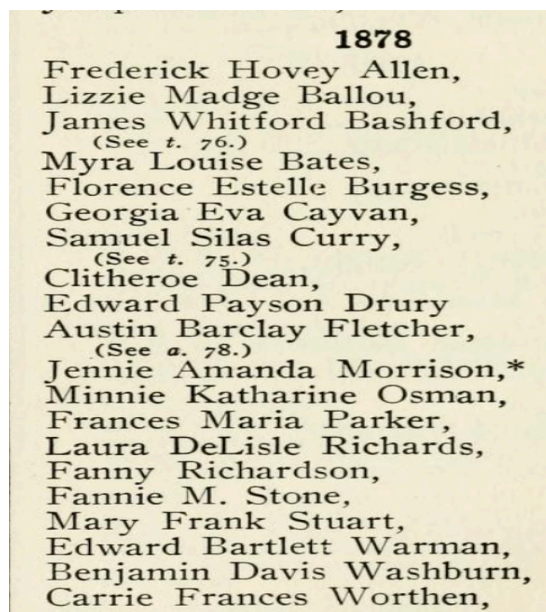


Fig. 64. *General Alumni Catalogue of Boston University.*

In the year ending May 1878, BUSO had 20 graduates, 14 women and 6 men. Streeter found that the 1878 graduation ceremony was “one for the record books” with Ralph Waldo Emerson, the governor of Massachusetts, and the president of Wellesley College all present. Social activists such as Lucy Stone attended the ceremony. Stone wrote how proud supporters were of the program and its graduates in the suffrage newspaper *Woman's Journal* (Streeter 2023, 81). Graduate Frederick Hovey Allen became a lecturer on European art and a minister, Samuel Silas Curry co-founded Curry College, Fanny Richardson became a popular public reader, Fannie M. Stone a reader and actress, and Georgie Cayvan became an accomplished

actress.³⁰⁷ 1878 graduate Golde Bamber became a social activist in the north end of Boston for newly arriving Jewish immigrant children, obtaining funding for a Hebrew training school and became the school's director. Mary Frank Stuart began working as an assistant instructor at BUSO the following school year (not to be confused with 1878 graduate Frances Maria Parker, as Mary Frank Stuart later became known as Mrs. Parker after her marriage). Below are the lists of graduates from 1878-1880.³⁰⁸

1879	
Lillian Beardslee Abbott, Golde Bamber, Belle Bovee, George Calvin Bower, Annie Delia Brackett, Emma Josephine Burt, Sarah Victoria Converse, Kate Davis, Maverette Ellen Eddy, Ellen Samson Edwards, Vesta Philomela Gates, Lucia Kern Gile,	
1880	
Mary Gregory, Minerva Guernsey, Minnie Jane Holdredge, Nancy Mirick Hopkins, Mattie Swain Hussey, Adelaide Baldwin Johnson, Minnie Ladd, David Francis Lingane, Mary Elizabeth Lord, Orrison Swett Marden, (See a. 77.) Tanetaro Megata, Susannah Elizabeth Oglevee, Hattie Augusta Prunk, Clara Francena Randall, Ellen Louise Read, Libby Maria Richardson, Mary Emma Skinner, Clara Madeline Spence, Nellie Francis Worthen,	Amy Baker, Daniel Bachelder, Lyman Daniel Bragg, (See t. 78.) Mary A. Currier, Kate Davis, Jeanette Howell, William Henry Knight, (See l. 78.) Clarimond Mansfield, (See a. 78.) Castelly Osceola Norcross, Abner Morrill Osgood, (See a. 78.) Fanny Page, Annie May Schoppely,

Fig. 65. *General Alumni Catalogue of Boston University*.

Streeter found that in the summer of 1879, Stebbins lived with Mary Stuart and enjoyed being welcomed into her home. They became close friends, staying up late in the evening

³⁰⁷ She took the role of Dollie Dutton in MacKaye's play *Hazel Kirke*. *Marie Burroughs Art Portfolio of Celebrities*, Marquis and Company, 1894, np.

³⁰⁸ Information gathered from *General Alumni Catalogue of Boston University*, "School of Oratory" Graduates from 1875-1879, (1918, 98-100), and *Chronicling America* newspapers.

passionately dreaming of future plans and projects, envisioning how these “physical practices and scientific claims” could continue to liberate women’s voices (Streeter 2023, 84). The following fall, Stuart was “given chairmanship of the Department of Voice and the Delsarte System of Gesture” in a new school of oratory in Boston.³⁰⁹ After marrying Colonel Francis Wayland Parker in 1883 (superintendent of Boston schools), Mrs. Parker moved from Boston to Chicago where Colonel Parker was given charge of Cook County Normal School (later known as Chicago Teachers College). ‘Normal’ schools in the 19th century were teacher-training programs, named after the French *école normale*, to teach established ‘norms’ of pedagogy.³¹⁰

Colonel Parker is considered a pioneer in progressive education while his wife, Mary Frank Stuart Parker’s work, is overlooked, despite his admirable deference to her, saying his refined ideas were widely recognized as having “rested largely on Mrs. Parker’s artistic genius.”³¹¹ Mrs. Parker advocated for body-mind education as an integral part of the school curriculum for both sexes, and taught ‘Delsarte’ as a form of ‘learning how to concentrate,’ which could be considered as a form of mindfulness. Mrs. Parker became a dress reform advocate and spoke at the Congress of Women for the Association for the Advancement of Women in 1896 alongside Julia Ward Howe. In a biography of Stuart Parker, who passed in 1899 of illness, Stebbins, as one of the contributing authors, remembered her friend as a

rare combination of the exquisite woman with the keen intellectual acumen of the man. Her breadth of view was so large; not one atom of petty femininity. A grand womanhood was in all her views. She was a loyal friend [...] Her marriage with Colonel Parker separated us in the body (but never in the spirit), for she went to live in Chicago, but I always felt as sure of her spiritual love and sympathy as if our lives still ran side by side” (1907, 19–20).

³⁰⁹ Jack Campbell, “Colonel Parker’s New Woman and New Education,” *McGill Journal of Education*, 1975, 153.

³¹⁰ Cook County Normal School, also known as the “Parker School,” was an offshoot of BUSO and included advocates such as progressive educator John Dewey, psychologist William James, and prominent social reform leader Jane Adams. Dewey’s ‘laboratory school’ employed teachers who trained at Cook County. Campbell, 1975, 160.

³¹¹ Campbell 1975, 150.

Stuart Parker was the first to bring American Delsarte teachings to Chicago where she “filled her pupils with a love of better expression for Art’s own sake” (47). She established a women’s club with over 300 members. Stebbins said that in Boston, she and Parker had worked together, teaching one another. Stebbins coached Stuart Parker in “interpretation, drama, and Delsarte,” and Stuart Parker coached her in elocutionary work. Stebbins admired Stuart Parker’s trait of scorning “everything that savored of affectation” and her ability to act as an intellectual critic with “unusual tact and charm of manner” giving her wonderful influence over her pupils (1907, 19–20). It seems they were of like minds. By 1880, the Parker School had 147 women and 113 male graduates (14). Graduates inspired a new generation of young teachers and innovators of ‘New Education.’

Stebbins taught in Boston from the end of the school year in 1878 into the next year, until the spring of 1879.³¹² In April she returned to New York City to work in a new stage production with Steele MacKaye. Yet even in this short time, it can be surmised that she had a lasting and profound effect on her students. In 1878–1879, Harriot Stanton (otherwise known as “Mrs. E. Cady Stanton’s daughter,” her mother being the famed Seneca Falls women’s rights activist) was a student. Stanton was a former student at Vassar for five years, followed by one year at BUSO before establishing herself as a lyceum platform speaker. Seeing as she was there for only one year, she isn’t listed as a graduate in the Boston University catalogue. Another unlisted Vassar graduate reported to be at the School of Oratory was an unnamed female Japanese student.³¹³ 1879 Graduate Hattie Augusta Prunk became the principal of the Indiana-Boston School of

³¹² *Werner’s Magazine* April 1894, 125. Governor Rice of Massachusetts and Ralph Waldo Emerson were present at the 1879 graduation, and Emerson “listened with a face expressive of great pleasure” (“The Fifth Anniversary of Boston University School of Oratory—the Great Results Apparent,” *The Chicago Tribune*, May 19, 1879, 2). It seems that neither MacKaye nor Stebbins would have been at the graduation as they were performing in New York City in the same week in May, perhaps dependent on what day it was, they could have done a turnaround trip.

³¹³ *The Lambertville Record*, N.J., July 9, 1879, 2.

Elocution and Expression of Indianapolis (est. 1879). Her student Lillian Fox became a prominent Black elocutionist, activist, reporter, a pantomimic performer, and taught tableaux to her students for public performances. Graduate Peter Robertson and prominent Black elocutionist Hallie Q. Brown taught at Wilberforce University (Streeter 94–95). Clara Spence became an actress, performing at the Madison Square Theatre before founding and becoming the headmistress of the Spence School in New York City, still in existence. Spence’s school was likely funded by her older intimate partner, Jessie Prentice, a wealthy woman.³¹⁴ 1879 graduate Tanetaro Megata (previous graduate of Harvard Law School) returned to Japan to become one of the founders of the Japanese school Senshu in 1880.³¹⁵ Streeter extensively researched BUSO, and more information on graduates can be gleaned from her dissertation (2023, 205–231).³¹⁶ Other graduates, according to Streeter, implemented elocution programs at Ohio State, Cleveland Public School, John Hopkins University, Colby College, and Curry College.

By 1878, Clappe had moved to New York City, likely to be close to Genevieve. The Denham Grammer School held a benefit raising \$2,000 for her retirement. Sandra Lockhart found that Clappe lived for a time with Ferdinand Ewer’s widow (the former publisher of her letters in the *Pioneer Magazine*). Presumably she lived with them when she arrived in New York (by then Ewer was an Episcopal pastor at Church of St. Ignatius of Antioch, near Bryant Park). Clappe continued to live with his widow after Ewer’s death in 1883.

³¹⁴ <https://lesbianhistorytrailmdi.weebly.com/clara-b-spence-and-charlotte-baker.html> The two women adopted children together before separating, after which Clara developed a new relationship with Charlotte Baker.

³¹⁵ <https://www.senshuu.ac.jp/english/about/history/founders.html>

³¹⁶ Clara Francena Randall became a teacher of elocution in Vermont, then taught in California at Throop Polytechnic (now Caltech). For more on the pedagogical lineage see Streeter’s detailed appendix (267–277).

Madison Square Theatre Company: *Aftermath, of Won at Last*

In April 1879, MacKaye announced he would present his play *Aftermath or Won at Last* with his new company in New York City,³¹⁷ with Stebbins in a lead role. MacKaye had taken over the Fifth Avenue Hall, across from Madison Square Park (located on West 24th street, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue intersect) renamed the Madison Square Theatre. The Madison Square Park was the first public place in the city to be illuminated by electric lights, thereafter, known as the ‘Great White Way.’³¹⁸

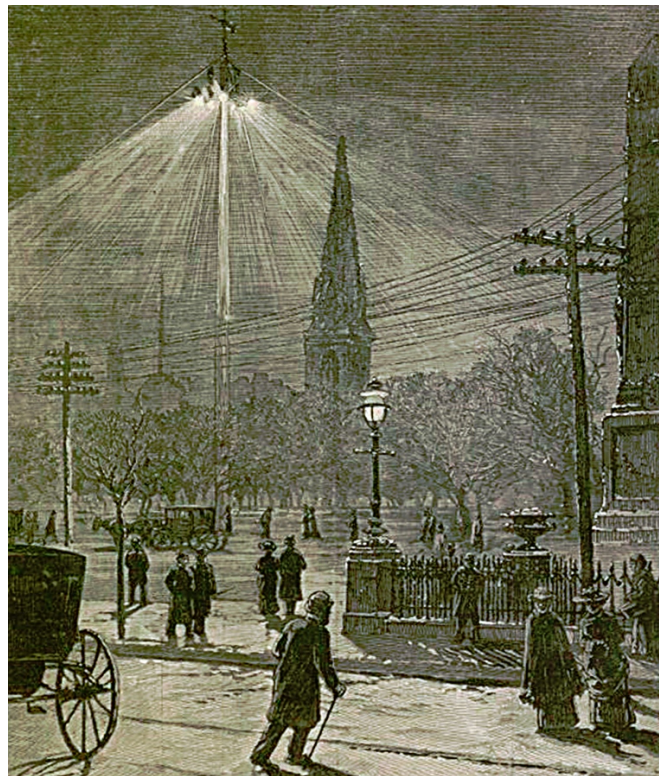


Fig. 66. “The Electric Light in Madison Square, New York,” *Harper’s Weekly*, January 24, 1882, 25.

The Madison Square Park area became the new social center for the wealthy and exclusive crowd, surpassing the Rialto. In the vicinity there were elite private clubs (for men and women), and grandiose marble mansions lined the length of Fifth Avenue from Madison Square up to

³¹⁷ *Public Ledger*, Memphis, Tennessee, April 23, 1879.

³¹⁸ Allen Churchill, *The Great White Way; a Re-creation of Broadway’s Golden Era of Theatrical Entertainment* (Dutton, 1962).

Central Park. The theatre was on the southwest corner of the park. Next door was the Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York's foremost hotel, welcoming numerous distinguished guests, such as the Prince of Wales, U.S. presidents, ambassadors, and emperors over decades. The Fifth Avenue Hotel had the first passenger elevator in the United States, which was quite a novelty and many eagerly wanted to try it out. Following evening theatre shows in the district, theatre performers would join 'high society' in upscale restaurants for late-night fine dining and overflowing champagne at restaurants such as at Delmonico's or Sherry's, and hotels with high end restaurants at Hoffman's House, Gilsey House, St. James, Holland House, the Brunswick and Martinique (Churchill 1962, 12). Madison Square Garden was built on the northeast corner of the park after Vanderbilt renovated his former train shed in 1880. The Garden had an amphitheatre seating 8,000, and a 30,000 square foot ballroom. It presented Barnum and Bailey's Circus, and such things as Wild West shows, Johan Straus' orchestra with two ballets organized by Leon Espinosa, negro jubilees (the soprano M. Sissieretta Jones made her debut there).

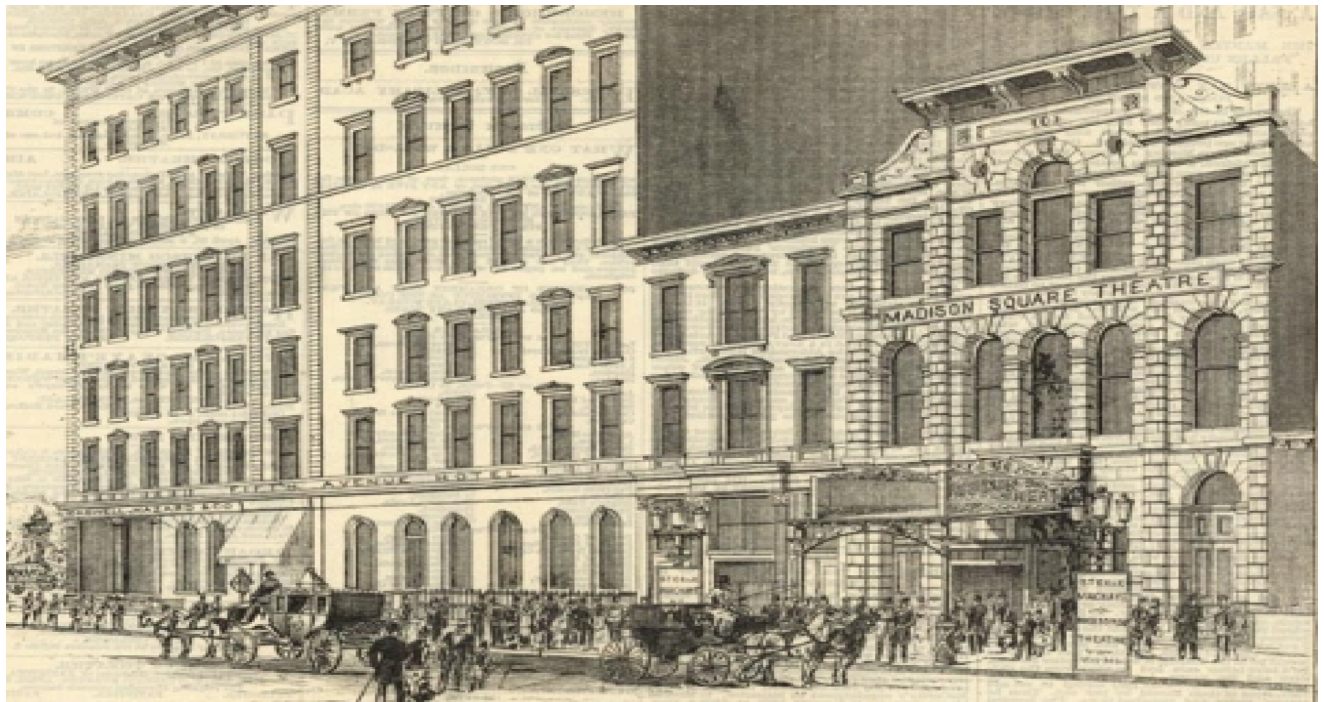


Fig. 67. Fifth Avenue Hotel adjoining Madison Square Theatre, Harvard Theatre Collection.



Fig. 68. Dining room at the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

The cast for the opening of *Aftermath or Won at Last* included MacKaye performing the lead opposite Stebbins, who used the stage name Agnes Loring. However, her real name was known as it was reported that “Miss Genevieve Stebbins will make her metropolitan debut, acting the heroine. The cast, in other features, is also to be of exceptional merit.”³¹⁹ It was also reported that “‘Agnes Loring’ (Stebbins), was the cousin of Geneviève Ward.”³²⁰ Members of MacKaye’s company were “discretely chosen for such strong character parts as the plays he has already commenced especially require.” The company was brought “into existence under the happiest auspices, with more brains on either side of the curtain than any of its competitors can ever claim.”³²¹ Some performers were from the original Wallack’s Theatre production including Charles W. Couldock, Edward Lamb, Genevieve Rogers, and Gabrielle Du Sauld. Couldock was

³¹⁹ *St. Louis Dispatch*, April 12, 1879, 6.

³²⁰ “Dramatic Notes,” *The Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1879, 5.

³²¹ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 14, 1879, 3.

an established character actor with a long running career (with a debut at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London as Othello in 1835). Genevieve Rogers performed since a child on the Boston stage.

The cast was extraordinarily talented. MacKaye had organized a competent company.

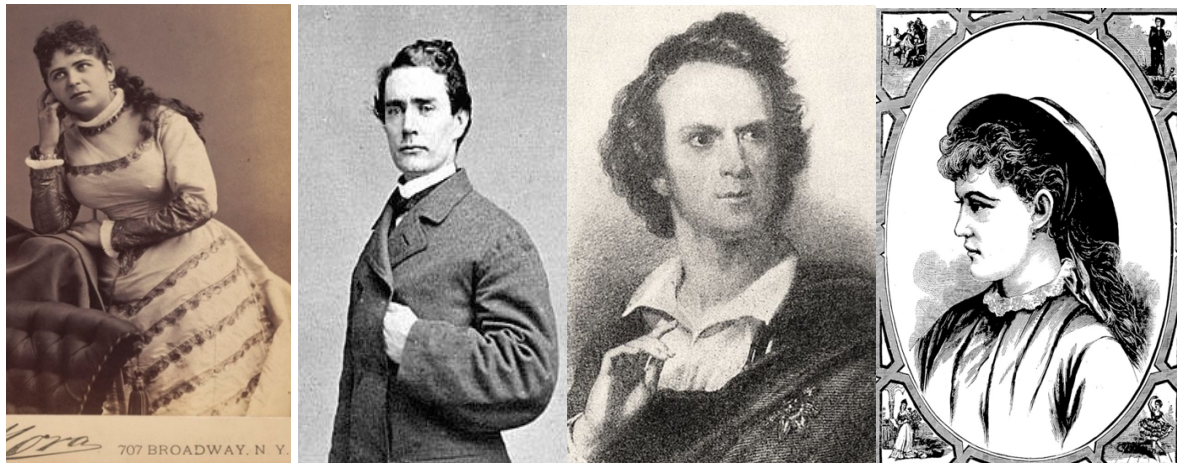


Fig. 69. Gabrielle du Sauld, Photographer José María Mora, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Francis A. DiMauro. Fig. 70. Edward Lamb, photographer Charles D. Fredricks & Co, University of Washington Libraries. Fig. 71. Charles Couldock, W. H. Mote, engraver, *Records of the New York Stage, from 1750 to 1860*, 550. Fig. 72. Genevieve Rogers, *New York Clipper*, May 25, 1877.



Fig. 73. Photo, Fig. 74. Illustration of the Madison Square theatre.

Opening night of *Aftermath, or Won at Last* on April 23, 1879, was sold out. The cast was said to be excellent, and the orchestra one of the best in the city. It was reported “Mr. Mackaye has gathered about him a very strong company, individually and collectively admirable for versatility, culture and acquirement.” The play was described as a “legitimate comedy-drama

[that] exalted in sentiment, deeply interesting in incident, powerful in action and consistently happy in denouement. He himself acts the leading part with repressive earnestness and subtle intensity and is brilliantly supported by Agnes Loring [...] if he can keep the company together it will be a miracle if he does not succeed in his managerial aims.”³²² In MacKaye’s role as the manager of Madison Square Theatre everything in the theatre was to “come under his direct supervision.”³²³

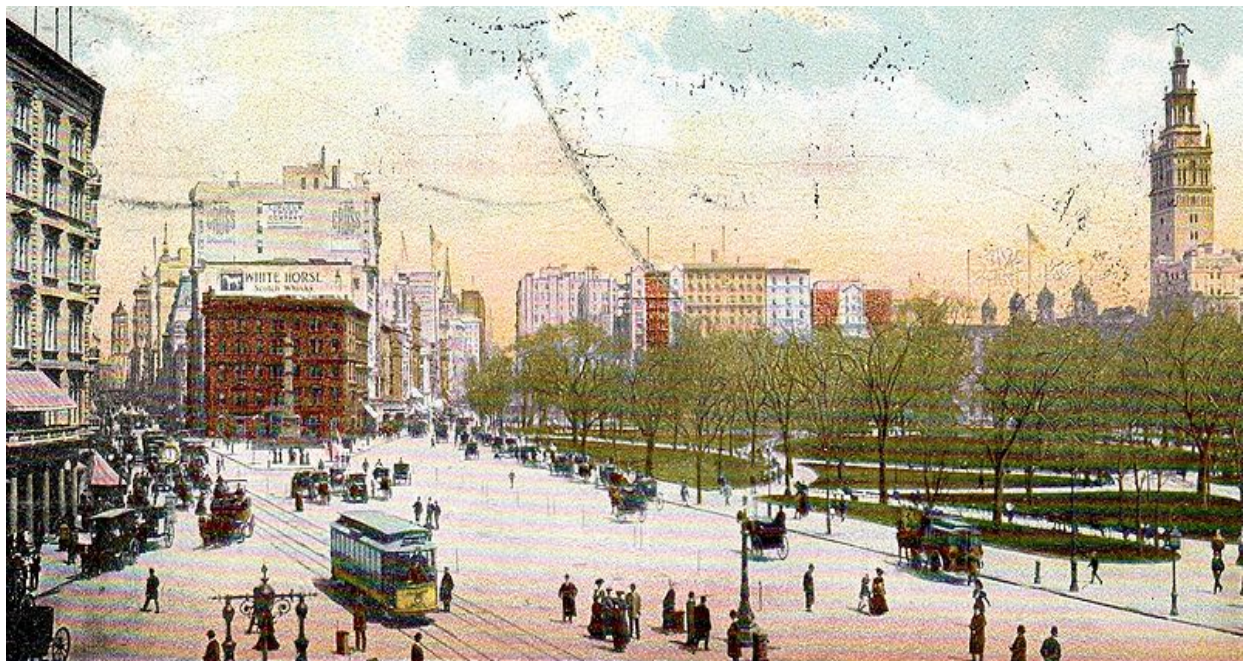


Fig. 75. Madison Square Park postcard, west side facing north. Madison Square Garden is seen in upper left corner.

MacKaye’s theatre concept was described as an attempt to:

establish a stock theatre in which no recognition should be given the star system, in which the play should be given the first consideration, and then should come the players, and in which actors, scene-painters, and carpenters should contribute their share to a complete, harmonious, and, above all, a truthful interpretation of the dramatic work with which there were entrusted. The idea was to found a theatre where the system of the Théâtre Français should be imitated as closely as the material at hand would allow” “Amusements, Hooley’s,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. June 13, 1879, 5.

³²² *Times Picayune*, April 29, 1879, 3.

³²³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1879, 9.

There were some negative reviews of the opening performance, saying that MacKaye's "gestures could be mechanical," and for the newcomer Agnes Loring (Stebbins)

not much praise can be awarded; she has been intelligently trained, and she seemed to be at home upon the stage, but there was no trace of talent in her efforts. Her emotion was strained of the sentimental kind which is too often mistaken for feeling. Her acting was inherently weak and crude, and utterly devoid of sincerity."³²⁴

Contradictorily, other journalists had the opposite opinion of Stebbins' performance. She was reported to be a "debutante" who studied under MacKaye and whose first appearance was "remarkably successful."³²⁵ Of her debut at Madison Square, *The Chicago Tribune* remarked,

The acting of the debutante is such as commands recognition for distinct ability and uncommon promise. It revealed a force of character, definite intellectual purpose, acute sensibility, quick sense of the significance and value of dramatic situations, ample capacity for the expression of hysterical emotions, with remarkable self-control and command of the resources of posture, movement, gesture and facial as well as vocal expression. The efficiency in these latter particulars, indeed, was remarked by that gracefulness which is the result, not merely of careful and protracted training, but of spontaneous identification with the spirit of the dramatic character (April 24, 1879).



Images used are not from the play but are shown to give an idea of what the two leads might have looked like performing together. Fig. 76. Henry Bracker, "Girl and Man Talking," Library of Congress. Fig. 77. Raymond Moreau Crosby, "Musical Memory," 1897, Library of Congress.

³²⁴ "Record of Amusements. Dramatic and Musical. Madison-Square Theatre" *New York Times*, April 24, 1879, 4.

³²⁵ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 24, 1879.

Agnes Loring (Stebbins) was noted as being a “fledgling whose dramatic talent has been hatched by Mr. MacKaye’s patent incubating process. How she will succeed in conveying Delsarte’s theories will be seen hereafter. She bears great promise now.”³²⁶ The *Dramatic News* states that “the surprise of the evening was to be found in the debutante. There is no exaggeration in saying that this is the very best first performance that we have ever seen. Nothing could be more admirable than her emotional scenes, while in her quiet by-play there was a fineness and delicacy which showed a coming woman on the American stage.”³²⁷ In MacKaye’s son’s biography of his father, he shares a theatre review saying Couldock was magnificent, Lamb “so very funny” du Sauld, et al are so perfectly drilled. Agnes Loring “is so charming, though amateurish, that everybody who goes is pleased” (1927, 303).³²⁸

Aftermath, or Won at Last is a comedy-drama, and must have been entertaining for the actors to play theatrical moments with wit and charm. In short, the story revolves around the marital relationship of John and Grace Fleming as a loveless match. Grace is a “pure, noble girl, who idolizes John and imagines him to be all chivalry, tenderness, and nobility.” When Grace finds out that John had an affair with a Frenchwoman, she decides to remain in the marriage aloof, detached, and at a distance. The Frenchwoman is described as inciting “passing passion” while the character of Grace “inspires an undying love.” William Tracey, a former suitor of Grace’s, comes into the picture and rouses John Flemings anger as he notices how endearing Grace is. His heart is stirred to sense love for the first time. John becomes so dismayed at his own callousness he attempts to kill himself, however, Tracey saves him and leaves John and Grace to make amends. While the narrative may seem a bit ridiculous, a good comedy is created

³²⁶ “Steele MacKaye’s Madison Square Theater,” *The Chicago Tribune* April 27, 1879, 10.

³²⁷ L.A.C “Biographical Sketches,” *Werner’s Directory of Elocutionists, Readers, Lecturers and other Public Instructors and Entertainers*. 1887, 290–291.

³²⁸ Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye Genius of the Theatre* (Boni and Liveright, 1927).

out of oppositional tensions. 19th century English writer Thomas De Quincy describes comedy as “the ludicrous of incident, or the ludicrous of situation, or the ludicrous that arises in a mixed way between the character and a situation” (226).³²⁹

The *New York Times* describes the narrative as,

very tender and very human in motive, [...it] attempts to portray the relations between a man of the world, *John Fleming*, and a sweet, simple girl, who becomes his wife. *Grace* learns on her wedding day that the man to whom she has surrendered her heart cares nothing for her; that he is a worn-out, dissipated, cynical being, who has found all love hollow and all women deceptive. This knowledge decides her to assert her dignity of womanhood, and thereupon she decides to be nothing to *John Fleming*. The latter, as soon as he learns to comprehend the nature of the woman he has married, learns also to respect and to venerate her, and the play is thus employed to picture the growth of love and to depict the obstacles which he must overcome before he can rightfully and manfully claim her heart as truly his own.³³⁰

Opening night news reached the papers in London, with the report that “Mr. Mackaye seems to have gathered around him some of the literary and social lights of the metropolis, and they were out in full force on the occasion of the opening of his new Theatre.” The article continues by stating:

The play is undoubtedly the best that Mr. Mackaye has ever written, but it is not improved by his acting in it, for, with all his vaunted Delsartian knowledge, he is but an amateur actor. He has gathered around him, however, some clever people and they made the first night’s performance interesting.” The review describes Couldock as “one of the best local actors” and a “*debutant*, Miss Agnes Loring (a stage name), gave great promise of future excellence in the character of Grace Fleming.”³³¹

The play closed in New York City on May 20th and travelled to Chicago for a two-week run at Hooley’s Theatre. Hooley’s Theatre was a large house, seating 1,300, located on 124 West Randolph Street in Chicago’s theatre district, next to the city’s best hotels. On June 15th the show was extended for another week. While the company was away, Madison Square Theatre began

³²⁹ Marvin Carlson, “Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present,” (Cornell University Press, Enlarged Edition, 1993).

³³⁰ “Record of Amusements. Dramatic and Musical. Madison Square Theatre,” April 24, 1879, 4.

³³¹ “The Drama in America (from our own correspondent),” *The Era*, May 11, 1879, 4.

an extensive renovation project. The plan was for the theatre to expand from a one-floor house with a low ceiling to add theatre boxes, a paraquet, and two tiers. The ‘new’ theatre was meant to open with a four-act character comedy by A.D. Gordou, entitled *Trix*. The principal parts were to be “sustained by C.W. Couldock, Steele Mackaye, A. C. Dacre, Padgett, Frankau, Elsie Moore, Agnes Loring [Stebbins] and Laura LeClaire,³³² however, this did not occur as the renovations ended up taking longer than expected.

At the opening performance on June 9, 1879, Stebbins performance was described as thus, “Miss Loring is a graceful, pleasing little actress, but just a little inclined to sing her part. She plays with a charm that secures her favor.”³³³ A few days later it was reported “Miss Agnes Loring gives a more satisfactory rendition of the wife of Fleming than she did on the opening night.”³³⁴ The show was received “as one of the most agreeable dramas of literary pretension that have appeared on the stage for a long time.” Miss Agnes Loring had evidently “received a good stage training and, were her natural powers fully cultivated in the art which she has chosen, doubtless she would realize a decided success.”³³⁵ An *Inter-Ocean* newspaper article, titled “Dramatic: The Made Actor, Mr. Mackaye as an Example,” states “Mr. Mackaye and Miss Loring lift their school above ridicule, though they may not shield it from criticism” (June 21, 1879, 6). It seems that it wasn’t only MacKaye, but also Stebbins (aka Loring) who was recognized for coaching actors in Delsartean expressive concepts.

While the play *Aftermath, or Won at Last* had relatively good reviews, it’s run was short. After Chicago, MacKaye and Stebbins returned to New York in July and the show was closed.

³³² *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 19, 1879, 5. The cast for the Chicago tour was slightly different, with the addition of Laura LeClaire, Josephine Craig, Frank Aiken, J.C. Paggett, Will Sands, and Joseph Franken.

³³³ “Hooley’s” *The Inter Ocean*, Chicago, Illinois, June 10, 1879, 8. Hooley’s Theatre, later renamed Power’s Theatre, now demolished. The proscenium was in white and gold, the ceiling a sky with abstract circles and triangles with a repeating theme of lotus flowers in pinks, blues, green and gold. The top tier had red velvet couches.

³³⁴ Amusements. Hooley’s,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 13, 1879, 5.

³³⁵ “Hooley’s,” *The Chicago Tribune* June 10, 1879, 5.

Despite the apparent success of the play, MacKaye's son states that his family was left with significant debt. They were forced to sell their horse and carriage, their 'fancy' breed of chickens, and his mother's "pretty jewelry was lost for ever" (*Epoch* 1927, 305). The MacKaye's were also financially strapped because the Madison Square Theatre renovations were taking longer than expected. The theatre was meant to be completed by September 1879, but renovations were extended and not finalized until February 1880 (Sokalski 2007, 54).³³⁶



Fig. 78. Newspaper ad.

³³⁶ J.A. Sokalski, *Pictorial Illusionism: The Theatre of Steele MacKaye*, McGill University Press, 2007.

For the theatre's renovations, MacKaye entered a special financial arrangement with the Mallory brothers, as new management of the theatre. Their arrangement included their investment in the remodel. The Mallory's were editors/owners of *The Churchman*, and apparently with significant wealth. They negotiated what was said by others to be a 'devil's contract' with MacKaye in which he released future profits for the play *Hazel Kirke* to open the new theatre. Some of the renovations including placing the orchestra above the stage, with a glass floor for the conductor to see the stage action underneath.

MacKaye was known for his expensive tastes, and he spared no expense of the Mallory's money in the renovations. He hired Louis Tiffany to design the theatre's interior, which was hung with "rich velvets and satins." The walls were painted canvas, the ceiling metallic with Persian designs and a 'sunburst' dome chandelier. The stage curtain was of embroidered satin showing a pool of water out of which grew bulrushes and marsh flowers, surrounded by "insects of variegated hues and birds of brilliant plumage" (Sokalski 2007, 73). The auditorium was climate controlled, which allowed the theatre to stay open through the summer when most theatres were closed. The cooling system, using tons of ice positioned under the auditorium floor, allowed for cool air to circulate. People would go to the theatre just to escape the summer heat (126). The stage itself was an elevator, in fact it was a 'double stage,' with one stage built above the other. The 'elevator' moved the stages up and down to reveal a scenic décor change, meant to reduce the time between set changes. While the upper platform was hidden, the set would be changed as needed, and then the elevator would lower to reveal another stage setting.³³⁷ MacKaye claimed to have invented the double stage, yet the machinist Nelson

³³⁷ *New York Herald*, December 25, 1879, 10.

Waldron held the patent and was responsible for the actual build (74). After the shows, some of the audience would have champagne and ride the double elevator for amusement.

Troubles with Steele MacKaye

While the theatre continued being renovated, in September 1879, Stebbins obtained permission from MacKaye to teach ‘Delsarte’ independently. He wrote a letter of recommendation stating “sincerely that you are competent to put that system to great use. You are the only one of my pupils now living whom I can conscientiously recommend or gladly authorize to teach what I teach myself.”³³⁸ Unfortunately, MacKaye later came to resent her success as an educator and author.

After performing opposite MacKaye as a lead in his play, sometime in the fall of 1879 MacKaye either cancelled Stebbins’ Madison Square Theatre Company contract, or didn’t renew it. This created significant problems between the two as she expected to remain a company member. Their disputes became public. As *The Times* (Philadelphia) reports:

I see that Steele Mackaye has got himself into trouble with Agnes Loring— in other words, Miss Genevieve Stebbins. It will be remembered that when Mr. Mackaye opened his Madison Square Theatre, not the present structure, but the little hall in which he began, his leading lady was Agnes Loring, a tall, thin and jejune individual, who at that time was generally supposed to be his backer. After the season Miss Loring’s name was dropped, and there were vague rumors of difficulties of a social nature. Now it appears that Miss Loring puts herself on record saying, ‘I shall sue Mr. Mackaye for \$3,000 which he owes me.’ She claims that having some money she took lessons of Mackaye in the Delsartian art of acting, for which she paid him, and that he said he had written a play for her with which he would open the theatre, if she would raise the money for him to go ahead with. She consented to raise the money and loan it to him on the condition that he would secure her a leading position in his theatre on a large salary. She borrowed the money from her friends with considerable difficulty and gave it to him, but as he had no credit he had to pay in advance for everything he obtained including the rent and furniture, so that the day before the opening he didn’t have a dollar and was unable to get several articles that were absolutely necessary for him to have, and yet he had not the cash. Through Miss Loring \$900 more was borrowed, which the loaner let Mr. Mackaye

³³⁸ Ruyter 1999, 47, reprinted in part in Stebbins 1888, 107.

have, considering it an accommodation for Miss Loring. Finding herself, after a little out of money and out of a position, Miss Loring spoke to Mackaye about it, and, according to her, he treated her in a very bullying manner, threatening her with various unpleasant complications if she didn't let him alone, whereupon Miss Loring says that she shall sue him. She is not ashamed of any act of hers except the foolish way in which she allowed him to blind her and build his fortunes upon her error in trusting him. [...] I trust he will be able to pay Miss Loring what he owes her.³³⁹

Unfortunately, according to New York State Archives researcher's services, without knowing where the court case was filed or heard, the case cannot be traced. It is possible that she did not file yet reports suggest she did. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* (June 24, 1880, 12) states "Miss Agnes Loring has instituted suit, we believe, against Steele Mackaye for the recovery of \$3,000 (more than \$90,000 in today's dollar) alleged to have been paid by the lady to that gentleman 'to bring her out.'" Stebbins should have been under contract for at least a full year as a leading lady however she only performed in the spring of 1879. In an article validating her circumstance with MacKaye, the *New York Dramatic News* reports:

Mr. Mackaye's methods of doing business will sooner or later get him into trouble. He had already engaged two ladies absolutely for leading business [...] Now he has got a third [...] To the three of them he has pledged himself that each one separately shall be a leading lady, which means a choice of parts. I can see several lawsuits in the dim distance as a result of this strange, Delsartian method of doing business. No one of these ladies is going to give way to the other. Yet it will be very unsafe to discharge any of them for refusing to play parts that are not leading. Miss Ellsler is the worse of the three. She has honorably and successfully carried out her contract, while Mackaye— but no matter. This sort of thing is bound to culminate in troubles the Reverend Mallory brothers sorry they ever went into business with a gentleman of the stamp of Mr. Mackaye.

For whatever reason, the article does not mention Stebbins' name, although Effie Ellsler was the actress that replaced Stebbins as the leading lady in the Madison Square company.³⁴⁰ It seems MacKaye put women in situations where he benefitted at their expense. To further aggravate the

³³⁹ "Howard's Letters. A Season of Discomfort Predicted for New York. Steele Mackaye's Troubles- Young America is going to the Bad. Steele Mackaye's Theater," *The Times* (Philadelphia), May 30, 1880, 5.

³⁴⁰ Ellsler is listed in the cast of 'Iron Will' (the title then changed to "Hazel Kirke"), MacKaye in *Epoch*, 320. She toured in 'Iron Will' to Ford's Theatre with the company in November 1879 (*Evening Star* Nov. 24, 1879, 4).

situation, an article in the *National Police Gazette* titled “Stage Whispers: Ins and Outs of the Gay and Giddy Dramatic World,” raised a different issue altogether. They claim there was a “curious misprint” in a St. Louis newspaper saying that Stebbins had founded the “Union Square Theatre.” On the contrary they state, “As a matter of fact,” Stebbins was the real “founder of the original Madison Square Theater, contributing about \$16,000 toward it through Steele Mackaye, Esq. Her name then ‘in religion,’ so to speak, was Agnes Loring.”³⁴¹ It’s not clear how they came up with this number (and it might be a bit of gossip) however if it’s true, \$16,000 would be equal to almost half a million today.

After his falling out with Stebbins, MacKaye found himself out of a job at the Madison Square Theatre and in court with different problems.³⁴² Stebbins, however, remained in good standing with the theater and returned to perform in numerous shows over the next decade. As noted by dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, a decade later MacKaye continued to express resentment towards Stebbins, writing to his wife Mary saying “Miss Stebbins, who is a very vicious young woman, who will never forgive me for not continuing her on the salary list of the Madison Square Theatre the second year– when we had no use for her. She threatened me with all sorts of things then in her rage.” He continues by saying in the letter,

I was forced to order her out of my office, and from that time to this, have of course disdained to notice her existence. This too must be exasperating to her. She has never lost an opportunity to lie about me– or to steal from me. In all cares of this kind, a man can do nothing– in any fight between the sexes– however right the male may be, the female will always appeal wronged even if she is clearly not right.³⁴³

³⁴¹ *National Police Gazette*, March 1, 1884.

³⁴² “Hazel Kirke in Court: The Countersuits of Steele MacKaye and the Messrs. Mallory,” *New York Times* April 15, 1882, 8.

³⁴³ MacKaye archives, Dartmouth College 1892, folder 18, box 5. Thank you dearly to Dr. Carrie Streeter for sharing resources gathered from her research in these archives.

Clearly, MacKaye wasn't taking responsibility for their falling out and was quite misogynistic in his rant. It can be said that MacKaye did not thoroughly respect women, as his personal diary proclaims that "All men are philosophers, all women actresses" (1862 in Dartmouth archive). In his view, women were for 'show' and not to be valued for their intellectual contributions.

If Stebbins had sued MacKaye, it seems odd that he would write a decade later that she "threatened me with all sorts of things." Instead, he would have complained to his wife about the trial, issues that arose from the court case, or other related matters. Therefore, it's possible that Stebbins did not actually end up suing MacKaye. Instead, what is clear is that she took a break from New York and left to travel abroad.

While MacKaye doesn't mention who he borrowed money from to open *Aftermath, Won at Last*, it was publicly known that he did borrow money to fund the theatre. The esteemed New York drama critic Nym Crinkle claims "when Steele Mackaye had temporarily exhausted himself of the local crop of aspirants to the honors of the stage, he obtained enough money from Frank Carpenter and Miss Genevieve Stebbins" to rent the space that was to become the Madison Square Theatre (Crinkle continues by being entirely dismissive of the new "Delsartology" fad)."³⁴⁴ Furthermore, MacKaye's son Percy knew that money had been borrowed to open the theatre. In the biography Percy wrote about his father, he provides recollections his mother shared from the time of that specific production. His mother told him that during the rehearsal period, MacKaye did not have enough money to receive props being delivered to the theatre. She said he lamented, "I haven't a cent. The whole thing will go to smash before it even begins, and all be a laughingstock." Mary recalled her grief, saying "he went off leaving me with the heartsickness I knew so well, but he got the money somehow that

³⁴⁴ *Music and Drama*, "Malloryism," vol. III, no. 5, New York, August 5, 1882.

time.”³⁴⁵ Percy said his mother sighed with a twinkling glance, and then said, “Cashless Glory should be graven on our coat-of-arms” (1927, 178).

Worse still, Mary recalled on the “very eve of opening” MacKaye needed an even larger sum of money. Unless they obtained money to pay debts the theatre doors would not open. MacKaye and his family were living in his Union Square studio, and Mary stayed up all night worrying. Mary told Percy that she woke very early, walked through Union Square and “sat with the sleeping tramps” until the sun rose. She decided to go “beg a friend to lend me money— an absolute last resort to one who had helped in former crises.” She travelled uptown and had the maid wake her ‘friend’ up at the brink of dawn. Mary asked for help. The friend at first refused, but then finally conceded. “So,” Percy says, “the little theatre was opened with *Won at Last*, revived as *Aftermath*” (302). This ‘friend’ seems to have been Stebbins, but it could have been another society woman. A desperate aspect of Mary’s begging was that she did so while holding a six-week-old newborn in her arms (303).

Percy did not say who they borrowed money from. In fact, in his two-volume 700-page biography *Epoch: The Life and Times of Steele MacKaye, Genius of the Theatre, In Relation to His Times and Contemporaries* (Vol. I & Vol II), he mentions Stebbins’ name only twice. He mentions Stebbins as a student, but not as MacKaye’s most famous student, and only cites her under her stage name Agnes Loring as a cast member in *Aftermath, or Won At Last* (303). Scholar Scott Johnson notes one sentence in Percy’s book that most certainly refers to Stebbins without mentioning her. Johnson cites Percy speaking of a Delsarte publication, “comprising 500 voluminous pages, based upon *notes pirated* [my emphasis] from my father, with no acknowledgement to him as the source, has enjoyed a very wide sale, in schools and elsewhere,

³⁴⁵ Percy Mackaye, *Epoch* vol I, 1927, 301–302).

during thirty years, and is still in the book market.”³⁴⁶ Percy is undoubtedly speaking of Stebbins’ 1885 popular publication *The Delsarte System of Expression*. Stebbins did not plagiarize MacKaye, but he did resent her success as an author. This disdain carried over to his son as he makes no venerable mention of Stebbins despite being MacKaye’s famous protégé.

Troubles with *Rose Michel* in Court

A year following MacKaye and Stebbins’ falling out, they both became involved in another legal case and were called upon to testify. This separate case demonstrates that Stebbins was not the only person MacKaye had financial issues with. In keeping with his patterns of behavior, the court case was filed over misleading information MacKaye provided to several people.

Unfortunately, it took almost a decade before those involved came to understand that he was their common problem.

The case was filed on May 7, 1881, with the Supreme Court of New York by Francis B. Carpenter as the Plaintiff against Sheridan Shook & A.M. Palmer Defendants and was not resolved until 1890.³⁴⁷ Carpenter was a famous portrait painter, known for his ‘First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation’ painting, and author of *Six Months in the White House* about his time with Abraham Lincoln. It’s quite possible that MacKaye never imagined that he would be pulled into court despite the case filing being a result of his own actions. The case involved issues over licensing, copyright, and royalties for his version of the play *Rose Michel*.

MacKaye’s portion of his rights to the play were transferred to the philanthropist Elizabeth Thompson and then from her to Carpenter. She had previously commissioned Carpenter for the

³⁴⁶ Scott P. Johnson, “Delsarte: Rhetorician to the Body Self,” chapter five in *Embodied Rhetoric in Anglo-American Modernity* 2, 269 (Regent University Press, 1999), 182.

³⁴⁷ Supreme Court. General Term. Marked with pen 545. Francis B. Carpenter Appellant, against Sheridan Shook and Albert M. Palmer Respondent. Case on Appeal. New York C. G. Burgoyne, 146–150 Centre Street. 1891.

Emancipation Proclamation painting for \$25,000³⁴⁸ and it seems the rights to the play were part of the transaction. Carpenter was expecting payment from his portion of the rights, but when he didn't receive the anticipated funds, he issued suit against Shook & Palmer who he assumed had a share of the rights.

Rose Michel was originally a French play that Shook and Palmer of the Union Square Theatre had adapted by paying MacKaye to write an English version via an advance loan of \$725. During the case, it was revealed that MacKaye never repaid the advance. MacKaye was meant to obtain copyright and transfer all his interests per a legal agreement to Shook & Palmer which he never did, unbeknownst to them.³⁴⁹ Those called to testify in court were prominent New York theatre professionals including A.M Palmer, T. Henry French of Samuel French & Sons, and performers from the original production of *Rose Michel* including Rose Eytinge, Stebbins, and James Collier. Much of the case involved confusion over MacKaye's failure to obtain rights to the play as Palmer had expected per their contractual agreement. All involved must have been furious with MacKaye as he had told different stories to different people, resulting in expectations that could not be met.

With the case against Shook & Palmer taking over a decade, surely some of the information would have seeped out into the theatre community about MacKaye's duplicitous actions. Shook and Palmer were top producers in New York, and MacKaye did himself no favors by not being entirely forthcoming. Instead, he made it worse by taking contradictory stances from earlier testimonies he gave and had to be reminded of his previous statements in court (20). He also directly contradicted Palmer several times and besmirched Palmer's professionalism which the

³⁴⁸ *New York Times*, December 23, 1894, 2.

³⁴⁹ Both Palmer and MacKaye received partial royalties in addition to 25% interest. \$40 per performance in royalties was paid to French & Sons representing the original playwright, Ernest Blum.

judge found unwarranted. As Palmer was now head of the Actor's Fund of America, it was not very wise of MacKaye to slight him.

For whatever reason, Stebbins was first called to testify in the 1890 court hearing. She stated she was living at Broadway and Fifty-Fourth street. She spoke about her hiring at Union Square Theatre and provided details about the *Rose Eytinge* tour. In cross examination, she testified that she was not presently on the stage, her last performance being in *Hazel Kirke* in Brooklyn in 1885. Her present employment, she stated, was as a teacher of elocution at Mrs. Reed's school. Stebbins shared, in retrospect, that she regrettably left the Union Square Theatre company because MacKaye offered her an engagement. In the court room at this time was MacKaye, Palmer, and Rose Eytinge, and no doubt none were pleased to be there.

Next to testify was Rose Eytinge's personal manager who stated that after the Union Square tour ended in July 1876, Eytinge continued to perform in the show from August 1876 a total of perhaps 30 times. Then MacKaye took the stand, saying he was at present a playwright. In brief, he said when the play went on tour, he asked Palmer for royalties to which he was told they were waiting for Eytinge's payments. He said he had a meeting with Palmer regarding their contractual agreement to sign documents conveying his rights to the play. However, evidence showed that MacKaye had instead assigned his royalties to Elizabeth Thompson on June 1, 1876. MacKaye explained that the transfer of his "rights, title, interest, property and claim" and copyright of *Rose Michel* was what he "would have under Shook & Palmer" (1890, 11). This is in fact true as he should have transferred rights to Shook & Palmer. Instead of doing what he was supposed to do, however, he sold them.

Thompson paid MacKaye \$1000 on July 20th, 1876, for his "one full half-interest" (44). Evidence showed Thompson later transferred her "assignment" to Francis B. Carpenter on

February 18, 1880, resulting in Carpenter's complaint being filed May 7, 1881, for unpaid royalties for performances of the play outside the city of New York (51). MacKaye was meant to secure copyright for Shook & Palmer, but did not, instead he transferred his rights to Thompson – something he was specifically not supposed to do per his contract with Shook & Palmer. Despite having admittedly sold his rights, MacKaye testified that he demanded payment of royalties from Palmer in a rather “stormy” meeting. At this point in time, Eytinge was still performing the play, and MacKaye wanted money he believed Palmer had received from her. However, what was soon revealed through further testimony, was that Eytinge took the play on a Pacific coast tour without ‘license’ and did not pay the royalties *she* was meant to.

When Eytinge testified, she ‘embellished’ (lied), saying she had an oral agreement with Palmer that she could “take the show” and perform it with her own stock company. However, when Palmer took the stand, he clarified Eytinge was quite incorrect in stating that she had been granted permission to use *Rose Michel* after her first tour under Shook & Palmer (the production that Stebbins toured in). For Eytinge to have made this claim was rather outrageous as she knew well how the theatre industry worked. She was a stock theatre member with Union Square Theatre, paid weekly between \$200–\$225, and there would have been no reason for the managers to have simply ‘given’ her a play that she could then continue to perform and collect profits from. But that’s exactly what she did. While the play was under license with Shook & Palmer, Eytinge’s management paid royalties, but when Eytinge went rogue, no royalties were paid to either MacKaye or Shook & Palmer. When Palmer ordered her to stop performing the play via telegram, she stopped paying royalties altogether but continued touring regardless (37).

When Palmer took the stand, he stated he was manager of the Madison Square Theatre and Palmer’s other theatres and president of the Actor’s Fund of America (34). Palmer testified he

didn't know how many times the play was performed either in or outside New York. He didn't have the books because he was no longer working for the Union Square Theatre. When *Rose Michel* was on its first tour, Palmer was paid via James Collier and MacKaye also received royalties. Eytinge obtained a license to perform the play from Palmer in August 1876 but at a certain point she stopped paying royalties. When she returned to perform the show in New York at the People's Theatre (*New York Dispatch*, Sept. 30, 1883), Palmer said there were issues over her non-payment and he tried to restrain her from performing. However, he said, there was a near riot in the theatre and the show had to go on. Palmer was finally paid \$125 by Eytinge's management.

There was great back and forth in the trial as to who was paying who, when and where. MacKaye was called back to the stand and asked if he did receive payment from Palmer, but he couldn't remember how much, or when. Eytinge took the stand saying after performing with the Union Square company, she took the play under her name as a theatre company and toured the Pacific coast and other locations—performing around five hundred times between 1877 and 1879. When asked for exact details, Eytinge irritatingly replied “Do you suppose that I, being under oath, would attempt to repeat to you verbatim a conversation that took place between me and anybody seven or eight years ago? Why it would be madness, it would be frenzy, to attempt to do it” (26). After much revelation regarding everyone's faulty memories, the defendant moved to dismiss the case, but the motion was denied.

Palmer took the stand again, refuting Eytinge's claims that she was given permission through an oral contract to continue performing the play, as he had in fact telegraphed her to tell her to stop performing the play without permission *and* that he had told also MacKaye the exact same. He said MacKaye's claims about him accepting payments from Eytinge and not

forwarding MacKaye his share, were not true and that “He is mistaken, very much mistaken.” Overall, Palmer said he never made statements that either MacKaye or Eytinge claimed, and exasperatedly proclaimed “It is all nonsense, absolutely” (36). Palmer followed by stating that he did not even know MacKaye failed to obtain the proper copyright which he was asked to do in the first place. Palmer also said MacKaye had threatened him. Needless to say, Palmer and MacKaye had not been on good terms for many years. The verdict found Shook & Palmer not responsible for non-payment of royalties to Carpenter, that Eytinge didn’t have a contract or license to continue to perform *Rose Michel* in the first place, and that therefore the Plaintiff would not be able to recover royalties from hundreds of shows she did without permission. The case was dismissed with costs for \$841 (1890, 1–73).

If anything, this case reveals much about MacKaye’s character, and the fact he quite often talked out of ‘both sides of his mouth’ saying whatever suited his needs in the moment no matter with whom he was speaking or the potential consequences. It is no small wonder that MacKaye and Stebbins had a falling out. The series *Music and Drama* (New York August 5, 1882) wrote when Mackaye had “temporarily exhausted the local crop of aspirants to the stage, he obtained enough money from Frank Carpenter and Miss Genevieve Stebbins to rent the bulkheaded, water-tight compartment saloon” that later became the Madison Square Theatre. During the *Rose Michel* trial, in 1885, MacKaye faced another lawsuit filed by playwright and director David Belasco for breach of contract at the Lyceum Theatre,³⁵⁰ followed by Franklin Sargeant suing for not receiving his salary.³⁵¹ In this fiasco, MacKaye was pushed out of the Lyceum Theatre,

³⁵⁰ MacKaye was now involved with the Lyceum Theater as a director with Gustavus Frohman as his partner. They asked Belasco to leave his job, then director of the Madison Square Theatre, to teach and become a stage manager of the Lyceum. Yet after his contract Belasco found that someone else was hired. “Steele MacKaye Sued,” *New York Times* April 5, 1885, 9. Apparently, this someone else was Franklin Sargeant who also then sued MacKaye.

³⁵¹ “Steele MacKaye Sued Again,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1885, 12.

Sargeant assumed leadership of the theatre and the school they had been attempting to establish was renamed the New York School of Acting. Both Belasco and Sargeant became founding faculty members, with Belasco teaching over the next decade (Marra 159).

Surprisingly, after the *Rose Michel* case closed, Carpenter then took up a suit against Elizabeth Thompson pending in the Supreme Court of New York in 1894.³⁵² This case was over a \$10,000 ‘note’ (loan worth over \$200,000 today) Thompson gave MacKaye in 1871, that was transferred to Carpenter as part payment of \$25,000 for his painting *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation* (1864). Thompson was a woman of great wealth, provided with a perpetual charitable trust after her husband’s death in 1869, after which she became a generous philanthropist. She purchased Carpenter’s painting in 1877 and immediately donated it to the nation which still hangs in the Senate halls today.³⁵³ Unfortunately for Carpenter, the \$10,000 note could not be collected from MacKaye, and so his only recourse was to lay claim against Thompson. These court cases were all a great circling mess of affairs. While Thompson had been generous, she had clearly been taken advantage of. MacKaye did not repay Thompson’s 1871 loan, and he gave her rights to a play intended for Shook and Palmer that couldn’t be retrieved.

Thompson was instrumental in funding a number of causes. In addition to funding MacKaye’s theatrical pursuits, she supported suffragette publications, women in scientific and medical research, poor working girl foundations, and the arts in general. It is important to point out that there were no government sponsored social welfare programs, or arts funding programs in the 19th century. Assistance emanated from the private sector and this responsibility “lay almost exclusively with kindly people of open minds and hearts, folks like the Thompsons, to

³⁵² “Peculiar Defense to a Suit,” *New York Times* December 23, 1894, 2.

³⁵³ <https://louisamayalcott.org/elizabeth-thompson>

bring relief to the underprivileged.”³⁵⁴ The National Endowment for the Arts was not founded until 1965. Many artists without personal wealth, whether visual or performing artists, relied on the financial support of private philanthropy for their artistic endeavours.

MacKaye was said to have “ill luck,” yet in most cases due to his “own want of judgement.” His first theatre enterprise failed, and investors lost money, and in his second theatre contract with the Mallory brothers for the Madison Square in his contract the owners “out-Shylocked Shylock” and again he lost a theatre workplace, followed by the Lyceum failure. Unfortunately, “men like him seldom have any permanent prosperity.”³⁵⁵

To conclude, once MacKaye and Stebbins separated as colleagues in the early 1880s, some of MacKaye’s friends became loyal to him as the ‘sole heir’ of Delsarte’s exclusive secrets and downplayed Stebbins’ influence. At times his comrades ‘ghosted’ her, by making no mention of her. Despite this, Stebbins was widely recognized as a leading Delsarte educator. Despite MacKaye’s legal troubles, he still maintained a prominent role in the theatre community and always managed to use his charisma to find funding. Nor did his falling out with Stebbins limit her opportunities to teach or perform. The next chapter lays out her ongoing artistic career and the beginning of her teaching career in New York City.³⁵⁶ Stebbins was 25 years of age when she moved from Boston back to New York City.

³⁵⁴ <https://thomasthompsontrust.org>.

³⁵⁵ “Steele MacKaye,” *The Times*, Philadelphia March 13, 1886, 14.

³⁵⁶ For those interested in viewing the growth of entertainment venues on ‘Broadway’ a fascinating digital mapping of over 400 theatres and performance spaces from the Rialto era up to Times Square, can be explored in the website “The City Performs: An Architectural History of NYC Theatre’s,” curated, designed, and written by Christopher Swift and supported by the National Endowment of the Humanities.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a06e7cace1ee465bac98eea887ea172d#>

Chapter Seven

The New Delsarte Educator

In the fall of 1879, Mary Thompson, former head teacher of oratory at Boston University, joined Stebbins to open a new school. It was announced in the *Springfield Weekly Republican* that Thompson was to leave Boston and “remove to New York,”

with Miss Genevieve Stebbins, the favorite pupil of McKaye [sic] who is said to be the only one to have mastered Delsarte theory, opens a ‘School of Expression,’ under the patronage, as they would say abroad, of such men as George William Curtis, Willie Winter of the *Tribune* and others. Miss Thompson has made her mark here in Boston, and carries away the indorsement [sic] of Phillips Brooks, Longfellow, and others of that stamp. She is one of the many bright women who have been and are making reputations here by their own work and on their own merits.³⁵⁷

“Under the patronage” meant that Stebbins and Thompson were financially supported or publicly endorsed by members of ‘established’ society. Stebbins’ patrons included George William Curtis who was a writer, abolitionist, editor of *Harper’s Weekly*, and a national civil service reformer appointed by President Ulysses D. Grant. Another patron, Willie Winter, was the managing editor of the *New York Weekly Review* and later dramatic critic for *The Tribune*. Mary Thompson’s patron was Phillip Brooks, a Harvard graduate and highly respected minister at Trinity Church in Boston. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the most popular American poets of the 19th century. In the 19th century, intellectually minded women were often deemed manly or denounced as ‘Amazons’ by rude male journalists, so for Stebbins and Thompson to have been credited in the press, and by esteemed men was quite an honor and signalled significant allyship.

³⁵⁷ “Our Boston Letter,” *The Springfield Weekly Republican*, Sept. 25, 1879, 4.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced Stebbins is “THE ONLY TEACHER OF THIS SYSTEM, EXCEPT MR. MACKAYE, IN AMERICA” [original emphasis]. Stebbins’ and

Thompson’s intent was to teach a system that

imparts not only confidence, but ease and grace of movement and expression. It seems to unite, in short, a sort of esthetic gymnastic with a mental training which, if fully carried out, ought to be invaluable, not only to the individual who proposes to come before the public as a reader or actor, but for any and every awkward or self – conscious young man or woman who enters upon the stage of society” (Oct. 9, 1879, 12).

In essence they were helping students to obtain confidence, learn methods of calming their nerves, and develop skills for public presentations and important social gatherings. Stebbins and Thompson quickly found appeal as public readers and educators in New York City. In January 1880, the *New York Times* reported,

Miss Mary S. Thompson and Miss Genevieve Stebbins, formerly leading instructors in the Boston University School of Oratory, are now giving a series of private readings at the residence of Mrs. John D. Townsend [Catherine Rebecca Johnson] of this city. Their last reading at Mrs. Townsend’s house will be given next Friday morning. Miss Stebbins, by the way, is remarkable proficient in the Delsartean system of gesture, a system which, in our judgment, is far less useful to the actor than to the elocutionist” (January 21, 1880, 5).

Private readings held in homes large enough to have a designated social gathering area were typical for salon entertainments, and skillful delivery was expected. Salon performances included such things as reading portions of classical literature, poetry recitations, lectures on science or art, theatrical monologues, playing musical instruments, or performing operatic solos. Readings required thorough preparation including textual analysis, much like an actor today analyzes a script to understand the character they are to portray with meaningful intent. As a later colleague of Stebbins’ described, reading literature aloud required “not merely command of the voice, but complete understanding of and sympathy with the thoughts and emotions of the author...

Thought, imagination, and feeling are the inner, or mental processes, which find expression in *voice and action*.”³⁵⁸ These were the skills required to be an elocutionist. Stebbins shares

when we recite, we must be our own scene-painters, and by appropriate gestures place the scene; then we must introduce the different characters of the drama by looks and gesture; and finally personate the characters, be they vehement, placid or concentrated. But it must be remembered that recitation is not acting, and that we must content ourselves with suggesting, rather than attempting, complete dramatization.”³⁵⁹

As an actress, Stebbins fully understood the difference between working in spaces that required a larger stage presence or appropriate artistic demeanor in salon performances. Gestures were meant to be subtle, and appropriate for clarity and comprehension of the reading.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that Miss Thompson and Miss Stebbins have “the highest idea of art training, which is to bring out the artistic and real in nature [...] Their idea that the body is an instrument which must be put in order that the expression that is to proceed from it may be harmonious is a very clever one.”³⁶⁰ Mrs. Catherine Townsend recognized Stebbins and Thompson as skilled readers, and to be invited to her salon was quite an honour. Townsend hosted guests in her home at 343 West Thirty-Fourth Street between 8th and 9th Avenues. Salon events could run for hours with breaks for tea and social exchange. Townsend was considered one of the “first families of New York” and her social circle included women of high society including Mrs. Williams Astor, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mrs. Sylvanus Reed, Mrs. Lester Wallack, Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, and Mrs. Ulysses Grant.³⁶¹ In a similar manner to other high society women, Townsend organized fundraising entertainments for charities.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ *Steps to Oratory: A School Speaker* by F. Townsend Southwick Principal of the New York School of Expression, (NY American Book Company, 1900), 8–9.

³⁵⁹ *Society Gymnastics: and Voice Culture adapted from the Delsarte System* (Werners, 1890/1888), 72.

³⁶⁰ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 9, 1879, 12,

³⁶¹ “For Charities Sake, and Almost Unprecedented Attendance Last Evening in the Academy of Music,” *The Sun*, February 4, 1881.

³⁶² Townsend contributed to the ‘cooperative dress association’ to help pay dressmakers a higher-than-average salary. Julia Ward Howe was a patron. The association was organized to make clothing supplies available at wholesale

Below is a portrait of the dignified salon host, Mrs. Catherine Townsend, by John Singer Sargent, and an example of a gown that could have been worn at salon gatherings follows:



Fig. 79. "Portrait of Mrs. John Joseph Townsend," oil on canvas by John Singer Sargent, 1881.
 Fig. 80. 1880's American Tea gown, Gift of Miss A. Gladys Peck, 1946, Public Domain, Metropolitan Museum, Costume Institute Collection.

Women of 'leisure,' as Stebbins called herself when she first arrived in New York City, not only meant that they did not have to work, but women of leisure more importantly meant that they were privileged enough to have time to organize and/or attend intellectual, cultural, and charitable social work events. 'Leisure' in the ancient Greek sense (meant *scholē*—the root word for school) meaning that one had time to pursue knowledge and cultural experiences, instead of toiling in working class labours. This is the heart of privilege, in that the monied class can decide what they want to do with excess funds once their basic needs and responsibilities are met. While 'leisure' can be likened to class snobbery and the spoils of the elite class, in turn, those in the

prices to avoid exploitation by shop owners and ensure good prices. As such, they were able to pay their dressmakers a higher wage and provide them two meals a day.

privileged realm who donate their time to support scholars and artists contributed in meaningful ways to their career developments.

New York School of Expression and New Elocution

In giving the title ‘School of Expression’ to their new institution, Stebbins and Thompson were marking a change in the field of elocution, following the foundation that MacKaye set. As historian Carrie Streeter points out, she was unable to find an actual ‘bricks and mortar’ building, therefore it is likely that they taught out of a rented studio space. Thompson led oratorical work while Stebbins taught Delsarte Expression. ‘Expression’ became a new popular term used interchangeably with ‘New Elocution.’ Elocution derives from Latin *elocutio* for ‘eloquence.’ Learning eloquence involves having command of rhetorical delivery in correspondence with appropriate expressive actions. Elocution is one branch of rhetoric, the art of persuasive communication. One of the earliest English texts in the history of rhetoric, according to scholar Thomas Sloane, is John Bulwer’s 1644 publication, *Chirologia and Chironomia* exploring the natural expression of hands that coincides with speech. Using hand gestures was also known as “Dell’ art Chiron” or “Dell’arte di Gestire con le mani.” According to Sloane, British elocution methods taught at the Boston University School of Oratory merged with “a certain French development,” i.e. Delsartism. Sloane describes BUSO’s Dean Lewis Monroe’s interests in Delsarte expression as combining with his passion for spiritualism, which included a “strong emphasis on inwardness, intuition, [and] the actions of one’s soul” (2013, 306). Noting that the Delsarte System came to be “promulgated largely by women,” Sloane situates “chief among these women was the actress and teacher Genevieve Stebbins.” He found her career to be like

other “elocutionists, who not only appeared in public performances but also served as itinerant teachers, set up private practice, founded their own schools, or joined established faculties.”³⁶³

For Stebbins and Thompson to found their own school in 1880, was relatively rare. For one, very few women had achieved higher education, owned their own businesses, or worked outside of the home. Those that did were mainly from low-income families working as chambermaids, laundresses, scullery maids, cooks, nannies or mill workers. Skilled women made lace, sewed clothes, were dressmakers, or produced other goods. Women lived under the rule of ‘Coverture’ and lacked a legal identity or the right to work once married.³⁶⁴ Husbands could forbid a wife from working, and women represented only 20% of the workforce, 5% of whom were married women. Only 2% of the nation had completed higher education, and only one third of this 2% were women. The rise of the middle-class began when women could work as clerks, journalists, teachers or as nurses and contribute to the household income.³⁶⁵ By 1930, 50% of single women worked, yet only 12% of married women did. Essentially a “marriage bar” expected women to not work after marriage as wives were expected to focus full-time on the welfare of their families and to defer to their husband’s wishes as their chattel.³⁶⁶ Many women could not maintain sole control of their family inheritance once married— even Julia Ward Howe lost money when her husband made foolish investments with her inheritance.³⁶⁷ Both Stebbins and Thompson were unmarried when they opened their school which allowed for their independence. Some women decided to marry later, or to not have children so that they could have a career.

³⁶³ Sloane, “From Elocution to New Criticism: An Episode in the History of Rhetoric” in *Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book* (University of California Berkely, 2013).

³⁶⁴ Gilder Lehrman Institute, “The Struggle for Married Women’s Rights, Circa 1880’s” gilderlehrman.org

³⁶⁵ Susan M. Cruea, “Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement,” Bowling Green State University, University Writing Program Faculty Publications, 2005.

³⁶⁶ Janet L. Yellen, former Chair of the Federal Reserve Board, drew from census records for these statistics. “The history of women’s work and wages and how it has created success for us all,” Brookings Institute.

³⁶⁷ Elaine Showalter, *Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe* (Simon & Schuster, 2016).

Carrie Streeter notes that within a year after announcing their school's opening, "leaders from the country's most prominent women's clubs were already endorsing Stebbins' classes" (2023, 97). She found an article in the *Women's Journal* (of the American Suffrage Association) in which Stebbins was admired for her summer classes at Mrs. Anna Randall Diehl's summer home 'Locust Cottage' in Long Island. Diehl was an accomplished public reader. She was also

ELOCUTION and the SEA-SHORE.
STUDY AND RECREATION COMBINED.

MRS. RANDALL-DIEHL'S
7th Annual Sea-Side Class
In Elocution, Reading, and Dramatic Action,
AT SEA CLIFF, LONG ISLAND.

FIRST TERM Commencing **July 16**, and Ending August 7. **SECOND TERM** Commencing **August 8**, and Ending Sept. 4.

SEA CLIFF is twenty-eight miles from New York, and is one of the most beautiful and healthful sea-side resorts in America.
 MRS. RANDALL-DIEHL receives a limited number of pupils in her own house, *Locust Cottage*, for which early application must be made.  Pupils from more than twenty States and the Canadas were in the Summer classes of 1877.
 For further particulars address MRS. ANNA RANDALL-DIEHL, 35 UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK; after July 1, *Sea Cliff, Long Island*.
 Pupils received at 35 Union Square, New York, before July 1, and after Oct. 1. 171 d Jy4

Fig. 81. *National Journal of Education* 7, no. 24, June 13, 1878.

the author of *Reading and Elocution: Theoretical and Practical* (Iverson, Blakeman, Taylor and Co., 1872). Soon after, Stebbins gave a lecture in New York City at Diehl's Conservatory.³⁶⁸ Streeter notes that Diehl was a leading member of "one of the nation's most prominent women's clubs," Sorosis, founded in 1868. She was also President of one of the oldest Shakespearean clubs. Diehl's support of Stebbins indicates solidarity amongst women interested in aesthetic expressive practices. Of note, Diehl had her own *Practical Delsarte Primer* published in 1890, which has the same exercises from Stebbins' work, including 'stage falls' to side, front, and back which Diehl states were commonly practiced by actors (20).

³⁶⁸ September 4, 1880, 281 cited in Streeter 2023, 97.

1880, Stebbins' Performances

Throughout 1880 Stebbins was teaching and performing. On January 28, 1880, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (6) announced the newly renovated Madison Square Theatre was finally set to open on February 2nd. The play opening the newly renovated theater was *Hazel Kirke*. The *Tribune* was under the impression that the Madison Square Theatre company still included Stebbins, however, Stebbins was no longer there after her falling out with MacKaye. Instead, on February 29, 1880, Stebbins delivered a “poetic synopsis” of the drama *Struensee* at Chickering Hall in New York City. The evening was organized by G. Carlberg, and included the “Triumphal Symphony” by Hugo Ulrich, and a performance by pianist Mme. Rachau (although reviews said she was but an amateur and not prepared for the modern stage). Stebbins’ performance was delivered with “great intelligence, grace and dramatic force” (*Music and Drama*, 7).



Fig. 82. Illustration Chickering Hall.

Struensee was an 1827 drama by Micheal Beer with orchestral music organized by his brother Giacomo Meyerbeer. Set in the Danish court and involving a problematic narrative,

Prussia did not want to offend their royal neighbors, so they initially banned its presentation for 20 years. Yet by 1846, Beer's mother sought to have the play produced in Berlin which was granted. 'Struensee' is the name of the royal physician who became a lover of the Queen and advisor to the mentally ill Dutch King. It is a strong narrative for Stebbins to have chosen to perform. The score for the play has 11 numbers and covers the rise of Struensee's career and his transformation of the royal court with reforms by decree \- including such things as the abolition of torture, a ban on slave trade in Danish colonies, abolition of noble privileges, and assignment of farmlands to peasants. However, the government famously turned on Struensee and his growing influence and ordered his execution. Stebbins' performance/ recitation of the play *Struensee*, adapted by Hugh Craig, was said to have been a point of "chief interest."

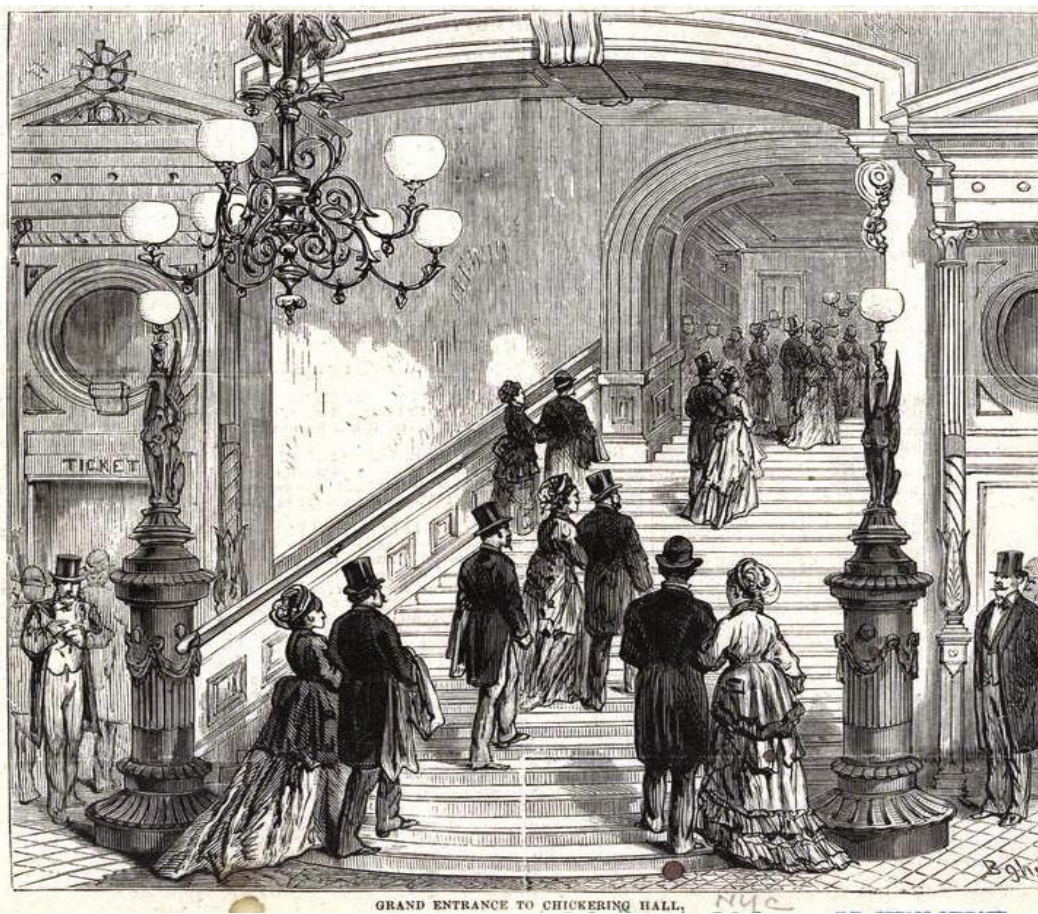


Fig. 83. Grand staircase entrance to Chickering Hall, December 4, 1875, collection of the New York Public Library.

Stebbins was admired in her role as

the task was not an easy one and was performed with creditable skill. Genevieve L. Stebbins, a young lady of pre-possessing appearance and of considerable dramatic and rhetorical talent, recited the poetry. The harp obligatos were played by Mme. Chatterton – Bohrer, the tenor solo sung by Mr. Fritsch, and a chorus under Mr. Dulcken's lead assisted in the choral portions. The story of Struensee is full of interest and Meyerbeer's highly wrought and very descriptive music added to its enjoyment. Michael Beer chose to give in his tragedy the eulogistic view of Struensee's character, attributing to him heroic qualities and a desire to be a benefactor to the Danes, among whom he had taken up residence. He casts a sentimental veil also over the relations of Struensee with the Danish Queen and sends him to the scaffold in a martyr's robe. That probably was the German view of the matter, and Beer dealt kindly with his fellow countryman. But the Danes failed to see Struensee in that light and will fail to do so. On the contrary, they regard him as a [...] Knave [...] who] carried on a scandalous liaison with the Queen, supplanted all the nobles, made reckless laws and so – called reforms [...] and finally at the age of 35 was put to death. The work was given in a very interesting manner, the overture especially being most brilliantly played. The varying phases of the tragedy gave Meyerbeer [Stebbins] an opportunity for the expression of every kind of emotion, a Danish national hymn, love music, dance music, a funeral march, and a prayer following in succession [...]. (*The Sun*, March 1, 1880 "Chickering Hall").



Fig. 84. Popular evening dress attire circa 1880, Silk, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the estate of Miss S. E. White, 1939. Fig. 85. Gift of Orme Wilson and R. Thornton Wilson, in memory of their mother, Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor Wilson, 1949.

Chickering Hall, was on 437 Fifth Avenue at 18th Street in the Union Square district, a 1,450-seat hall and competitor to Steinway Hall. It had a specially built ‘Roosevelt’ concert organ that played in an ‘ethereal manner.’ Chickering and Steinway Hall presented some of the best musicians from Europe and America. For Stebbins to have been respected for her performance of *Struensee* was of high credit. I wonder today about the audience for whom Stebbins performed, dressed in their finery and listening to her recitation with an accompanying orchestra. I would imagine the evening was splendid. Post show Union Square would have been filled with the bustle of night life.



Fig. 86. Night Market, *Harper's Weekly*, October 16, 1886, 678.

In October 1880, Stebbins was engaged to perform in *Hamlet* with Harry J. Sargent's company— formerly Helena Modjeska's manager— in a large cast of 19 (“School of Expression” 1902, 107). Miss Adele Belgarde performed as a female Hamlet and Stebbins took the role of Ophelia. Before performing in New York City, the company took a steamer from New York to Norfolk, Virginia. Their two-night engagement at Van Wyck's Academy of Music was expected to have a packed audience. Their performance occurred just after the opening of Van Wyck's, on

September 20, 1880, reputed to be one of the most “costly temples in the entire south.”³⁶⁹ It’s quite amazing to think that in 1880 Virginia was still considered a southern state! The Van Wyck’s Academy of Music was the first theatre in Virginia lit with electricity, with a “dazzling central crystal chandelier,” velvet hangings, gilded carvings, and a ceiling decorated with large portraits of Shakespeare, Racine, Beethoven, Goethe [...] (*The Virginia Pilot*, 1994, np). When the company returned to New York City, they performed at Niblo’s Theatre and received quite poor reviews. Belgarde was ridiculed for her performance of Hamlet, not because she was a woman playing a male role, but due to her acting “weakness being painfully obvious.” Yet, as the dissatisfied critic humorously wrote, the audience (who were said to be quite numerous) nevertheless applauded the “convulsive gurglings, wrong emphasis, and the lackadaisical demeanor of this Hamlet, at every possible point, and thus presented a spectacle of ignorance even more humiliating than that which was displayed upon the stage.” Belgarde was said to have no knowledge of “stage business, ignorance of every emotion and every intellectual purpose that underlie the words.” Additionally, Stebbins as Ophelia did “not astonish the audience,” however it was remarked that Belgarde ruined the scene with Ophelia, meant to be one of the most tender.³⁷⁰ Belgarde was a young actress trying to make her mark, but evidently, she tried to do so without the requisite talent.

In an 1880 census Stebbins is listed as residing in New London, CT, on 6 Ocean Avenue (near Ocean Beach) as a guest in the home of Amy Elliot and Fanny Jerome. I couldn’t find who these women were, or how long Stebbins was a guest there. She was likely teaching through the summer. In 1881, the *New York Times* announced that Stebbins and Thompson were set to

³⁶⁹ "Amusements," *Daily Inter Ocean*, September 2, 1880, 4, and "Hamlet Tonight," *The Public Ledger* 9, no. 60, October 1880, *Virginia Chronicle*, *Library of Virginia*.

³⁷⁰ *New York Tribune*, October 5, 1880, 4.

appear in at Haines Room on 5th Avenue, slightly north of Union Square (April 24, 1881, 9). It seems Stebbins and Thompson were teaching and giving both private and public performances throughout 1880 and into 1881. Stebbins' last press notice of 1881 was as a teacher "of the New York School of Expression." She had been teaching throughout the summer but where exactly is unclear. One announcement for Mrs. Katherine Westendorf, a teacher of elocution (and former student of the Boston University School of Oratory), said she studied "on the seashore" with Stebbins for six weeks in daily lessons.³⁷¹ It's unclear whether these were private lessons or a summer school that Stebbins held—perhaps near Ocean Beach.

European 'Grand Tour'

Ruyter notes in late 1881 Stebbins traveled to Europe, visiting London, Florence, Rome and Paris (1999, 49). She spent a year abroad in the tradition of privileged young adults (most usually white males) who went on what was known as the 'Grand Tour.' To experience European society and artistic life on a 'Grand Tour' was a privilege. Based upon aristocratic traditions for European young men, during the Gilded Age it was customary for wealthy Americans to partake in European travels as an educational and cultural 'finishing school.'

It seems Louise Clappe accompanied Stebbins abroad, as she had moved to New York City from San Francisco in 1878 and travelled to Europe to "visit the art galleries, a treat that had been her lifelong heart's desire."³⁷² Stebbins was 27 years of age, and Clappe was 62. Clappe was reported as travelling to Europe as a guest of the family of Cyrus Fields.³⁷³ Cyrus Field was a multi-millionaire known for laying the first telegraph cable across the Atlantic Ocean (in 1866

³⁷¹ *Cincinnati Commercial*, September 2, 1881, 8.

³⁷² Mary Lawrence, *Shirley Letters*, 1922, preface. Mary Lawrence, *Literary California* 1915, 49

³⁷³ "Mrs. Louise Clappe Dies in New Jersey. She was One of the Noted Educators of Early Days in California," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1906, 13.

it was one of the greatest American engineering feats). I would deduce that Stebbins was likewise a guest and that they travelled together. In May 1881, Fields is reported to have sailed to England aboard the *S.S. Britannic* to go to a banquet honoring American success.³⁷⁴ In May, he was reported to have gone to London, in what ended up being a surprise turnaround trip as he attended the banquet and then sailed back to New York aboard the same ship.³⁷⁵ Apparently his wife fell ill, so they returned home.³⁷⁶ The *S.S. Britannic* was a steamship from the White Star ship line, taking a week to travel from New York to Liverpool. The golden age of passenger ship travel had begun just a decade earlier greatly improving travel comfort. First class guests (Saloon Class) had accommodations equal to a world class hotel. Their ship was built by the same company as the Titanic, Harland and Wolff, in Belfast, Northern Ireland.



Fig. 87. *RMS Britannic* (1874). Fig. 88. Library of Congress 19th century Passenger Ship interiors. First class guests had formal dining rooms, lounges, libraries, entertainment halls, and grand foyers.

On the ‘Grand Tour,’ it was custom for young adults to be accompanied by maids, attendants, learned scholars, and tour guides. Travelling as a culture tourist on a Grand Tour included visits to museums and galleries, theater and opera, taking private classes, visiting libraries, and attending fashionable social events. Clappe would have been a fine travel

³⁷⁴ *Omaha Daily Bee* May 6, 1881, 1.

³⁷⁵ “Minor Telegrams,” *Portland Daily Press*, May 7, 1881, 2.

³⁷⁶ *Daily Kennebec Journal*, May 6, 1881, 1.

companion to accompany Stebbins in Europe. When Clappe moved to New York, she gave popular lectures on art history (Smith–Baranzini 1999, 238) including lessons about Renaissance paintings, Leonardo Da Vinci, and art of the Eclectic and Neapolitan schools.³⁷⁷ Clappe would have been able to provide valuable insights for the classical art they viewed on their tour.

Stebbins enjoyed visiting museums like the Louvre where she spent months studying “collections of the antique” observing artistic principles such as ‘harmonic’ lines, poses, gestures and physical expression (Ruyter 1999, 49). Her European travels significantly informed her future artistic endeavors. Years later, inspired by her study of ancient Greek statuary, Stebbins began to choreograph Greek and Egyptian dances derived from her studies of “carved works of ancient art vase, bas–relief, alto–relief, and the free figure, in vase, frieze, pillar and temple” (Stebbins 1913, foreword). In Paris, in 1882, Stebbins privately studied acting with François Regnier a master teacher from the Paris Conservatory of Dramatic Art (the oldest acting school in Europe). Regnier was a *sociétaire* (a retired member) of the national theatrical association Comédie–Française, financed by the French government and founded in 1680 by royal decree of Louis XIV. The French state theatre paid actor’s salaries and was a model organization that many American actors both envied and wished to replicate.

After working with Regnier, he wrote a lovely recommendation letter for Stebbins (June 13, 1882), stating she undoubtedly possessed genius and “*fue sacré*,” meaning being divinely inspired or having authentic creative spark.³⁷⁸ To her credit, Regnier recognized Stebbins as a dedicated artist with true dramatic talent and predicted she would find the greatest success. And

³⁷⁷ Marlene Smith-Baranzini, “Out of the Shadows Louise Clappe’s Life and Early California Writing,” *California History* 78, no. 4, 238–261. Examples of her lesson books can be found in the Online Archive of California <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf5j49n78c> and in the ‘Louise K. S. Clappe papers,’ University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

³⁷⁸ Stebbins 1888, 109; Ruyter 1999, 49.

indeed, when she returned to the U.S. she continued to find significant opportunities. In *The Season: an Annual Record of Society in New York* chronicling ‘society’ events of the ‘season,’ on January 31, 1883, Stebbins was noted as performing the dramatic poem/monologue *L’Entresol* at Chickering Hall which was said to be recited “with much spirit.” Stebbins’ monologue of one act, is of an English lady visiting Paris who mistakenly wanders into the apartment of an opera singer, in which Stebbins “amused the audience exceedingly” (*New York Times* February 1, 1883, 5.) Her performance was after a play by amateur actors from Madison Square Theatre and followed by a comedietta.³⁷⁹ *L’Entresol* is a poem from Edward Bulwer Lytton in his book *Night and Day*. It’s impressive Stebbins performed a second time at Chickering Hall.

While Stebbins was abroad, some educators took advantage of her absence by trying to usurp her role as the recognized leading Delsarte educator by proclaiming proximity to the original French man himself. In December 1881, Rev. William Alger and Henrietta Hovey were interviewed by the editor of *The Voice, An International Review of the Speaking and Singing Voice* (vol. III, no.12) in which Alger claims he personally studied with Delsarte, and Hovey with Delsarte’s son Gustave. However, Delsarte died in 1871 before Alger arrived in Paris according to a 1890 letter to the editor of *Werner’s Magazine*,³⁸⁰ and when Hovey studied in Paris it was reported that she didn’t speak French, and the younger Gustave Delsarte didn’t speak English (*North American*, 25 March 1884). It seems an odd thing to lie about, especially for a Reverend, yet strangely at this time, many artists self-promoted or ‘marketed’ themselves by ‘augmenting’ their story as a way of heightening their claim to fame. People could easily make up what they wanted and get away with it unless publicly challenged. If Alger had studied with

³⁷⁹ Edited by Charles Crandall, New York, White, Stokes & Allen, 1882–1883, 232.

³⁸⁰ *Werner’s*, “Delsartiana,” May 1890, 132.

Delsarte, it seems MacKaye would have told Stebbins. Gustave was not noted as being a skilled educator. Samuel Curry, a graduate of BUSO and a respected elocutionist, argues that Gustave “had been a wild son who had given his father and mother much trouble and would never have dared set up as a teacher during his father’s life; but as too he is dead, we ought to observe the charity of silence regarding him.”³⁸¹

During the 1880s, there were arguments over who could claim to be a ‘real’ teacher of Delsarte. There was also condemnation for MacKaye’s high fees. Curry agreed with others saying MacKaye had been “sneered at for keeping the great work of Delsarte secret and dolling it out by little bits at an extraordinary price,” and he wished that “MacKaye had devoted himself to this work [meaning teaching and publishing] instead of building these theaters.”³⁸² However, by late 1884, Stebbins stepped in to make up for this loss by publishing her own work.

Lights o’ London, Shook and Collier’s Central Company on Tour

When Stebbins returned to New York, sometime in late 1882 or early 1883, she was cast in a tour for *Lights o’ London*³⁸³ organized by ‘Shook and Collier’ under the Central Theater Company.³⁸⁴ The play had just ended an unprecedented five-month run at the Union Square Theatre under direction of A.M. Palmer. After the shows end, Palmer took a break to travel to Europe, and James Collier (Union Square company actor) took over management. For the tour the show travelled with the original stage scenery from the Union Square production which included a series of beautiful tableaux with mechanical effects and mammoth stereopticon

³⁸¹ *Werner’s*, 1883, 24.

³⁸² *Werner’s*, 1883, 25–26.

³⁸³ The Central Company had the following cast Will Cowder, Ignatius O’Byrne, Edwin Nalod, G.V. Ryder, Archie Cowper, Harry Harwood, RJ Moyne, Mr. and Mrs. WA Rouse, Mr. and Mrs. JW Bankson, Genevieve Stebbins, Eleanor Merron, Joan Goodwhich, Eda Goodrich, BH Butler acting manager, and Charles Keeshin business manager. *The Theatre, An Illustrated Weekly Magazine Drama, Music, Art* 1, 1886, 163.

³⁸⁴ Albert Ellery Berg. *The Drama, Painting, Poetry, and Song* (P. F. Collier Publishing, 1884), 326.

pictures, said to be brilliantly illuminated by powerful calcium lights. Those who couldn't afford to see the play were invited to view the magnificent scenery before the play opened, and many came to do just that.³⁸⁵ The first tour was so successful, that by June of 1883 Shook and Collier planned to put out four touring companies 'next season' (meaning in the fall of 1883) for each of the four theatre districts— Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western.

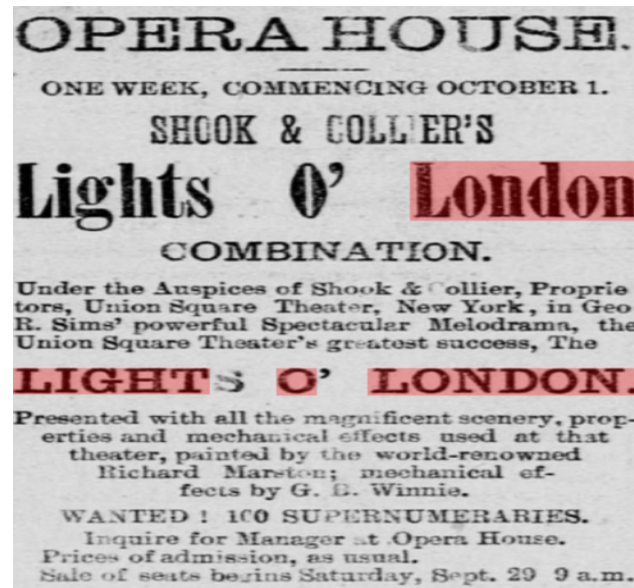


Fig. 89. Advertisement.

In the late 1870s to early 1880s, it was rare for large companies to tour, yet this quickly changed with the 'combination stage business.' Soon more than 100 dramatic companies were travelling as the railroad rapidly expanded possibilities for touring. There were numerous entertainment companies of varying sizes on the road, including opera troupes, variety and minstrel shows, and enormous circus tent companies. Dion Boucicault, Augustin Daly, and Edwin Booth all had productions on the road, and Madison Square Theatre soon had six companies touring MacKaye's popular play *Hazel Kirke*.

³⁸⁵ *St. Paul Daily Globe* December 25, 1882, 8.

During the tour, the company experienced tragedy when on January 8, 1883, it became national news when the *Lights o' London* train collided with a passenger train outside of Cedar Falls, Illinois. Both engines were destroyed and the train car carrying theatrical property was “telescoped next to the baggage car.” One man was killed, and it was not known who was at fault.³⁸⁶ The scenery was wrecked, and new pieces had to be sent from New York, which was done so rapidly they didn’t have to cancel their next engagement. Surely the company and crew would have been rattled by this extraordinary train accident.



Fig. 90. (Illustration for effect), *Harper's Weekly*, 1888, 112.

To add to the company’s misfortune soon after, in mid-January, there was another massive accident. At a show in Milwaukee, a gas cylinder generating calcium light exploded on stage. The explosion created panic in the audience of 1,600 until loud cries of “Keep your seats! Keep

³⁸⁶ “The Day’s News,” *Rock Island Argus* xxxI, no. 67.

your seats!” stilled the crowd and they avoided a crushing stampede. The audience witnessed the shocking aftermath on the stage. Five stagehands were injured and two tragically died. The force of the explosion was so strong, one man was blown 20 feet but was otherwise left untouched, while another man was disemboweled and undoubtably remained moaning on stage.

Surprisingly, no actors were injured but the stage scene was bloody. The newly created scenery just sent from New York was ripped apart by the explosion and badly damaged. As the audience left the theatre, they were met by thousands of townspeople who heard there was a fire.³⁸⁷ Stebbins performed in New York City on January 31st at Chickering Hall as previously mentioned, and by February 3, 1883, the *Lights o’ London* company was in Chicago performing with a second set of scenery rush ordered from New York. Soon after, the show was presented in the following cities by the four companies:

March 19, 1883, Washington DC one week at the National Theatre, April 2,3,4 in Wilmington, Delaware. Sept. 3 for one week Portland, Maine, Sept. 8 in NYC at the People’s Theatre opening, Sept. 22 at Windsor’s Theatre in NYC, Sept. 25 Salt Lake City, Utah, Oct. 1 for one week in St Paul, Minnesota, Oct. 13 Ottawa, Illinois, Nov. 8 in Oskaloosa, Iowa, Nov. Cairo, Illinois, Nov. 22 Stafford Springs, CT, Nov. 23, 24 Willimantic, Conn, Nov. 29, 30, Dec. 1. Cairo, Illinois, Dec. 3 in Cincinnati at Heucks Opera House, Dec. 7 New Haven, CT, Dec. 8 in Memphis Tennessee for a week, Dec. 6 New Haven, Conn. Dec. 17 Indianapolis, Dec. 21 in Willimantic, Conn., Dec. in Fort Worth Texas as one of the “grandest” shows ever seen on their stage.

The first mention of Stebbins in Shook and Collier’s company (that I was able to find) is in a California paper on July 29, 1883, stating “Genevieve Stebbins a San Francisco girl, has been engaged by Collier for the *Lights o’ London* next season.”³⁸⁸ However, Stebbins could certainly have been in the cast earlier. Most articles reviewing the show did not mention specific actors as the cast was large. An article from November 16, 1883, says the cast was too big to speak about

³⁸⁷ *Salt Lake City Herald* January 19, 1883, 5; *Iron County Register* Feb 1, 1883.

³⁸⁸ “Theatrical Matters,” *San Jose Mercury News*.

any particular member worthy of note, as they were all exceptional (*Willimatic Journal*, 5). The production drew large houses wherever they went, and shows were regularly sold out.

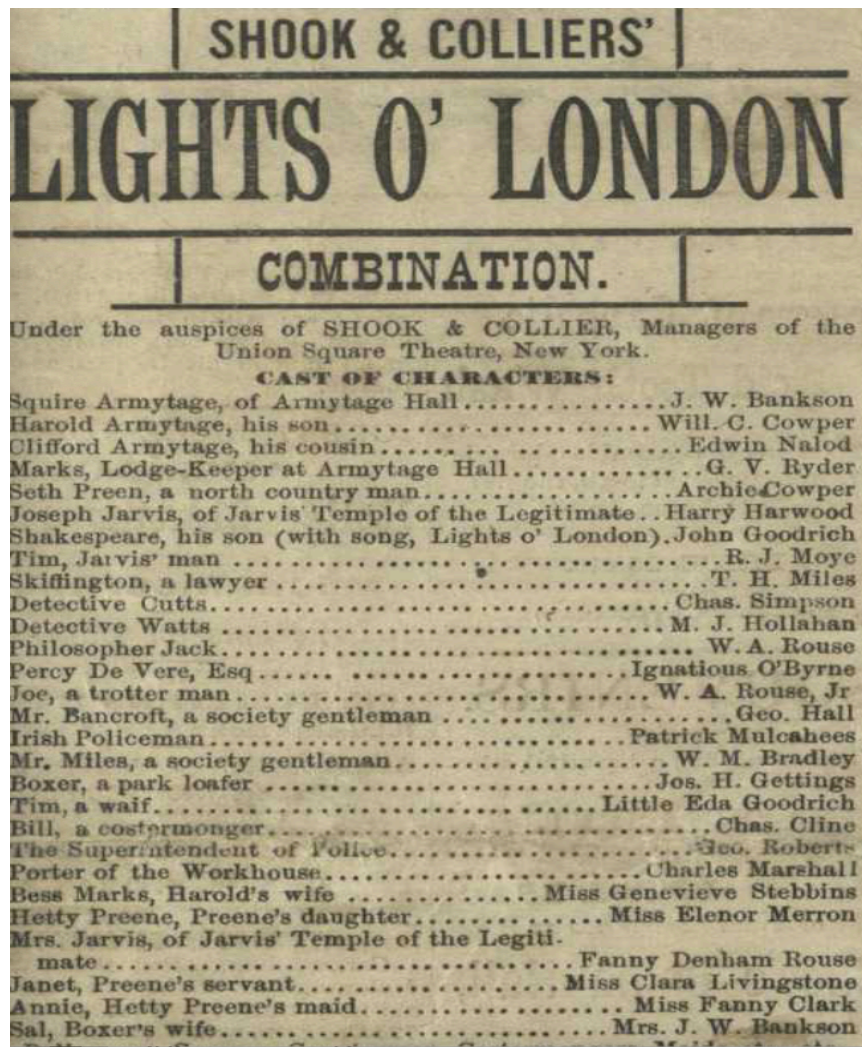


Fig. 91. Academy of Music Programme, Bibliothèque Quebec.

Stebbins performed the role of Bess Marks who falls in love with the main character Harold Armytage, and they elope. In a melodramatic twist and turn of events, his wealthy father disowns him, and his cousin turns against him to try to take his inheritance by accusing him of a crime. Harold is sent to jail but escapes to find Bess. In the process he saves his father's friend from drowning, and, in the end, Harold receives his rightful inheritance. The play included a huge tableaux of the popular painting *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward* (1874),

representing a “Victorian workhouse, and a vivid scene of a night market “complete with minutely realized costermongers’ barrows, a greengrocer’s shop, a cobbler’s shop, a public house, and much more” (Williams 2018, 218). *Lights o’ London* had real “splashing water,” said to cap “the climax of wonders, and those who witnessed it could not for the moment believe what they were witnessing other than an attempt at murder in real life and subsequent rescue.” In another scene, moonlight streamed through falling snow marveling the audience as to its realistic nature. The play had well-developed characters said to excite and hold the audience from beginning to end “with striking and sensational stage pictures.”³⁸⁹



Fig. 92, and 93. Poster Advertisements.

The company’s performance at the Opera House in Cairo, Illinois from November 24–29th 1883, was said to be the “grandest affair not only in the spectacular line but in point of first class acting and a plot of thorough, unwavering interest and power. It consists of six acts, and even with the most constant, rapid moving of scenery it takes about four hours to render the entire

³⁸⁹ *Ottawa Free Trader*, October 13, 1883.

drama.” In Cincinnati, at Heuck Opera House, there was a “exceedingly large audience.” Mr J. L. Burleigh performed the hero and “Miss Genevieve Stebbins, in the role of the heroine, did fairly well.”³⁹⁰ They performed all week and continued to draw large audiences.



Fig. 94, and 95. Poster Advertisements.

On December 18, 1883, in Indianapolis at Dickenson’s Grand Old Opera House, the show was “received nightly with thunders of applause, roars of laughter, tears of sympathy and unbounded enthusiasm.” Of interest, in each city they advertised for 100 “supernumeraries,” meaning stage ‘extras’ who would be taught how to create stage tableaux for large crowd scenes, and how to travel around the stage as a group to create atmosphere and support the main action.

Unknown in the day, Collier took the risk of arranging one–week engagements. Many did not believe travelling shows could get audiences to pack theatres night after night for the same play and Collier proved them wrong. Another significant aspect of the tour was that Shook and Collier were the first managers to invest in specially built railroad cars.³⁹¹ The entire tour was an

³⁹⁰ “The Theatres,” *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, December 3, 1883, 4.

³⁹¹ *New York Dispatch* July 29, 1883, 4.

experiment in theatrical travel to see how fast they could get to a theatre, unpack and perform, then strike and travel to the next location. Their investment into specially built theatrical rail cars was at a price of \$15,000 *a piece*, which would be almost a million dollars today. Their rail cars could be brought directly to a theatre's back door for loading and unloading and "run along the street the same manner as an ordinary truck" (a truck, albeit drawn by horses) to the railroad station. The train cars also had wheels that could be changed to fit various gauged railway tracks.

In New York City, Collier was known for loitering outside the Union Square Theatre early evenings before the theatre opened. He had a special spot on the sidewalk while others in the 'Profession' clustered around him. This spot was not for just 'anyone.' As the group gathered round, they listened intently to hear Collier describe how he came up with his novel tour innovations. Collier attributed his success to his idea of packing railroad wagons with scenery loaded at the theatre. This saved labor costs and time spent packing at the train depot. He had his own stagehands that travelled with the company to avoid having train station employees handle stage gear. His technical crew ran the show and packed everything. Each wagon could fit on an open freight car and was able to be quickly taken on and off the train as the company moved between towns and cities.³⁹² The 'Lights o' London' arrived on the Missouri Pacific railroad,

their fine, large car, adorned on either side with costly and carefully executed paintings, representing scenes from the play, that attracted much attention. The work of unloading the scenery was at once begun and two wagon-loads were hauled to the opera house. Then the earnest work began. Stage carpenters and hands furnished by the company and Maj. Laing, a regiment of them almost in number, made the theatre ring with the noise of getting pieces of scenery set in the proper grooves, hanging drops and removing traps and other stage trappings, to make room for the great quantity of scenery carried by the company, and necessary to a proper presentation of the play. Every detail was looked after, the workmen not taking time to go to their dinners. The result of these efforts was that last night when the curtain run up, the stage settings were so complete and in as grand working order as on the initial appearance of the plan, at the Union Square Theatre, where it had an unprecedented run. The piece passed off without a hitch or delay, and nothing to mar the evenness or smoothness of the scenes. "*Amusements. "Lights o' London" Leavenworth Times (Kansas)*

³⁹² *New-York Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1883, 4.

(January 11, 1884, 4).

The review continued by saying that there was no attempt to spotlight any one player as the production was “composed of first-class artists, each suited to his or her part.” The audience was “one of the largest ever assembled in the opera house” with every patron delighted. The final verdict on the production was that it was “grand beyond description. It is a spectacular drama and far excels anything in that line ever put upon the stage in this country.”³⁹³



Fig. 96, and 97. Smithsonian Digital Collections, Pullman Palace Car Company.

The enormous production required a ‘mammoth train car’ for the sets and a ‘palace car’ for the cast, with several being built for national touring for each company. Palace cars were luxury transit with ornate interiors, designed by the Pullman Palace Car Company. Collier’s train cars were especially built to run on express train routes. The decorations on the outside of the cars were said to have been as elaborate as circus chariots. To give an idea of the size of the railroad cars, “two immense wagons are loaded at the theatre and conveyed to the depot; they are then

³⁹³ “Amusements. Lights o’ London,” *The Leavenworth Times*, January 11, 1884, 4.

elevated intact into the car by means of wire rope windlass attached to the car.”³⁹⁴ This was an extravagant and high-class way for a theatre company to travel and it must have been thrilling for all involved. They were on the cutting edge of theatrical touring innovation as their train travel was akin to a hotel on wheels with fine dining and social activities on board.



Fig. 98, and 99. The sleeping cars were changed for nightly use with beds made and curtains drawn. Pullman hired primarily Black men as porters, who famously organized as the first African American labor union. B. Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925–1945* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Smithsonian Digital Collections, Pullman Palace Car Company

In Detroit, the audience at White’s Grand Theater was also large. The play, a “picturesque melodrama,” was performed by a company “evenly balanced and well-liked organization, headed by John L. Burleigh” and included such actors as “[...] Genevieve Stebbins.” After the first presentation of the play in Detroit, critics attested that

The excellently conceived and well-painted scenic effects were displayed to perfect advantage, the spacious stage room at that theater giving all possible perspective effect to the various sets [met with awed] silent wonderment with which the audience— to four-fifths of whom the play was absolutely new— received each scene. They appeared dazed, and at the climax to each act their wonderment gave place to most enthusiastic applause. The “Light’s o’ London” has scored the greatest success yet to the credit of White’s Grand. (“White’s,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 19, 1884.)

³⁹⁴ *The Portland Daily Press*, August 31, 1883, 4.

In February 1884 they were back at Heucks Opera House in Cincinnati, with newly painted scenery. The cast was said to be too large to make mention of everyone, yet Stebbins and others were said to have “acquitted themselves so handsomely of their parts, that a mention at least of their worth is due them.”³⁹⁵ A few days later they were playing for four nights in Wheeling, West Virginia.³⁹⁶ For the week of March 5 they performed in Providence, Rhode Island then by March 9, 1884, they were in Philadelphia once again at the acclaimed Arch Street Theatre for a week. The show, having done such good business the first time, was booked for a return engagement.

Stebbins played Bess Marks opposite J.L. Burleigh.³⁹⁷ They continued the tour and by March 15th were in Canton, Ohio for two nights, March 17, 18th in Richmond, VA, then by March 19th back in New York City at the New Park Theatre. The troupe travelled to the National Theatre in Washington, D.C. arriving around March 24th where they delivered “a balanced and effective performance” where the “mechanical and scenic effects were, as ever, a great feature of attraction. There are few if any better melodramas than ‘The Lights o’ London,’ in which an interesting story is told, dramatic situations realized, and excellent characters developed.” The troupe was a “excellent dramatic organization” with Burleigh and Stebbins as Bess Marks.³⁹⁸

By March 30th they were back in Brooklyn at the Park Theatre. The piece was said to be familiar to all theatre goers as its “stirring scenes and incidents and the beauties of its pictorial display are all matters of common knowledge.” Audiences wanted to see Mr. J. L. Burleigh (starring opposite Stebbins) who was “widely known in Brooklyn as a scholarly gentleman,” a Civil War veteran (Colonel Burleigh) and former State Senator of Michigan.³⁹⁹ Stebbins and

³⁹⁵ *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, February 25, 1884, 4.

³⁹⁶ *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, February 28, 1884, 4.

³⁹⁷ *The Times*, March 4; *Philadelphia Times*, March 9, 1884, 6.

³⁹⁸ *North American*, March 24, 1884, np., *National Republican*, March 25, 1884, 4.

³⁹⁹ *Evening Critic*, Washington D.C., March 26, 1884, 3.

Burleigh were expected to “attract overflowing audiences to the Park on this, as on all former occasions, is quite within the range of probability, since it is to be presented at this time with an entire new outfit of scenic embellishments” and a strong cast of characters.⁴⁰⁰



Fig. 100. Park Theatre, New York Public Library Digital Collection. Fig. 101. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* photographs, Brooklyn Public Library, Center for Brooklyn History, Public Domain.

By April 7th in New York City, they performed at Niblo’s Garden for a week run. The role of Bess Marks was said to be played by Miss Clappe, so it’s possible Stebbins was no longer performing the role, or it was a typo, or a different actress.⁴⁰¹ By April 18, 1884, another actress was announced as taking the role of Bess Marks,⁴⁰² however it isn’t mentioned in which of the four companies this replacement occurred, so it is possible Stebbins still remained in her role. It is also possible that she took a break from performing as she began writing a series of articles for *Werner’s Magazine*. Regardless, Stebbins had spent a year on the road in an epic production that was a resounding national hit. Stebbins was likely elated but also probably exhausted.

⁴⁰⁰ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2.

⁴⁰¹ *New York Times*, April 13, 1884, 8. Clappe with an ‘e’ was how Louise Clappe signed her name.

⁴⁰² “Amusements,” *Evening Star*, April 18, 1884, 8.

In early September 1884, at the Madison Square Theatre, Stebbins replaced Georgia Cayvan (a BUSO graduate) as ‘May Blossom’ in a romantic comedic play of the same name, written and directed by David Belasco. Stebbins’ performance “created quite a favorable impression.”⁴⁰³ Unfortunately she performed the role only for a month as the Madison management changed from the Frohmans and Belasco to A. M. Palmer. Thereafter, Palmer dropped the play which had been “running to full houses” as a way of stopping Belasco from benefitting from royalties. At this time, a new Lyceum Theatre was being built on 4th Avenue that included a school of dramatic art to be run by Franklin Sargent. The theatre was to be artistically directed by Steele MacKaye and underwritten by the Frohmans. MacKaye had long wanted a theatre that would also house a school. However, it was noted that while “practicality” was not his strong suit, it was hoped the new school would meet with success.⁴⁰⁴ As previously mentioned, MacKaye was pushed out of the Lyceum after Sargent and Belasco took control. At the end of October, when Stebbins was without her lead role in *May Blossom*, she travelled to Connecticut to perform as Hazel in Steele MacKaye’s play *Hazel Kirke*, replacing Annie Russel who was on her honeymoon.⁴⁰⁵ Stebbins then took a break from performing to focus on the publication of her first book, as we shall explore in the next chapter.

⁴⁰³ “Green Room Gossip,” *Commercial Gazette Cincinnati* September 7, 1884, 4.

⁴⁰⁴ “A Theatrical Row: New York Managers who are at a Dagger’s Point: The American Conservatoire of Dramatic Art and its Objectives,” correspondence of *The American* October 5, 1884, re-printed in *The Tennessean*, October 12, 1884, 9.

⁴⁰⁵ October 27, 1884, performing in New Haven, Conn., *Boston Sunday Globe*, November 9, 1884, 10. The play was no longer under the control of MacKaye, but performed by Madison Square Theatres touring company under the Mallory brother ownership.

Chapter Eight

Delsarte's Secrets, and Stebbins' Philosophy.

Aesthetic Physical Culture: The Delsarte System of Expression

Stebbins' publication, *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1885) was the first English text clearly situating Delsarte's expressive philosophies in a comprehensible pedagogical system. This chapter explores public opinion regarding 'Delsarte' prior to Stebbins' publication, issues with MacKaye withholding Delsarte's 'secret's, reception of two of Stebbins' publications, the philosophical basis of aesthetic physical culture, and women's participation in American Delsartism. Prior to Stebbins' first publication the only other reliable text was *Delsarte System of Oratory* organized by Delsarte's students Abbé Delaumonse and Angelique Arnaud and translated into English from French in 1882 by Edgar Werner (enlarged 2nd edition in 1884, 3rd edition 1887, and 4th edition 1892). Werner published numerous works by prominent scholars including Alexander Melville Bell. His journal, *The Voice*, was dedicated to the field of elocution and vocal science (1879–1902). The name later changed to *Werner's Voice Magazine*, then *Werner's Magazine*. Early on, Werner published articles on 'Delsarte Philosophy.'

The Voice.

An International Review of the Speaking and Singing Voice.

ORATORY, DELSARTE PHILOSOPHY, STUTTERING, STAMMERING, SINGING, AND VISIBLE SPEECH.

One Dollar a Year.

Edited by EDGAR S. WERNER.

Single Copy, Ten Cents.

Fig. 102. Masthead for *The Voice*.

Mme. Laured la Madeleine (a Parisian pupil) states that seeing as Delsarte wrote “little or nothing, many artistic opinions and brilliant theories, once uttered by him, faded from his memory and were lost forever.” But, she argues, were it not for Arnaud and Delaumosne, many ideas would certainly have been forgotten (*The Voice*, January 1885, np). In 1882, the *Music and Drama* magazine gave a scathing review of the *Delsarte System of Oratory*, not for the information contained within, but rather as a rebuke of Steele MacKaye.⁴⁰⁶ They found “hundreds of young and misguided persons have wasted their substance on that most expensive luxury, the Delsartian theory, as put up in cans by the eminent confectioner Mr. Steele Mackaye.” The high price of his acting lessons for those desiring to enter the stage were likened to a candy salesman selling sweets. Since there was now a new Delsarte publication, the review posed the question, was there any more use for “Steele Mackaye and his costly preparations of the same subject?” MacKaye was rendered unnecessary.



Fig. 103. Example of ‘A Candy Man.’ Cover illustration from *Puck*, January 7, 1885. Joseph Ferdinand Keppler (1838–1894). Chromolithograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. The illustration notes bad ingredients in dyes for the candy stick. Notice the poor child in bare feet, the below left corner, tending to a sibling.

⁴⁰⁶ “The Art of Gesture, and Other Things,” 8.

The *Music and Drama* article continues, stating

to be frank, the elimination of Steele Mackaye in the book before us, seems to be thoroughly accomplished by the substitution of Abbé Delsaumosne, and that ‘tribute’ of his to the singing master, Delsarte, which Mr. Mackaye, with more ingenuity than invention, broke up into ‘lectures’ and ‘lessons’ to the confusion of the American stage and his own intermittent profit.

But, on a positive note, they found without MacKaye there would have been no introduction to “Agnes Loring [Genevieve Stebbins], no Blanche Meda.” Regardless, they liken MacKaye to ‘slippery’ men who sell “magical soap, supernatural toothpowders, and razor-stops of monstrous virtue, with like directness of address and pomp of language.” While they poke fun, they also praise the book’s price at \$1.50, as a worthwhile way of avoiding paying “\$100 a lesson” to MacKaye. \$100 apparently covered six weeks of study with MacKaye, two times a week (Ruyter 1995, 83).

The *Music and Drama* article further accuses MacKaye of emptying supporter’s pocketbooks including “Frank Carpenter, Miss Genevieve Stebbins, Mr. Frank Moulton, Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson, Mr. Marshall Mallory, Mrs. Bogardus and other enthusiastic proto-martyrs of the Delsartian creed.” Certainly, in the theatre community, there would have been rumours about MacKaye’s schemes amongst those ‘in the know.’ One of MacKaye’s obituaries even states, “so persuasive was Mr. MacKaye’s tongue that whatever his theme, he could interest not only the brain but also the more potent force, the purse” (*Werner’s* Dec. 1894, 458).

Unfortunately for Stebbins, she was associated with gossip surrounding MacKaye. It is possible she wrote her publication to not only justify her own teachings and establish Delsarte’s theories as a philosophical and practical pedagogy, but also to remove herself from MacKaye’s shadow.

Werner asked Stebbins to prepare a publication around 1881, before her European voyage with the Field family and Louise Clappe. Werner hoped she would meet Delaumosne while she

was in Paris, whose book he was just then translating (Ruyter 1995, 48). In the introduction to Stebbins' book (1885), she notes speaking for hours with Delaumosne who shared information about Delsarte's biographical background. She didn't study with Delaumosne, as some claim, rather they simply enjoyed each other's company. A *New York Times* review of Delaumosne's and Arnaud's 1884 first edition states at that time there was "little known of Delsarte, and still less known of his system" (May 18, 1884). The book was divided in three parts: voice, gesture and articulate language. Arnaud describes Delsarte's 'laws of gesture,' but the review notes it would take "long and thoughtful study" before finding any lucidity in the 'system,' and "even then, it will appear to some a trifle pedantic" (ibid).

Delsarte enthusiast Samuel Wells found the gesture portion of the book to be "ambiguous" and that many of the 'laws of gesture' could easily be misinterpreted. In comparison, he said Oskar Guttman's *Aesthetic Physical Culture* was far more valuable for preparatory dramatic studies (*The Voice* April 1884, 56–57). Wells argues that theory could only take a student of oratory or acting so far, because practical lessons in aesthetic physical culture were necessary "to bring the body under the control of the intellect." He jokes that you could theoretically teach someone to swim by describing swim strokes while they lie across a chair and pretend to swim, but that student would drown by theory alone if tossed in the water as physical skills require practice. The *Delsarte System of Oratory* left the public desiring more practical information, and Stebbins was poised to fill this void.

Delsarte's Secret Abracadabra

In 1886, fifteen years after Delsarte's death in 1871, there was little published about his theories. One observer wrote it was all "a matter of fog and moonshine to me. There seems to be

nothing tangible or practical in it.”⁴⁰⁷ Another asked, “What are the prospects for publication of the material Mackaye has? Can he not be induced to delegate the work to Mr. Alger?” He should publish whatever materials he has, and if he doesn’t, it’s either “wanton selfishness, or else cowardice prevents it from being given to the world [...] He will wait just a little too long if he is not careful.”⁴⁰⁸ Yet, MacKaye had no incentive to publish an educational manual, for if he did, he would not be able to continue demanding exceedingly high prices for his private lessons.

In 1884, educator Laura Tilsdale said MacKaye told her many times “no one but him had [Delsarte’s] manuscripts” and she had been waiting for 14 years for him to publish them.⁴⁰⁹ MacKaye had been bragging for almost a decade, as Delsarte’s ‘sole protégé,’ that he had been bequeathed a collection of Delsarte’s personal papers from his widow. Yet, MacKaye did not publish Delsarte’s manuscripts, despite assertions by his friend Rev. Alger, that they were working on a publication and that no one else was qualified to do it (*The Voice*, April 1884, 61). By this statement, I would imagine they were aware Stebbins was preparing a manuscript.

MacKaye purported to have exclusive knowledge, and the public wanted these revelations to be unveiled. However, what MacKaye kept secret was he didn’t have an unpublished treatise of Delsarte’s, but instead a collection of irrelevant notes. After Delsarte’s death, while MacKaye was in the U.S. he asked his father, who was in Paris, to purchase written remnants from his widow. What they obtained was a disappointment. In MacKaye’s archive, there is a letter from his father Colonel MacKaye indicating that the materials would be of no use for publication.

My son, I very much fear that they are not at all what you expect. As far as I can see they are made up of old scrap books, memoranda, on various subjects, notes of his courses, or of his ideas, to be explained in his courses, repetitions over and over again, a sort of confused mess of memoranda and scraps. Most of them are very old and yellow.

⁴⁰⁷ *The Voice*, May 1884, 78

⁴⁰⁸ Wells, *The Voice*, April 1884, 56.

⁴⁰⁹ *The Voice*, March, 423, Tilsdale was a former student of Stebbins’ who became the Director of the School of Oratory and Dramatic Art at Chicago Musical College.

So far, I have found no continuous treatise on any subject and not the scratch of a pen that seems to have been made within the last half century.

Colonel MacKaye continues by saying, unfortunately, Delsarte was “a very careless and disorderly man and never took care of what he wrote, he never took copies of his own letters, or preserved any of the letters of his correspondents, so that amongst all his mass of scraps, there is not a single letter that I have discovered. Amongst the papers yet delivered there are no charts or plans” (October 24, 1871). In the 19th century, it was common for people to make copies of letters if they related to business or for personal archival purposes.

Delsarte’s son Gustave told Colonel MacKaye that it wasn’t all his documents, but that the rest were of the same sort. The Colonel wondered if Madame Delsarte gave him only the “most useless or confusing portion” of Delsarte’s personal memorabilia and suggested that his son consider telling Delsarte’s widow what he intended to do with his papers. Perhaps then, if there were any valuable materials remaining, she would consider selling them. Otherwise, he saw little value to continue to pursue “picking out the scraps of ideas they contain” as it “would not pay” (October 24, 1871).

MacKaye wrote his friend Rev. William Alger sharing his disappointment, saying “If these papers are all the family intend to give us to sustain Delsarte’s reputation, I think you will agree with me that his reputation is in peril.” MacKaye knew he could not use this material for publication. He told Alger “I have been carefully through them, and they have not only taught me nothing new, but don’t even teach me as much as Delsarte taught me— before I received them. The grandest things he taught me— a few of which I have detailed for you— are not to be found among his papers— and if these were to represent his life work, I should be most awfully disappointed” (May 29, 1872). MacKaye’s wife admitted in an article in July 1892 for *Werner’s* that they obtained “a small packing box filled with a mass of mere notes, which, at first search, it

was impossible to find any coherent connection upon any subject. It was indeed the chips from the workshop, but chips divided into the minutest fragments. Mr. Alger and Prof. Monroe also examined the papers, with the same result of deep disappointment.” This disclosure came almost a decade later. In the intervening years MacKaye had continued his ruse that he had valuable materials to publish.

By 1884 there were a handful of prominent Delsarte teachers trained through either MacKaye or Stebbins, or both. One student, J.B. Roberts, who heard lectures and took classes from the “*Delsarte aristocracy*” (including Alger, Henrietta Crane, Samuel Silas Curry, Professor Raymond, Frank Stuart Parker, Moses True Brown, and Charles W. Emerson), said he had “heard so much about ‘Delsarte Philosophy,’ he became anxious to know if there is anything in it.” But, after hearing lectures “from so-called ‘Delsartians’ he found them to be very indefinite.” He also protested “against the idea that this ancient and world-wide art [oratory] can be boxed and shipped from place to place under the exclusive ownership and control of any ‘sole successor’ or any coterie whose chief characteristics and merits seem to be mysticism and illiberality” (*The Voice*, June 1884, 90). In letters to the editor (Edgar Werner) in *The Voice* there was confusion expressed about whether MacKaye would publish or guard Delsarte’s ‘secrets.’ People worried that MacKaye might die before Delsarte’s truths could be shared and preserved. Moses True Brown declared, it’s a “superfluous and unnecessary alarm that should any single disciple of his die and not leave his mark” that Delsarte’s ideas “would be irrevocably lost” (*The Voice*, June 1884, 92). Stebbins’ name was not mentioned in these debates, although she was recognized as an established Delsarte teacher. However, because MacKaye promoted himself as the only American student to have studied directly with Delsarte, some assumed he solely possessed precious secrets. Stebbins argued in response, “To any intelligent outsider modern

Delsartism would seem to be the riddle of the Sphinx. All this unnecessary mystery and dark profundity had been caused by the repetition of foolish statements by the two or three people who claim to know considerable about it. The statements are foolish, because they are so untrue.” She continues by assessing,

They give the impression to the mass of uninitiated students that there is some great and priceless revelation behind the mysterious system which Delsarte is supposed to have revealed to Mackaye. For instance, one authority in speaking of the system says: ‘Who is there that is competent to go inside and take out the constituent elements and set them forth? No one but Steele Mackaye and I fear very much that he may delay and die without giving it to the world.’ Another self-appointed judge asserts: ‘Mr. Steele Mackaye alone is thoroughly competent to give the Delsarte System to the world.’ Thus, they hold out the idea that the Delsarte philosophy of expression is in reality what the dead master so firmly believed it to be, vis., A universal criterion, of all things beginning and end; and they think that there is one human being still alive who holds the awful key to this sacred penetralia of creation. (*Werner’s*, December 1893, 412)

Stebbins made this argument almost a decade after her first publication of the *Delsarte System of Expression* in 1885, when MacKaye was still resentful that she produced a publication in the first place. Some still believed that MacKaye had elusive knowledge yet to be revealed. Stebbins insists, “for nearly twenty years they have been looking with anxious eyes and waiting with divine illumination. But alas for human hope! The revelation of the Delsarte Kabbalah has not yet come. This universal solvent of ‘all things pertaining to man’ still remains concealed, like the alchemical enigma of the mystics, behind the Abracadabra of the great hierophant Steele Mackaye. The truth of the matter is, no such mystery exists” (*Werner’s*, December 1893, 412). Stebbins had written several publications by this point, and it must have been frustrating that some believed MacKaye still had information yet to be disclosed. Alger continued to claim after MacKaye’s death in 1894, that MacKaye *had left him manuscripts* that would give MacKaye, “as well as Delsarte immortal fame” (*The Voice*, March 1894). However, Alger also did not publish this ‘material.’

Stebbins insists she spent “years of study to get to the penetralia of Delsarte’s system,” and while it was as “difficult to access as the sacred adytum of a Tibetan mahatma” [...] *cui bono?* [meaning Who benefits? Or, to whose advantage?] (1902, 385). Stebbins found, in retrospect, after testing Delsarte’s ideas that frankly, “as far as the *philosophy* of Delsarte goes, a twelve-month’s careful study of the cabala [such as occultist Eliphas Levi] and the Platonists would have yielded quite as much as my fifteen years’ study of Delsarte” (1902, 385). She insists Delsarte’s concepts were not exclusive to Delsarte, nor to his sole inheritor, MacKaye.



EDGAR S. WERNER.



Fig. 104. Edgar Werner, a strong supporter of Stebbins, from Ayre’s publication, 1894, 8.⁴¹⁰ Fig. 105. Portia in lawyer’s robes, actress Kate Dowlan MET digital collections, oil painting by Sir John Everett Millais, 1886 donation by the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1906.

Amongst this background flurry of debate, Stebbins performed as Portia, the female protagonist in the *Merchant of Venice* opposite Alfred Ayres (a pseudonym for Thomas Embley Osmun, an established elocution author and educator of dramatic art in Manhattan). They performed for a benefit to help raise money for the Bartholdi Fund at the University Club

⁴¹⁰ For more information on Werner’s publications, see LaNor Lois Lombard Lollich, “Theories of elocution in Werner’s Magazine, 1879–1904.” Ph.D. Diss. University of California at Los Angeles, 1973. Francine Merritt, “Werner’s Magazine: Pioneer speech journal” (PhD. Diss., Department of Speech, Louisiana State University, 1953).

Theatre, on May 20th (*New York Dispatch*, May 17, 1885, 5). The Bartholdi event raised funds to build the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, which was finished in October 1886. Ayres was a regular contributor to *Werner's* and the *Dramatic Mirror* for the publisher Harrison Grey Fiske. Stebbins and Ayres were colleagues in the same profession of elocution and acting. Werner later published Ayre's book on acting, *Acting and Actors, Elocution and elocutionists: A book about theatre folk and theatre art* (1894) which is largely a compilation of Ayres former publications for *Werners* and the *Dramatic Mirror*.

It's likely that Ayres and Stebbins decided to perform together and chose the *Merchant of Venice* to play. Ayres was quite critical of many popular actors and actresses, so to perform with Stebbins seems to demonstrate a mutual professional respect. For example, he said of Rose Coughlan that "she never has a reason for anything she does. She always looks well, is always graceful, is always dashing and vigorous; but her handling of the lines is generally worse than bad. Her emphasis is more frequently in the wrong place than it is in the right place, and she always lets her voice run down as the breath leaves her lungs until she is scarcely audible" (1894, 76). The art of elocution taught the artist to think about the words, intention, and meaning in addition to articulation, proper emphasis, when to pause, timing of 'beats,' breath control, pronunciation and vocal projection. They chose a difficult piece, yet both had performed Shakespeare before. Ayres believed 'higher drama' provides actors a chance to demonstrate their professional artistry, saying "the chief reason why higher drama is the higher drama is because it gives the actor of greater ability a better chance than does any sort of drama to show what he is able to do" (1894, 56). Portia, the role Stebbins performed is notoriously difficult and Portia's speech is known to be one of the most famous from the play. Ayres analyzed issues actresses had with the role when placing emphasis of certain words to the neglect of others which alters the

meaning and, in his opinion, the correct intent (1894, 74–80). He doesn't mention his performance with Stebbins, but neither does he critique her although his book is filled with critical examinations of leading actors' performances.

The Delsarte System of Expression

In June 1885, Stebbins began publishing a series of articles on Delsarte in *The Voice*, starting with the “Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression, Part I.”⁴¹¹ Her work was anticipated, as the *Journal of Education* announced “Miss Genevieve Stebbins, a leading lady of the Madison Square Theatre, New York, a lady who not only ranks high in the theatrical profession, but who has also attained distinction as teacher and author, is writing a series of articles in *The Voice*, a New York paper, upon the ‘Delsarte System’ which is attracting much notice and many favorable comments.”⁴¹²

In her first article, Stebbins shares a letter MacKaye wrote crediting her for being the only pupil he recommended teaching what he taught. She shared the letter to situate her professional status, and to demonstrate that MacKaye had passed the torch to her. She notes her travels to Paris, meeting Delamoune, and describes exercises MacKaye taught her such as the decomposing exercises in which body parts are shaken “as if asleep.” She said MacKaye gave her lessons, and then he would leave to give her time to practice before he came back and had

⁴¹¹ In the same month (of June 1885 in *Werner's*), there is a listing for the Lyceum School of Acting run by Franklin Sargent who had been MacKaye's collaborator. In the year prior, Sargent worked with MacKaye who was meant to be the dramatic educator at the Lyceum School. Yet, by this date, MacKaye had been removed from the company. Franklin states that at the conclusion of the school year, “all connection between Lyceum Theater and the Lyceum Theater School ceases” and will re-open October 1885— as the New York School of Acting” (*Werner's* June 1885, 93). MacKaye then began advertising his own school which apparently never opened.

⁴¹² Vol. 21–22, 1884, 24.

Stebbins teach him as if he knew nothing, as a way of demonstrating her comprehension and teaching ability.

Stebbins' articles in *The Voice* became chapters published in *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1885) in which she systematized Delsarte's ideas for a broader public to enjoy. Delsarte did not leave a pedagogical 'system' behind, rather his theories were categorized within conceptual 'laws or principles' in relation to bodily expression. These principles were not preserved in a philosophical treatise by Delsarte but were in charts and diagrams, fragments of notes on scraps of paper, and "scribbled on chairs and doors."⁴¹³ French student Angélique Arnaud states, "Delsarte published no book on art. The basis of the science he created is contained in a synthetical table. Other tables develop each branch of it considered separately."⁴¹⁴ Ruyter explains there was "very little known about" what Delsarte taught. His few extant writings provide some of the "rationale for his system, aspects of his theory, and some descriptions of gestural patterns (1995, 81). Delsarte's French student, Alfred Giraudet, said his work was not organized to the extent that it could be taught in a replicable manner. Giraudet shared that Delsarte's concepts weren't taught as complete lessons, but rather "scattered over a number of lectures, fragmentarily, years sometimes intervening, according as the master felt led or invited to develop his thoughts upon one principle or another. A few or even one lecture missed might make the notes taken, confused or indeed unintelligible."⁴¹⁵ French dance historian Annie Suquet likewise found "En matiere de geste, son system n'a cependent pas debouche sur une veritable methode d'enseignement" (an approach to using gesture, his system was not based on an actual teaching method),⁴¹⁶ or an effective teaching methodology (Ruyter 1999, 81). Due

⁴¹³ *Werner's*, 1893, 420.

⁴¹⁴ *Delsarte System of Oratory* 1892, 171.

⁴¹⁵ *The Voice*, January 1885, 10.

⁴¹⁶ Introduction to the 2005 French edition of Ted Shawn's book *Every Little Movement (Chaque Petit Mouvement)*.

to the nature of Delsarte's teachings, MacKaye worked with Stebbins on developing the initial precepts of 'American Delsarte' teachings into a basic curriculum. After departing from MacKaye, Stebbins thereafter elaborated and constructed her own "Delsartian" pedagogy.

Building on her training with MacKaye, it was rumored that Stebbins obtained notes from Delsarte's widow and from these "she worked out and elaborated the Delsarte System, adding many things which she had observed" in her extensive studies.⁴¹⁷ Ruyter compared outlines of MacKaye's 1875 prospectus of five different six-week courses he offered and said Stebbins' book is "probably a faithful rendition of MacKaye's teachings" (1999, 81). These were once a week classes. In her two-year study with MacKaye (not held consistently over that period), Stebbins said she learned what there was to learn in six months, and the rest was "variations and repetitions of the same knowledge. He candidly told me so and further stated that I had exhausted the subject as far as he was concerned" (1902, 396). MacKaye focused on exercises for oratory and dramatic art, the study of non-verbal communication, and harmonic poise (which could be described as equipoise, or aesthetic transfer of body weight). MacKaye noted 81 'laws' of expression regarding the relationship between bodily signs and interior content (Lake 2002, 79), yet Stebbins found this to be unnecessarily excessive, so she reduced them to 9 laws of pantomime. Stebbins did not simply take teachings of MacKaye and put them into print. She combined what she learned from MacKaye, with expressive exercises from her own professional training in oratory, pantomime, theatre, and physical culture studies. She tested Delsarte's concepts and cross-referenced them with principles from classical art and incorporated other approaches and techniques along with her own innovations, making her a reformer and visionary in her own right (Ruyter 1973, 1995, 1999).

⁴¹⁷ *The Jersey City News*, October 25, 1895.

Stebbins corroborated Delsarte's categorical 'laws' of action and expression by linking his threads of thought with comparable ideologies, metaphysical and theological ponderings, and contemporary studies in rhetoric. She amalgamated Delsarte's concepts into a concrete aesthetic philosophy for adepts to appreciate and study. Editor Edgar Werner maintains that Stebbins "gathered up the hitherto widely scattered and much mystified points that constituted the public's knowledge concerning Delsarte, besides containing much new material, the whole topically arranged in lessons having a well-planned beginning and a definitive aim [...] The widespread approval with which these ideas met is a matter of history" (1902, 474). Beyond what MacKaye taught her, Stebbins relied on her intellectual ability to theorize, organize and expand upon Delsarte's principles and concepts to create the practical pedagogical 'Delsarte System.'

It is worth noting that MacKaye did not publish anything regarding Delsarte until his first article in April 1887 for *Werner's*. Although in MacKaye's archive there are lectures on aesthetic philosophy that he gave in 1872, with Delsartean concepts echoed in Stebbins' publication. Werner asserts that Stebbins built on the writings of Delaumosne, Arnaud, and teachings of MacKaye and "supplemented these with years of study under other masters— in different capitals, at the Paris Conservatory, etc.— and has drawn from various additional sources ancient and modern. She has taken all they had to give, pruning, analyzing, adapting, formulating, comparing, constructing and testing theories, principles, rules and methods with years of personal, practical experience as a teacher, elocutionist, public reader, and actress. [...Her publication rescues Delsarte from] oblivion, and from misunderstanding, mysticism and contempt into which it has fallen."⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ *Werner's*, January 1888, 12.

Werner recalls meeting Stebbins as a young “metropolitan actress” when she gave him a “personal exposition of her interpretation of the Delsarte System.”⁴¹⁹ Werner said her work “revolutionized the teaching of personal expression” and proclaims Stebbins’ book was an “epoch-making treatise” [that came to be studied] by every progressive teacher of elocution, oratory, and acting, not only in this country but also other parts of the English-speaking world.” He situated Stebbins as the greatest living Delsartean, stating she was able “to give expressional illustrations equaled by none other. It is one of the ironies in the fate of this great art that illustrations cannot be preserved; that they are fleeting, and live only in the memories of those persons fortunate enough to have seen them.”⁴²⁰ Stebbins’ dear friend, Frances Stuart Parker from the Boston School of Oratory, stressed that because expressions are so ephemeral, it requires an adept teacher knowledgeable in philosophy and psychology to demonstrate Delsartean principles.⁴²¹ Stebbins was one such individual.

Stebbins’ book includes practical exercises in ‘decomposing,’ Harmonic Poise, breathing exercises, expressive pantomime exercises, stage falls, and attitudes. MacKaye’s decomposing exercises were rather rudimentary, and it is not truly known whether he created or appropriated the exercises. Regardless they are simplistic enough that the origin is irrelevant. The ‘order of practice’ for decomposing is shaking and releasing energy beginning in the fingers, then to the hand, forearm, entire arm, head, torso, feet, entire leg, entire body, eyelids, and lower jaw. The essential proposition is after the student ‘shakes it off,’ releasing tension in various body parts, they are refreshed and ready to apply their awareness to proceeding lessons at hand. ‘Harmonic Poise/Equipoise’ exercises were relatively standard in oratorical training (as will be explored

⁴¹⁹ *Werner’s*, September 1899, 84.

⁴²⁰ September 1899, 84–85.

⁴²¹ *Werner’s*, July 1884, 98.

forthwith), as were breathing exercises, while improvisational non-verbal dramatic exercises, stage falls and expressive pantomimic ‘attitudes’ came from theatre techniques.

Of note, in 1884 Edgar Werner published *Aesthetic Physical Culture, A Self-instructor: for all cultured circles, and especially for oratorical and dramatic artists* by Oskar Guttman, a German theatre professor and former manager of the Stadt Theatre. Originally published in German in 1865, the text demonstrates much of the same line of thinking that Stebbins advises, such as the importance for a dramatic artist to train in physical culture and aesthetic culture. Guttman’s book was translated into Hungarian and used as a textbook at National Dramatic School of Hungary. In 1884 Guttman was living in America, and wrote an article for *Werner’s* (March 1884, 434), saying that Delsarte’s fame was “confined almost wholly to Paris,”

That he did not live to complete his work, and free it from its mysticism and vagueness which apparently envelop it, it is deeply to be regretted. This unsatisfactory state of the Delsarte System makes prompt action on the part of the qualified and authorized exponents all the more imperative. Delsarte is dead, hence whatever expositions of his system will come second-handed and tinctured with the philosophy of its expositors.

Guttman threatened copyright infringement arguing for those who might copy his work, and he questions again whether Delsarte might have even drawn from him [one could ask this of MacKaye also]. He warns Delsarteans against using his practical work in the name of Delsarte.

Later editions (of the six) *Delsarte System of Expression* publications added a transcribed lecture by Delsarte, and Stebbins’ explanations of her artistic statue posing innovations. Her book was met with enthusiastic anticipation and essentially rendered MacKaye powerless against the tides of change, as she allowed anyone to explore Delsarte’s ideas for the small fee of purchasing her book. The magic rug was pulled out from under MacKaye’s feet. Resentment grew in MacKaye’s inner circle as Stebbins came to surpass him nationally as a recognized Delsarte educator. Women’s elocution historian Paige Van Osdol explains:

Much to the chagrin of many elocutionary men, Stebbins— not MacKaye— emerged as the leader of the Delsarte movement, and Stebbins was not content to stick with a strict interpretation of the Delsarte theory handed down to her by MacKaye; rather, she saw Delsarte as a starting point from which to elaborate her own system for teaching women to use and understand the import of their bodies as expressive instruments.⁴²²

Despite having written the *Delsarte System of Expression* and receiving accolades, Stebbins faced some public disbelief about her ability to organize Delsarte’s diagrams into a working philosophy. Part of this mystery emerged from Stebbins herself, as she wrote in deference to Delsarte as if he was the authorial voice. Therefore, some believed her written words literally came from Delsarte himself. As Van Osdol notes, even as late as a 1937 dissertation by Claude Shaver, men were still unable to accept Stebbins as an authentic Delsartean and instead claim that MacKaye was the only “true voice of authority” (2012, 95).

One critical review of Stebbins’ book questioned her ability to independently create a piece of advanced scholarship. The *Atlantic Monthly* said it is “a little bit difficult to determine just where this book comes from. Delsarte is at the bottom of it, but the intermediary process to Genevieve Stebbins is not clear. Is it a translation from the Abbé Delaumosne?”⁴²³ Perhaps they couldn’t believe Stebbins was the author because she was a woman? Or that she could conceive of an aesthetic philosophy and create a practical ideology all on her own? Regardless, within a decade, women’s involvement in the elocution movement blossomed to such an extent that by 1900 women professionally dominated as teachers by 85% (Ruyter 1995, 50). In the field of aesthetic physical culture education, Stebbins was a recognized leader along with Emily Bishop, African American Hallie Quinn Brown, and to a lesser extent Henrietta Hovey.⁴²⁴ As historian

⁴²² *The Women’s Elocution Movement in America, 1870–1915* (Ohio State University, 2012), 96.

⁴²³ v. 58, 1886, 287.

⁴²⁴ Brown was familiar with Stebbins’ work, and incorporated Delsarte into her teachings and publications, with a strong focus on public speaking. She was a student of Peter Robertson from 1874–1878. Robertson had studied at BUSO. For more on Hallie Quinn Brown see Paige Van Osdol 2012, 105–117, and Streeter 2023, 19, 28–29.

Carrie Streeter finds, female educators in general increased from around 84,000 in 1870 to 154,000 a decade later. These teachers were encouraged to literally ‘speak up’ and liberate their voices as public speakers (Streeter 2023, 43).

Critic Nym Crinkle found Stebbins’ book to be a “unique combination of familiar conversations, philosophical and sometimes dogmatic statements, and graduated lessons of exercises.” He did not want to discuss the system in depth in his short review as it would be an injustice, for the book “touches too many points of an esoteric orbit to be quadrated in a column.” Yet, he argues if the book was to be “looked at with serious and studious intent it becomes a philosophy of life in which many straggling beams of science and metaphysics have at last been focussed.” Crinkle states that for a serious thinking and humble student, the Delsarte science of expression “proclaims many new beauties and solves many riddles sphinxine in their age and import.”⁴²⁵ Stebbins had piqued the interest of many.

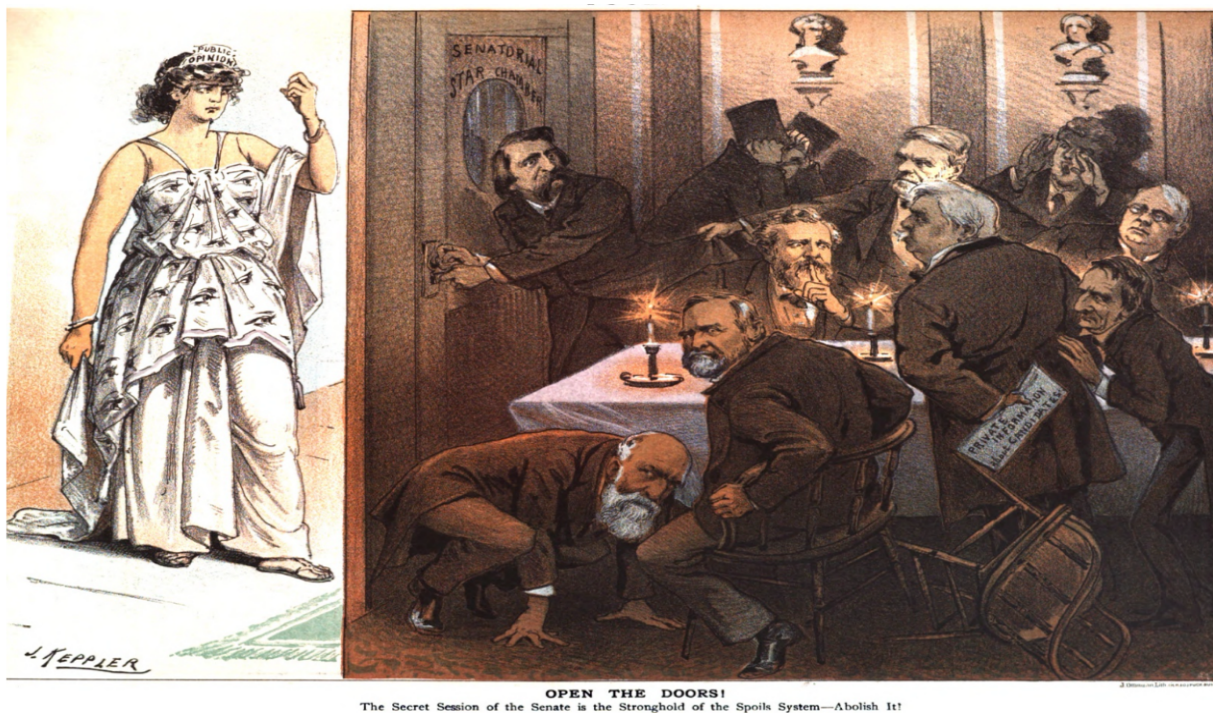


Fig. 106. “Puck’s Views and Reviews,” *Puck*, 18, no. 512, 1886, 410.

⁴²⁵ *Werner’s*, vol. 10, 1888, 5.

In the perspective of the *Christian Union*, despite “absurdities uttered about Delsarte’s system, both in the ignorant ridicule and extravagant adulation, it is a pleasure to have at last, a clear and thorough exposition both of his central idea and the details of his method.” In their assessment the “volume is carefully arranged and well classified,” Stebbins’ writing style is “concise and vivacious,” and she demonstrates a “complete practical and theoretical acquaintance with her topic.”⁴²⁶ She was respected for “explaining the Delsarte system of dramatic expression. Miss Stebbins is a woman for whom the world has long been looking. If she can explain the Delsarte system, she can probably explain the spoils system. No reasonable person has been able to understand it yet.”⁴²⁷ This is a significant statement as it demonstrates Stebbins’ ability to organize a comprehensible working philosophy that spoke to many stakeholders.

Delsarte Philosophy and Stebbins as a Philosopher

It was Abbé Delaumosne who posed the question, “Was Delsarte a philosopher?” While not directly answering yes or no, he notes Delsarte had “begun to classify the faculties of being, entering into the subject more profoundly than Kant; but all this only exists in mere outline, in a technology whose terms have not weighed and connected together by a solid chain of reasoning: logic has not uttered its final word therein.” Ultimately, he clearly states that Delsarte’s work was left “in a rudimentary state.”⁴²⁸ Delsarte was not an established philosopher. He had not organized his thoughts into a rationale anywhere near the realm of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Scholar Elani Randi states that Delsarte was not entirely isolated in his theories, as

⁴²⁶ February 18, 1886, 23.

⁴²⁷ “Puck’s Views and Reviews,” *Puck*, 18, no. 512, 1886, 410.

⁴²⁸ *Werner’s*, 1893, 197.

he incorporated and modified ideas from several French *ideologues*.⁴²⁹ Delsarte scholar Alain Porte suggests Delsarte did not even want a ‘System,’ citing Delsarte as saying “I cannot, like Descartes, say: My method, because God himself is its author.”⁴³⁰ As such, Porte situates Delsarte as having an “approach,” that “should logically lead to a system or a method” but suggests that Delsarte did not create a system because it would have been contrary to his nature (2005, 39). Stebbins clarified that not even one third of what was taught in the U.S. was developed by Delsarte, rather it was built on his foundations, the “rest has been added from time to time, like the stones of an edifice obtained from widely different sources, but all is in strict harmony with Delsarte’s basic ideas and the principles involved” (1902, 398–399). Essentially Stebbins, following MacKaye, began where Delsarte had left off.

Delsarte addressed artists (singers, orators, painters, etc.) and orators in his home salon and other public salons such as the Salon du Cercle des Societies Savants (in the 1840s and 50’s).⁴³¹ According to Alaine Porte, while Delsarte had some success as a singer and despite having sung before the king at Tuileries Palace, he did not enjoy the public spotlight and often shunned singing opportunities. Perhaps because Delsarte did not seek fame or fortune (2005, 25), he did not care to organize his thoughts in a tome for prosperity. Candidly, Delsarte proclaimed “I prefer living asses to dead scholars” (24). It appears he was not interested in leaving a legacy.

Ruyter asserts “unfortunately, Delsarte never completed— in fact, he barely even started— a full exposition of his discoveries and conclusions” (1995, 8). Some of his ‘literary remains’ were published in English in the *Delsarte System of Oratory* but Moses True Brown, of the Boston School of Oratory, notes “The truth is knowledge left by Delsarte is fragmentary. There is to-day

⁴²⁹ “Consciousness and Inspiration in the Delsartean Theory,” in *Essays on Francois Delsarte*, 2005, 85–95.

⁴³⁰ Porte, “Four Reflections on Francois Delsarte,” in *Essays on Francois Delsarte*, 2005, 39.

⁴³¹ Elani Randi, “Consciousness and Inspiration in the Delsartean Theory,” in *Essays on Francois Delsarte*, 93.

no such body of systemized knowledge left by Delsartians, standing alone and without further interpretation, merits the title of an undisputed philosophy.”⁴³² At least that was the case in America in 1884. The little Delsarte ‘left to the world’ was built upon in the imaginations of scholars such as Stebbins when she presented ‘Delsarte’ as a philosophy. Drawing from her academic background, Stebbins assessed that Delsarte borrowed from “esoteric Christianity; a compound of cabalistic lore” and “metaphysical abstractions” (1902, 386). Because Stebbins had a substantial classical educational background, she was able to advance Delsarte’s concepts and formulate a publication that came to reach national and international audiences.

Porte describes Delsarte’s challenging upbringing (2025, 24). Born in 1811, and having grown up extremely poor, Delsarte had more sympathy for the artist and average citizen than the elite professional classes. When Delsarte was ten, his mother left him and his eight-year-old brother in Paris in the care of an “innkeeper,” which I would take to mean a poor house or a ‘foundling’ home run by the church. Unfortunately, this was the fate for many impoverished families. His younger brother apparently died in his arms, probably of cold and hunger, and was buried in a common grave. Delsarte lived and worked in the streets of Paris as a rag-picker and took other small jobs that ‘orphans’ were able to find. He survived in the streets for 3 or 4 years until 1824 or 1825 when, at the age of 13 or 14, Delsarte was brought into the care of the priest ‘Bambini.’ He apparently taught Delsarte to sing and perhaps also to read and write. Delsarte received entry into the *École Royale de Musique and Declamation Lyrique* around 1827 or 1828 and by 1829 was dismissed by the school jury as his vocal skills did not continue to meet their standards. With his limited vocal training, he sang briefly in the theatre before establishing himself as a vocal coach.

⁴³² Werner’s, June 1884, 92.

His difficult and impoverished youth must have left him with some bitterness, as he expressed disdain for the wealthy classes and the “pontificating phraseology of ‘philosophers’ (his private enemies)” (Porte 2005, 35). Delsarte did not have a teacher training school with a distinct curriculum or graduates. At his salon, his students said he didn’t teach systematically but rather in moments of inspiration (*methodos*). Yet, while Delsarte was not a scholar in the traditional sense as he had little formal schooling and was not trained in a classical university like the Sorbonne (and did not have theoretical publications), his mind certainly worked in a brilliant investigative manner. His speeches were filled with passion, insight, and inspiration.

The ‘Trinity’ and Theory of ‘Correspondence’

France was predominantly Roman Catholic, and as a profoundly devout Catholic man, the Trinity of Father, Son and the Holy Ghost became the foundational criterion of Delsarte’s work (Delaumosne 1893, 535). Delsarte created a cohesive, methodical analysis of gestures and directional movements defined in various ‘laws’ and illustrated in diagrams. He described emotional/gestural actions as eccentric (moving outward), concentric (moving inward), or ‘normal’ (neutral) and divided the body into different conceptual zones representing the ‘vital, mental, and moral’ (1902, 117–125). These three ‘zones’ were then mapped into ‘sub-zones’ in sections of the body signifying body, mind or soul (1902, 135–252). This body mapping, and Delsarte’s ‘laws’ of motion (1902, 257–269) were described in *The Delsarte System of Expression* but were later discarded by Stebbins as she evolved her work. Delsarte’s numerous theories regarding expression are based on the ‘Trinity,’ and divided into categories of 3’s or expanded into 9’s reaching from earthly existence into the realms of angels. Delsarte’s intent was

to encourage embodied expression so that a performance would become charged with *sacre feu* (sacred fire, inner light, inspired passion, or divine spark/inspiration).

Delsarte's illustrated "Chart of Man," revolves around the 'Trinity' of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, representing body, mind, and soul. Delsarte did not create the diagram below, as it is in English. He likely drew an illustration with French terminology that was translated by Werner for the *Delsarte System of Oratory*. In explaining the 'The Chart of Man,' Delaumosne refers to St. Thomas. The chart is dynamic and is meant to describe an unfolding world in infinite expansion to provide insight into how the physical body and mind are connected to God.

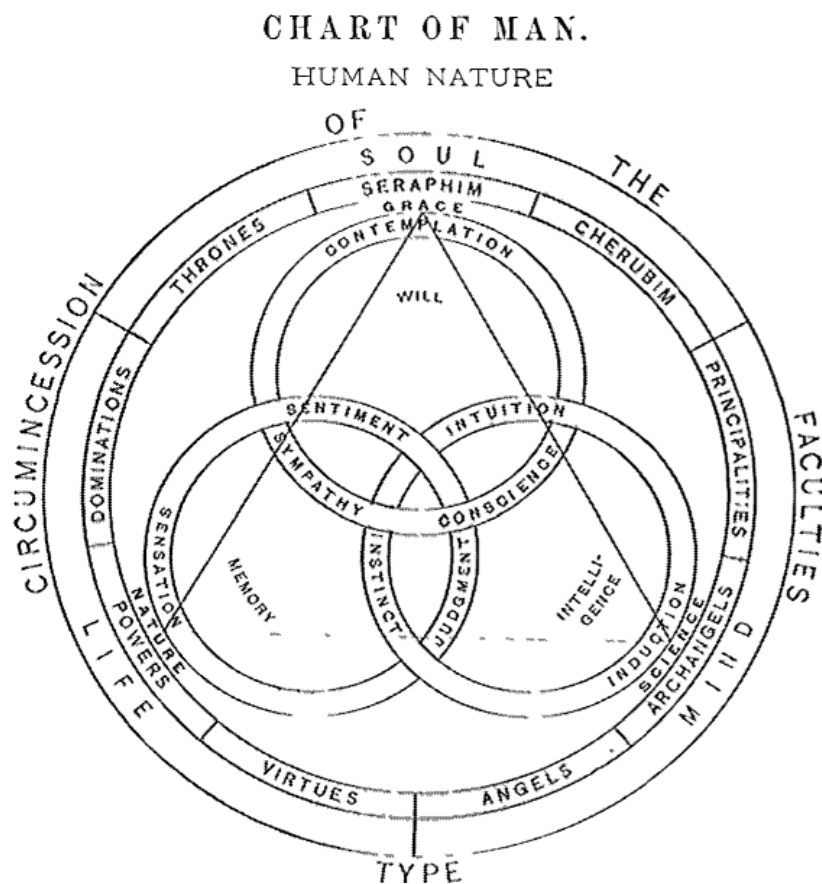


Fig. 107. *Delsarte System of Oratory*, English translation from the French, 1892, 505. Unknown creator.

The 'Trinity' is essentially an enigma. Stebbins explains that, in Delsarte's view, "life and mind are one and the same soul, and soul and mind are one and the same life, life and soul are

one and the same mind” (1902, 384). Delsarte believed that the spirit was an internal source expressed as ‘Life, Mind and Soul,’ while the physical body expresses externally ‘Feeling, Thought and Love.’ The idea of ‘three states of being’ were presented in different ways by various Delsartians, yet each ‘state of being’ was understood as being interconnected and inseparable from the others (Van Osdol 2012, 35–36). Most significantly, because Delsarte based his Applied Aesthetics on the triad, “he avoids the critical problem of Cartesian dualism” (Hoover 2020, 2). There is no body/mind divide, because the trinity represents a revolving synthesis of interacting parts. In the “Principle of Trinity,” Stebbins explores interrelationships between the spiritual, material (of the bodily senses), and action as dynamic corresponding levels of exchange (1885, 33). The aspiration is for the soul, body, and mind to act as a force of good.

Delsarte viewed Human Nature as a complex of *Life, Mind, and Soul* through the lens of Christian theology. In the scholastic tradition, Stebbins’ theories follow St. Augustine’s ‘Trinity’ as mapped out in Delsarte’s charts. Stebbins was extremely well read, and her studies in scholastic thought included “Origen, Tertullian, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Basil, and St. Thomas of Aquinas” (1902, 392). According to scholar Bradley Hoover, the scholastic ‘Trinity’ in Western philosophical tradition is considered as the ‘first’ examination of the “Theory of Mind.”⁴³³ Following St. Augustine, the *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* are inseparable concepts, and are equated to a psychological analogy for three distinct activities of Memory, Intelligence (Knowledge/ Understanding), and Love/Will (Rilling 2006, 330).⁴³⁴ Intelligence ‘speaks’ because memory is able to recall, working in combination with will/desire to transmit thought.

⁴³³ Bradley Hoover, “On the Connection Between Francois Delsarte’s ‘Cours in Applied Aesthetics’ (1839–1870) and Richard Wagner’s Aesthetic Writings,” University of Oxford, 2020 <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:e191e736-bf10-4690-8447-f7344c8a7829/files/sz316q279r>

⁴³⁴ Peter Drilling, The Psychological Analogy of the Trinity: Augustine, Aquinas, and Lonergan. *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71, no. 3–4 (2006): 320–337.

‘Will’ is likened to love when, for example, a good-natured individual speaks to another ‘soul’ with pure intent. As scholar Peter Rilling explains, “will is the appetite of the intellect for good” as an expression of the “word of the heart” (2006, 330). The word of the heart emerges from within and is expressed through communication.

In Delsarte’s concept, the inner and outer self were seen to reflect each other, known as the ‘Law of Correspondence.’ In this law, inner states of emotion, sensation, and intellect are outwardly represented through bodily action, tone, inflection in the voice, and gesture. And vice-versa, the outer world alters the physical bearing of the individual through action-reaction. Regarding the Law of Correspondence, Stebbins wrote that it literally means, from the Latin, “*to answer again from the heart* [...] it is only complete when someone has answered again *from the heart*” (1885, 61). In her understanding, to speak from the heart and be connected to the inner self, the individual is then able to “correspond” with their surroundings and the “vibrations of fellow-souls” (1885, 61). St. Augustin’s psychological analogy incorporates a spiritual connection to others, unlike contemporary cognitive science which follows a more scientific process of analysis based on the sensory motor system. Stebbins clarifies the law of correspondence as “purely a metaphysical idea” and originally a religious concept (1902, 391).

Memory, Intelligence, and Will = “I think therefore I am” = “I act therefore I am.”

In the field of contemporary cognitive science, Memory can be thought of not only as recall, but also as what exists in our unconscious. The automatic processing of the brain takes sensorial input from the body which loops back to the body in a rapid-fire manner to direct bodily action. The sensory motor loop is an unconscious process, in that one cannot be conscious of the innumerable inputs from the sensorial systems (including what one hears, feels, smells and

tastes) from one second to the next. The mind would be overloaded if it were meant to keep track of every subcortical sensation.

In Delsarte's Chart of Man, in terms of cognition, 'Intelligence/Mind' is the awareness of self, in that it is the self that 'thinks.' Regarding 'Will,' it is the ability to *remember at will* by focusing awareness and developing perceptions. According to Stebbins, the mind is not the images the brain sees any more than "the organs of sense are the senses themselves" (1892, 22). What we see in our Minds eye, is a mix of what comes from Memory (past experiences) and Will (Perception). Sight is not simply viewing the world via our optical nerves, but an internal mental processing of images by the brain (Memory) to manifest knowledge as '*insight*.'

Through understanding *how to see* and thereby *perceive*, one must study the art of science and the science of art. Stebbins asks, "How many are conscious that we owe all the pleasures which charm the sight and delight the ear— the music of waving trees and the aromas of the flower— to the sensations produced upon the brain by the invisible vibrations that reach our senses in continuous waves from all directions?" (1892, 25). Stebbins differentiates *creative thought* from the functioning aspects of the brain by arguing that the brain does not "think of itself" but is the means towards perception as it receives images through the optic nerve and sensations from the nervous system via the environment that are then interpreted by the mind to create knowledge. As Delsarte scholar Elani Randi explains, in the "double essence of human essence" between the unconscious and conscious mind, knowledge is created by transforming "perception into a concept" (2005, 57). Similarly, Iris Fischer situates Pierce's semiotics as a kind of double essence involving "dual consciousness" (2013, 385) in that consciousness is a process of "learning, of acquiring mental growth" that is characteristic of cognition (388).

Cognition is informed by perception. Perception is related to *how* one processes thoughts. Perception is a mixed intuitive and focused process in which one takes in information from the sensorial systems either directly in the moment and/or in relation to the memory of ‘what is known.’ Perception, along with cognition, organizes and interprets stimuli and is fundamental to creativity as the mind selectively modifies data in a creative manner. Data comes from the senses, consciousness, self-awareness, and insight itself.

Stebbins argues Delsarte’s ‘Trinity’ ideas weren’t entirely as original as Alger claimed, seeing as many of his concepts are neo-platonic and found in the “cabalism of the hermetic writers who postulated their trinity as Divine Fire, manifesting itself as Life, Light, and Love (1902, 384). Stebbins even states that Delsarte’s “artificial array of triunes can be cast to the wind” (*Werner’s*, May 1894, 177), but not because she didn’t value the metaphysical concept of the Trinity, as her own work was based on the unification of body, mind, and soul. She preserved the concept that ‘inner’ expression comes from a divine source, as Delsarte had. If she was to cast anything aside, it was the idea that during practical classes and lessons, students need not be overwhelmed with theoretical talk, rules, or charts as it would “destroy the great spirit of his work and teaching and sink into a state of painful affectation” (1894, 177). Furthermore, she demonstrates that the ‘Trinity’ can be “anything you like to make it, if the triune manifestation of its nature be retained. We might go on forever, but to no vital purpose. For, whether we postulate our primary conceptions as Monad, Duad, or Triad, we shall find that it is a metaphysical idea” and to quarrel over terminology is nothing but “hairsplitting over mere terms” (1902, 387). Stebbins likewise notes that the trinitarian concept existed in the pre-Christian era in Platonic thought and that there are similar triadic cyclical values demonstrated by ancient Egyptians, Persians, Celts, Hindus, and Chinese (1885, 32; 1902, 109). She explains, the Egyptians

“represented divine goodness by the god Osiris; the Greeks, by Jupiter; the Persians, by Oromazes. Divine wisdom was represented by the goddess Isis, in Egypt; by Pallas Athene, in Greece; and by Mythene, in Persia. The third principle was called by the Egyptians, Orus; by the Greeks Apollo; and by the Persians, Mithas” (1902, 108). Certainly, the trinity as a cyclical concept is neither monolithic nor culturally bounded.

Stebbins stresses that the education of the immaterial mind must co-exist with the corporeal education of the body. Drawing from Descartes philosophy of mind, Stebbins summed up in the idea “I think therefore I am,” by building on this premise and asserting that the “thing that thinks, [is] the creative attribute of the soul” (1892, 28). Therefore, what one *does* is a demonstration of the soul’s essence, i.e. “I act therefore I am.” Aside from the metaphysical aspects of her argument, some of her thinking resonates with modern cognitive scientists’ investigations into embodied cognition wherein perception is seen to emerge from a biologically based active interaction between body and mind (Claxton, 2015). Furthermore, her work acknowledges both the natural body and the spiritual body (1902, 110).

Signs, Semiotics and the Actor

Interestingly, Stebbins is entirely overlooked in an analysis of the ‘Trinity’ involving Charles Pierce (the ‘father’ of semiotics). Scholar Iris Fischer explores Pierce’s interest in the “reshaping of perceived binaries— aesthetic/semiotic, inner/outer, spirit/matter— into more valid triadic conceptions of embodied cognition” (2013, 391). Fischer examines similarities between Pierce’s semiotic “account of cognition” and Delsarte’s Trinity by relying on MacKaye’s supposable influence, despite Pierce not having studied with MacKaye. While Fischer notes that teachings from the field of elocution and the performance culture of oratory played a role in the

development of 19th century semeiotics (an older spelling of semiotics), she does not mention Stebbins as a prominent elocutionist with a sizable influence. Instead, Fischer finds a remarkable similarity between Peirce's philosophical account of cognition in his unpublished 1888 essay "Trichotomic" and MacKaye's Delsartean actor training. Fischer does not utilize Stebbins' 1885 publication to compare or contrast Pierce's semeiotic theories. She notes that Delsarte left no published work, and MacKaye died without leaving a full account of Delsarte's work. However, instead of relying on Stebbins' extensive exploration of the 'Trinity,' Fischer loosely connects the idea that Pierce might have heard MacKaye lecture or absorbed insights via his wife who took acting classes at the Lyceum Theatre when MacKaye was employed there. However, at the Lyceum, MacKaye wasn't teaching students, he was staging a play. Fischer notes that Pierce's wife was briefly a private student of MacKaye's, and the couple "probably" saw MacKaye perform. Therefore, she asserts that MacKaye influenced Pierce's theories instead of the more obvious influence of Stebbins. More realistically, Stebbins' publications articulate values that Pierce absorbed as his concepts are remarkably similar to her concept of the 'Trinity' established prior to his unpublished essay. Delsarte spoke to "*semeiotique*" as meaning extracted from movement (a function of the mind). Stebbins writes "Semeiotics is the science of signs, and so the science of the form of gesture" (1902, 142). As Peirce states "The sign is a likeness; and this is the main mode of representation in all art" (Fischer 2013, 384). The 'sign' is not unique to theories of semiotics, as the concept has historically been integral to theatre.

Human nature displays 'outward signs' that convey emotions to an 'audience' or viewer. Delsarte examined gestural movements and expressions from a range of individuals so that he could determine distinct emotional states. For an actor, their 'work' is to create bodily signs/attributes that define the character role they are meant to portray, and through practice,

these actions are intuitively performed on the stage as embodied cognition. The actor chooses the proper expressions for an audience to comprehend the bodily ‘signs’ or semeiotic presented. In the most rudimentary fashion, the point of seeing live theatre is to follow a narrative. Above and beyond listening to a story, audiences understand plot lines by being able to ‘read’ the signs and symbols of nonverbal body language and relationship dynamics. There is a kinesthetic affective resonance from performers to spectators who actively engage in ‘reading’ theatrical ideas from moment to moment and, in the process, become emotionally connected to themes presented.

Delsarte, like Diderot before him, placed strong emphasis on pantomime. Pantomime is essentially an art of nonverbal signs. However, unlike others, Delsarte focused on detailing a wide range of gestures and expressions coded according to ‘zones’ in the body divided by attributes. He ascertained that certain ‘sections’ of the body represent more noble intentions, and others debased. Emotions of moral uplift were seen as gesturally moving “upward for the spiritual and universal; downward for the weak and bestial; horizontal for the serene and philanthropic” (Stebbins 1888, 67). However, over time Stebbins came to place less emphasis in her own writing on these bodily divisions.

Delsarte believed expressions should come from an inner impulse, and historically speaking he was not alone in this theory. French philosopher, Denis Diderot, asserts that actors need to understand emotional expression and experiment with gesture to develop their performance technique in *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (*The Paradox of Acting*), published posthumously in 1830 based on his essays written between roughly 1750–1777. As an actor, it is integral to engage in character development and consider how their character thinks, moves, and speaks. The art and craft of acting includes developing the expressive physicality of a character to expose their inner psychological mindset, emotional reality, moral fortitude or lack thereof.

Stebbins quotes Diderot saying, “Every gesture is a metaphor” and, as she says, “gesture is a running commentary on words (1888, 69). Seeing as Stebbins was incredibly well read, she was familiar with Diderot’s *The Actor’s Paradox*, and other theatre theorists as well. Theatre historian Marvin Carlson argues that some 19th century French theatre theorists imagined that whole scenes could be performed without speech and in pantomime, as a way of demonstrating that the narrative could still be comprehended (such as Denis Diderot, Jean Jullien, and Emile Zola). Visual clarity was central to theatrical effect (1993, 280).⁴³⁵ Diderot even called for the inclusion of *tableau* as a way of arranging actors in a realistic yet artistic visual pictures on the stage (154). Furthermore, in *The Actors’ Paradox* (published in 1883 in English), Diderot encourages actors to carefully study and prepare their roles to conform “action, direction, expression, and gesture not to life but ‘to an ideal type invented by the poet’” (161). Diderot believed the ‘poet,’ i.e. playwright, should carefully describe his characters so that an actor/player has a solid basis upon which to creatively build their role. I make mention of Diderot in particular, as neither Delsarte nor American Delsartism has been compared/contrasted with other established 19th century theatre theorists.

Most importantly, Diderot stresses actors need not rely on ‘inner’ feelings, sympathetic imagination, or pure spontaneity but instead work to develop theatrical skills so that one can utilize these components at will rather than randomly. Likewise, George Henry Lewes, the leading English drama critic in the late 19th century, stresses that the actor must draw from “‘well known symbols” and what an individual *may feel* so that the spectators ‘recognizing these expressions are thrown into a state of sympathy’” (cited in Carlson, 1993, 230). For these

⁴³⁵ *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Cornell University Press). Notably, Carlson does not explore American theatre prior to 1900.

theorists, ‘natural’ acting was created by representing characters with such truthfulness that it will resonate with the audience as real, “converted by the actor into art” (230).

Stebbins similarly situates dramatic culture as “an expression of the organic unity of body and mind in delineation of character.” The art of acting for Stebbins, meant that the actor should create a ‘typical’ presentation, that is “representative instead of personal” (1902, 428). She made her point clear by stating “the perfect actor is one who becomes one with his part, and whose individuality is completely lost in the personality of the character he creates” (428). In the same critique delivered by French actor Constant Coquelin in *L'art du Comedien* (1887), Stebbins reiterates that the actor Henry Irving was someone who, no matter what role he performed, was “always distinctly Irving” (1902, 428). Coquelin felt that Irving’s individuality eclipsed the roles he played (Carlson 1993, 234). For those in the theatre world, they would have been aware that Stebbins’ commentary was drawing from public arguments between Coquelin and Irving, and that she was siding with Coquelin (their debates as noted in Carlson, 234).

As Stebbins explains, “the actors’ art is to express in well-known symbols what an individual man may be supposed to feel; and we, as spectators, recognizing these expressions, are drawn in sympathy. In other words, we respond to the mental ideal of the actor, and so form a magnetic rapport with his artistic creation” (1902, 429). Stebbins expected actors to be reflective in creating their role and consistent in their performance so that fellow actors could rely on this mastery. Coquelin explains that great acting requires self-mastery and the ability to express feelings at will. Coquelin follows Diderot’s thoughts on the actor’s paradox, in which the actor is meant to display the *illusion of feeling* instead of relying on their own emotions which can be unpredictable. By imitating and creating an illusion of a character’s sentiments, feelings emerge as a result, yet the actor maintains control by being the master of such emotions.

In Marvin Carlson's study of theatre theorists from Greece to present day (1993), he includes important contributions in 19th century France. In one paragraph he notes Delsarte's notoriety (but doesn't cite any source material). He assesses that his codified work, as it was handed down by his descendants, had a contradictory impact from Delsarte's original intent and claims his method is now synonymous with "mechanical, arbitrary expressions and gestures, the very thing it was created to prevent" (1993, 218). Even in the late 19th century, Stebbins stated that while the Delsarte System was mocked, "ridicule is not proof, and a sneer is not an argument" (1902, 439). She concludes that his system, more than any other, "analyzes form, poise and gesture, not as expressed in the individual" but in the collective to create 'types.' Stebbins felt that Delsarte was completely misunderstood. In his defense, she argues that he insisted on systematic training and "correct knowledge of gesture," and that through a union of emotion and artistic choice the art of dramatic expression emerges (1902, 443). She also notes that these ideas were common in the art of elocution, and in the skill development for an actor.



Fig. 108. Theatre rehearsal. *Harper's Weekly*, October 1888, 797.

Stebbins asks, “how shall the artist translate the passion which he is called upon to express?” (1902, 58). Stebbins explains, “All things visible are the expressions of an interior spiritual essence; but not all that is in the interior is expressed on the surface” (1888, 9). Therefore, an artist uses bodily gestures, postures, and movements to represent emotions, spiritual expression or specific ideas. Stebbins wanted Delsarte’s pantomimic expression to be organized in a manner that students could use it as an acting technique. Many illustrations in various Delsarte manuals provide ‘static’ representations of various ‘attitudes of expression’ such as delight, antagonism, aloofness, or compassionate concern. Yet, these ‘attitudes,’ and pantomimic exercises were designed for a student to embody expression as a tool for learning, that could then be used in an unconscious, natural manner on the stage.

Stebbins wrote that the goal was one of “unconscious cerebration” [...] acquired by a patient practice of the technique, as a singer studies her scales” (1902, 91). She said, remember, “Genius has been defined as the ‘power of taking great pains’” and the artist is meant to cultivate himself (91). She continues to explain that “every expression of the face, every gesture, and posture of the body, corresponds to, or is but the outer expression of, an inner emotion or condition of the mind, be it one of beauty or ugliness” (1888, 10). “Esthetic culture is an art,” says Stebbins, and the “finished artist in this department of expression, whether singer, orator, or actor [...] has “control over the whole apparatus, by whose means the sensations of life, the ideas of mind, and the affections of the soul, are revealed. Knowledge of the apparatus makes the critic; possession yields control. Add to knowledge and possession, control, and you have an artist” (1902, 418). Stebbins’ concepts of ‘dramatic culture’ were well known by American Delsartians whether they be elocutionists, actors or educators. Her advocacy of acting theories through the Delsartian creative practices she developed greatly influenced schools of thought for

in New York and elsewhere. Stebbins has been overlooked by theatre historians that either claim that Delsartism turned into a fad that faded from existence as some sort of feminine folly, or MacKaye is credited for his teaching and theatre innovations. But both can be true, as Stebbins' influence was also tangible. Her publication was likely even used as a textbook in the Lyceum Theatre school, later renamed the American Academy of Dramatic Arts– noted as the first acting school in America. Notably, Mary Thompson taught at the Lyceum school as did others who have studied with Stebbins. However, the impact of American Delsartism on late 19th century theatre is another avenue for further research.

Salons, Club Women, and Society Support:

Performing and Teaching

At some point in 1886, Stebbins returned to Paris to meet with Delsarte's widow and obtained some of Delsarte's papers. The next edition of her book includes the addition of these materials (Ruyter 2000, American National Biography Online). Nothing else is known about that trip. In 1887, building on her popularity as an author of *Delsarte System of Expression*, and her background as an established actress, Stebbins began performances at Madison Square Theater in 'Delsarte matinees.' She joined her colleague Mary Thompson who gave oratorical presentations and exquisite "bird songs" while Stebbins gave solo performances of monologues, artistic statue posing, and dance. In 1886 Stebbins and Thompson taught from a location at 32 Waverly Place next to Washington Square Park, then in 1887 the school moved further uptown to 34 West 30th Street. This chapter considers society women's support for Stebbins, her performances between 1887–1890, a Delsarte spoof, Stebbins' second publication *Society Gymnastics*, the essence of grace, and a contentious statue posing debate.

On April 22, 1887, the *New York Commercial Advertiser* reported "Madison Square Theater was crowded from floor to ceiling yesterday at the Delsarte matinee given by Miss Genevieve Stebbins and Mary Thompson, who certainly, if they owe their grace to Delsarte, are living proofs of the value of that system." As theatre scholar Marlis E. Schweitzer explores in *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and American Culture* (2009),⁴³⁶ 'matinee culture' catered largely to a feminine sphere, as women were allowed to see shows together during the day. Streetwalkers prowled the sidewalks at night along with crafty pickpockets, so

⁴³⁶ University of Pennsylvania Press.

daytime activities were safer and less ‘sketchy’ for women to attend with friends. Schweitzer notes that box office receipts for matinee performances often exceeded evening shows, demonstrating an important consumer purchasing power of women at the turn of the century (2009, 41). By 1910, 75% of legitimate theater audiences were women who went to the theater to “indulge their own tastes and interests” (39). This led some men to express their distaste for the feminization of the theatre, as theatres were transformed from rambunctious male clubs with brash working-class women to a space for family matinee entertainment and shows for fashionable female audiences.⁴³⁷



Fig. 109. “Costumes to be worn in a Theatre Box,” *Harpers Bazar*, March 6, 1897, 201.

As Schweitzer explores, women in the audience often came to the theatre to admire the actresses on stage costumed in the latest fashionable dresses from London and Paris. The

⁴³⁷ Richard Butsch, “Bowery B’hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences.” *American Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1994): 374-405.

emerging commercial fashion industry relied on Broadway stars modelling new fashions on the stage, in a similar manner today when celebrities wear new designer clothes at award shows. After afternoon theatre shows, ‘matinee girls’ would spill out in the streets to shop on Broadway and try to find dresses to emulate the fashions of their favorite leading lady (166). The world of theatre and the world of fashion provided an atmosphere of possibility, and desirability that could be acquired through one’s attire and a cultured presentation of self. In a similar way to how actresses present different characters on the stage, department stores held fashion shows with female models wearing fashions demonstrating various ‘character types’ through the manner of her walk, her composure, and attitude in a kind of “performativity of class” (Schweitzer 115).

As Delsarte scholar Carrie Streeter found, Stebbins and Thompson were supported by prominent society women as sponsors of their matinees, including Caroline Gallup Reed and Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta, “a poet and host of an influential literary salon and early advocate for Sorosis,” one of the first professional women’s clubs established in 1869 (2023, 79). Other supporters included Arabella Huntington, wife of the railroad tycoon C.P. Huntington, and “Susan Moore Fields, daughter-in-law of the telegraph pioneer Cyrus Fields.” (Streeter notes it is likely Susan Fields who joined their trip in 1881. Susan Fields and Stebbins were the same age and could have been good ship companions and friends).

Mrs. Reed established a boarding and day school between Madison and Fifth Avenue in 1864 before the school was transferred near Sixth Avenue and 53rd street. By 1883 it was incorporated as Reed’s College. Students were historically drawn from “families of the highest social and intellectual culture” such as the Vanderbilt’s, etc., with students from ages 8–16, plus

a collegiate four-year program. It was one of the most prestigious schools in NYC.⁴³⁸ Stebbins taught at Reeds and was later provided with a letter of recommendation when she opened her New York School of Expression. Reed wrote after Stebbins publication of the *Delsarte System of Expression* came out; she asked Stebbins to teach at her college. Reed's expectations were exceeded. Stebbins said she taught at seven of the most prominent New York schools, one of which said they expected their teachers of elocution and physical culture to be able to teach in an inspiring manner, thoroughly know literature to conduct reading classes, organize (and choreograph) commencement ceremonies, oversee the gymnasium classes including aesthetic gymnastics and other forms of physical culture (school brochure, 1893, 10).

Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta appreciated Stebbins' performances to such an extent that she "hired her to instruct twice-weekly 'Delsarte' classes for herself and her friends, many of whom were surely members of Sorosis" (Streeter 2023, 79). Streeter found mention of a letter written to Stebbins in 1888 from Botta expressing her genuine respect for Stebbins' teachings. This extraordinary fact cannot be underestimated. Botta knew everyone from 'high society,' and she supported those in literary, theatre, and artistic circles— helping to launch many careers in Manhattan by serving to advocate for artists and connect artists with editors, art dealers, etc. Botta commended Stebbins' restorative exercises for their ability to rest the nerves and reserve vital force for economy of movement. Botta's weekly salon in Greenwich Village was held for over forty years, filled with literary celebrities such as Margaret Fuller, Louisa May Alcott, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson who spoke of her as being "one of the happiest rainbows" (1893, 178).⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Edited by John Leonard, *Woman's Who's Who of America I* (1914), 677.

⁴³⁹ *Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta: Written by her Friends, with selections from her correspondence and from her writings in prose and poetry*. J. Selwin Tait and Sons, 1893.



Fig. 110. In Thomas Read, *Female Poets of America* (Philadelphia), 1849, 265. The Library Company of Philadelphia. Circa 1847. Fig. 111. Carline Gallup Reed, circa 1892 oil on canvas, Monmouth Historyemuseum.com

Greatly admired as a hostess, Botta was said to be full of life, ready to enjoy new ideas like “grace of movement from the exponents of Delsarte” (1893, 176). I would imagine Louise Clappe (the same age as Botta) and Stebbins were welcomed either as guests to Botta’s salons or as performers to deliver recitations or lecture on various subjects. Stebbins could have performed statue posing or a dance. Her memoir has commentary by Andrew Carnegie, and fifty other loving friends. Notably, Botta invited Edgar Allan Poe to her salon where he first recited ‘The Raven’ (193) and his friendship with her garnered him the nickname of ‘Lynchie’ (1893, 173). Botta welcomed elites to her gatherings along with bohemian “artists in every department—painting, poetry, sculpture, and music” and ““queer people,’ all mixed together” in evenings filled with “music, dancing, recitation, and conversation” (165, 175). She was also known as a poet (Poe admired her work) and sculptor (117). Botta warmly welcomed a mixed crowd of ‘unknowns,’ besides those of the nouveaux riche, individuals from family lineages of early American settlers (such as Julia Ward Howe), and the “most diverse social elements” (1893,

194). Botta was also an outspoken feminist awarding authors whose work promoted women's causes, organized with the Academie Française as the Prix Botta.⁴⁴⁰

Seldarte Craze

In 1887, the same year that Stebbins' Delsarte matinee performances were garnering praise for the Delsarte System, MacKaye's 'Delsarte' acting methods were ridiculed in a one-act comedy. George Baker's *Forty Minutes with a Crank* satirically illustrates the 'Seldarte Craze' of realistic acting and obviously positions MacKaye as its target of humor (1887/2nd edition 1889). In the opening scene, one of the professors' students, Miss 'Minnie Moneybags,' is working on a recitation behind the scenes while a maid on stage responds to what she overhears. The professor rehearses Moneybags in the recitation of *The Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight* before commanding her to "Now swing!" She is comically meant to swing on a large bell situated backstage, but visible above a center stage curtain is only the top edge of the bell swinging back and forth. The bell is a stage prop built from a rope and painted black cardboard, swung by stagehands behind the scenes while Moneybags is 'heard' shouting oh, oh!!! while she struggles to hold onto the bell as it swings back and forth. The maid on stage states, "she won't do, she can't hold her own," which is her tongue and cheek way of saying that Moneybags' ambitions for the stage are doomed to fail. The maid shares that she herself came to pursue fame in the theatre but gave up her ambitions and likened the school to a "torture chamber" (5). When the swinging stops, Moneybags enters centerstage rubbing her aching shoulders and complaining that she nearly dislocated her shoulder blades. Moneybags is 35 years old, grey haired, but costumed to look young with an old face. The professor (meant to parody MacKaye)

⁴⁴⁰ <https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/fr/html/anne-lynch-botta-une-americaine-paris>

compliments her, saying “You have grace,” and she giggles in response– “Oh! You flatter me!” The professor comments, “You have booty. Ahem! (Correcting himself) Beauty!” and proceeds to eagerly take her money in payment for her lesson (1887, 6).



Fig. 112. *The Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight*, illustration of the poem of Rose Hartwick Thorpe (1882).

Delsarte scholar Taylor Lake notes the bell scenario is likely a comedic take on a popular poem *The Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight* from 1882, commonly recited at the time. In this poem a young woman saves her lover who was meant to be shot when the bell tolled. However, she saves him from his untimely death by climbing up the bell tower to acrobatically silence the bell as it swings (2002, 94). In *Strange Duets: Impresarios and Actresses in the American Theatre, 1865–1914*, author Kim Marra likens the bell episode to some sort of pornographic torture chamber instead of the rather obvious caricature of the poem although two characters mention aspects of the poem (1882, 5&6). Marra claims that female pupils were “experiencing sensations and reactions” in their lessons and were thereafter eager to seek out weekly masturbatory

“massages at the gynecologic clinic.” In a critical review of Marra’s book, Rosemarie Bank notes Marra provides no evidence for this assertion,⁴⁴¹ and certainly a doctor’s client list would be likely impossible to attain. Marra does not make the connection with the spoof representing MacKaye who had been critiqued by the theatre profession for fleecing female clients. Instead, she likens another theatre impresarios’ personal pornographic interests with the idea that students pursued their own sexual pleasure.

While women could obtain vibratory stimulation as early as 1869 (with an invention by Dr. George Taylor), it was usually used by a doctor for a diagnosis of hysteria.⁴⁴² Marra also likens Stebbins’ publication *The Delsarte System of Expression* as focusing “obsessive attention to specific body parts and how to manipulate them.” She then asserts that Stebbins’ guidance “obversely mirrors the anatomical elaborations in the lesbian instruction scenes of pornographic novels” popular with men at the time (2006, 175). However, Stebbins is not sexually guiding her students, and if she were to have done such a thing as an educator one would think there would have been quite a row and outcry by parents. But this is not to say that Stebbins’ shied away from discussing female body parts, as she has a published exercise designed to “invigorate the ovaries,” by advising women to breathe deeply and to use their second finger from each hand, to press down vigorously in the region of the ovaries, while willing energy into the ovaries” (1913, 31). I would not consider her exercises to be sexual ‘manipulations,’ but rather physical work intended to engage bodily awareness. Delsarte scholar Taylor Lake describes Stebbins’ pedagogy as aiming at “nothing less than the total regeneration of the female body, mind, and soul. She did this by combining the physical culture movements promise of a healthy body, the New Thought Movements promise of spiritual regeneration, and the elocution movements promise of a middle-

⁴⁴¹ *Theatre History Studies* 28 (2008): 191.

⁴⁴² Rainey Horwitz, *Medical Vibrators for treatment of female hysteria*, Arizona State University, 2020.

class respectability based on the aesthetic principles of art, beauty and good taste” (2008, 18).⁴⁴³

This is not to say that Stebbins or her students did not freely embrace sexual experience, but advocating for such is unknown.

“Society Gymnastics”

In 1888, Stebbins’ book *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture: Adapted from the Delsarte System* was published by Edgar Werner. It was dedicated to Caroline Reed in acknowledgement of her support for her work. The book was so popular it went through 6 editions in 1888. In an advertisement for *Society Gymnastics*, Stebbins mentions years of teaching at girl’s schools such as “Mrs. Sylvanus Reed’s and Miss Graham’s, etc., of New York— and in kindergarten schools— Prof. Felix Adler’s, etc. of New York.” Her teachings were said to “correct awkwardness or stiffness, whether proceeding from self-consciousness or timidity, and eliminate disagreeable qualities from the speaking voice, such as nasality, harshness or shrillness of any kind.”⁴⁴⁴ As Streeter notes, Stebbins’ pedagogy was backed by prominent professional women including Anna Randall Diehl and Reed, both leading members of the influential women’s club Sorosis and founders of prestigious girl’s school (2023, 70). Sorosis members included prominent women “journalists, educators, and patrons of the arts” (70). *Soror* is Latin for sister, and sorosis is the name for a multiple flowering fruit. Sorosis, the leading women’s club in the nation, notably succeeded with their initiative for members to be able to dine together in upscale restaurants, motivated after three women journalists were not allowed to dine at an event at

⁴⁴³ Taylor Lake, “Mapping Meaning, Making Being: Genevieve Stebbins Delsartism and the Performance of Womanliness.” Conference Papers 94th National Communication Association, San Diego, CA, 2008.

⁴⁴⁴ Nov 1889, *Werner’s* (at this date she also taught at 1244 Broadway).

Delmonico's. The restaurant later allowed the first ever public dinner for women and famously hosted the Sorosis club dinners thereafter.

Felix Adler, who recommended Stebbins as an educator, was a social reformist and founder of the Society for Ethical Culture and rector at the Ethical Culture School which taught a free kindergarten class for working class children. He advocated for civil liberties and served on boards which later evolved into the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Stebbins, like Adler and Reed, believed that altruism stemmed from eliciting the best from oneself to correspondingly stimulate the best from others.

Paige Van Osdol argues Delsarte culture focused on "women's physical, mental and spiritual health" and promoted "women's educational liberation" in the "public and political roles American women hoped to play as they entered the more progressive age of the twentieth century" (2012, 64, 65). When Stebbins was observed teaching middle-aged women in a 'philosophical class,' Elsie Wilbor, assistant editor to *Werner*, watched the students enjoying the exchange of ideas in an intellectual atmosphere. In a highly gendered society where women were generally not encouraged to attend higher education nor allowed to engage in the 'professions,' Wilbor expressed the desire that men would not laugh or make fun of these women. "Would men dare laugh at a blind man trying to independently walk through the streets? Why shouldn't women study philosophical ideas?" Wilbor argues, "Let women study philosophy, Theosophy, moral laws or anything she will, so that she is taken outside of herself. She may make mistakes in the beginning; who does not?" (cited in Van Osdol 2012, 30). Stebbins' work was intended to encourage discovery of a connection between the imagination and soul, to connect the body and mind, and to journey inward to find the 'higher self,' advocating a path towards self-actualization

and that which is greater than oneself. Stebbins' aesthetic philosophy provided the foundation for her pedagogy and feminine expressivity.

It is worth noting, in 1888 Stebbins married Joseph A. Thompson, who is thought to be Mary Thompson's brother. They remained married until 1892. Nothing is known about him and their marriage other than a finding by historian Carrie Streeter. She found a novel narrative in which the couple was said to support each other's careers, and that they decided to not have live-in servants but hired help for only an hour a day. They took responsibility for household chores "shared equally." Stebbins's husband also expressed interest in cooking which was unusual for the time (2023, 71). Stebbins was therefore sometimes referred to as Mrs. Thompson.

In 1888, Stebbins advertised teaching at 32 Waverly Place, near Washington Square. At this time there were around 30 Delsarte teachers across the nation, according to Edgar Werner. Stebbins also set a hair trend in the Madonna Bow style, said to be "pretty" and she "set the seal of popularity upon it." The hairstyle resembles a bow and is held in place by wire ribbon.



Fig. 113. *Harrisburg Telegraph*, April 4, 1888, 2.

The *New York Times* mentions Stebbins' third edition of *The Delsarte System of Expression* noting she wrote with an "agreeable colloquial style, as a teacher might talk to a pupil." They

argued that whatever the value of Delsarte's 'rules' may be, "actors today would be much better equipped for their work if they had followed a course of study similar to that prescribed by Miss Stebbins in this book" (January 1888, 112). They continue by saying the value of the book "lies in the fact that it will teach aspirants of the stage to think" (112). Young actors were encouraged to find a place for Stebbins book in their home library "alongside that wonderful exposition of a great actor's mind, *The Diary of William Charles Macready*." This is a notable statement, as Stebbins has not been considered as a significant contributor within the history of American theatre educational developments. Instead, her publication is credited to the genius of MacKaye or Delsarte. Modernism in American theatre has also been credited to the elocutionist S.S. Curry (who was not involved with theatre productions),⁴⁴⁵ while others assert that the influence of American Delsartism in the evolution of American theatre was negligible (2009, 170).⁴⁴⁶ For example, Julia Walker asserts that Curry was responsible for having "inspired the 'expressive culture movement,' a broad based program of personal and social reform advocating the performing arts as a means of overcoming the alienating conditions of modernity" (2005, 5). She continues to explain that because expression was "feminized within the cultural imaginary" [sic] it ultimately was "deemed unworthy of serious scholarly attention such that it was little more than a footnote" in American theatre history. As stated previously, theatre historians have not investigated how Stebbins' exercises were utilized in late 19th century schools of acting or oratory. Moses True Brown (principal of the Boston School of Oratory), used Stebbins expressive exercises and 'drills' such as the serpentine drill, harmonic poise, and feather

⁴⁴⁵ Julia Walker, *Expression and Modernism in the American Theatre: Bodies, Voices, Words* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Christopher Bigsby and Don Wilmet, eds., *The Cambridge History of American Theatre* (1998), 448. Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig, eds., *The Facts on File Companion to American Drama* (Facts On File Inc., 2010), 340. Arthur Bartow, ed., *Training of the American Actor* (Theatre Communications Group, 2006). Claudia Springer and Julia Levinson, eds., *Acting* (Rutgers University Press, 2015).

⁴⁴⁶ Michael Schwartz, *Broadway and Corporate Capitalism: The Rise of the Professional-Managerial Class, 1900–1920* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

movements.⁴⁴⁷ Brown recommended her book *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture* saying it was a “gem.”

The high regard Stebbins’ students held her in was one of reverence. One author said it was inspiring to speak with them and read their expressions of gratitude. Stebbins was said to exude “cheerfulness” and to radiate “hope and success.” She was described as having a combination of “sanguine and encephalic temperaments,” was “highly organized, of peculiarly fine nerve fiber,

highly developed on the spiritual and moral as well as mental and physical planes, and possess the intuitional sense that is requisite in a teacher of the ideals she represents. She is very natural in her manner, entirely devoid of artificiality, but gives you the sense of being in the presence of a master mind.

I meant to spend a half hour with her, and two hours found me still interested and unwilling to leave her presence. She really charmed me so completely that my soul has gone out to her ever since our interview. [...] Her voice is magnetic and very sweet: her manner is reassuring and helpful; her knowledge does not oppress but encourages you, and you feel that with her help you can accomplish all that is possible. (“The New York School of Expression,” *Physical Culture* 1900, vol II, 68–70).

With this sort of temperament, it makes sense that Stebbins’ teachings were so popular, and students greatly enjoyed her presence.

Embodying Grace

Stebbins states, “All bodily grace should flow from an inner source; but that the channels may be choked, and a system of training is necessary to free those channels” (*Society Gymnastics* 1888, 11). Stebbins demonstrated her principles of ‘grace’ in her Madison Square Theatre performances with her co-worker Mary Thompson. Several reviews state

Each of these young women stands in New York at the head of her respective branch of the art of expression. Many of the incompetent teachers of Delsartism understand the philosophy of Delsarte's principles well enough but are wholly unable to demonstrate them. The great thing in Mrs. and Miss Thompson's favor is that they show what superb grace and delicious tone are, and as an educational influence that is worth a library of works (*N. Y. Graphic*, March 21, 1888).

⁴⁴⁷ *Boston Post*, May 18, 1887, 5.

Other reviews state, “Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Thompson succeeded simply by the exercise of exquisite grace” (N. Y. World), and “with great intelligence” (N. Y. Tribune).⁴⁴⁸ Elocutionist

Henry Davenport Northrop posits

Be the mind never so well trained, profound and agile in thought, if the body, its medium of manifestation, be uncultivated, muscles stiff and inert, and unable to respond quickly and intelligently to the mental impulses, the result must be awkwardness, weakness, and inaccuracy of gesture. Cultivate the muscles, rendering the whole physique in every part pliable and quick to respond to the emotions, and there will be naturally the conformity to the laws which Delsarte primarily deduced from nature (*Delsarte Speaker of Modern Elocution*, 1895, 26).

An essential component of aesthetic physical culture included teaching students how to embody grace. Stebbins argues “natural inborn grace is one thing, however, natural inborn awkwardness quite another” (1902, 414). To overcome awkward behavior, instruction began with understanding “correct bearing” and carriage of the body.



Fig 114. Slouching posture with sunken chest/ribcage compressing diaphragm and arms pulled forward.

Fig 115. Rigid posture with shoulders raised and immobile, creating tension in the upper back and neck.

Fig 116. Graceful and ‘Natural’ Poise- chest is lightly lifted, shoulders relaxed, and arms fall easily into place.

⁴⁴⁸ Advertisement in *Wilbor’s Delsarte Recitation Book and Directory* 1890, 311.

It was integral to be aware of the body as an “outward manifestation of the impression you wish to create daily and hourly” (Morgan 1889, 12).⁴⁴⁹ Grace was also known as “Harmonic Poise,” seen in the turn of the neck, the wrist, curve in the torso, and overall bodily bearing.



Fig. 117. Example of graceful ‘Harmonic Poise.’ Standing leg bears the weight of the body while the torso pulls slightly away as the neck/head inclines in direction of standing leg. Stebbins included Minerva in the *Delsarte System of Expression* (1902), from a photo taken at the Louvre. Pallas de Velletri; Statue of Minerva; Print on paper; from the Musée des Antiques, vol. 1. By Pierre Bouillon, 1810. Victoria and Albert Museum. Fig. 118. Statue of Aphrodite, metmuseum.org, Public Domain, 3rd-2nd century BCE, Gift of Francis Neilson, 1942.

Stebbins began her lessons with exercises to shake out nervous energy and muscular holding before exploring aesthetic exercises. Harmonic poise included exploring how weight transfers through the body and shifts the head and torso slightly as a result. For example, *while standing, shift weight to the right side. When weight is transferred over to one leg, it is known as the standing or ‘strong’ leg (the leg that bears the weight of the body). Slowly shift weight to the left and slowly back to the right (repeat 6x) to explore the sense of weight transferring. Next slowly move side to side and try to find an ‘S like’ curving action through the spine/torso (from tailbone to top of head) as the body sways right to left in effortless motion. Next, allow the head*

⁴⁴⁹ *An Hour with Delsarte* (Lee and Shepard, 1889).

to gently lean side to side in the direction of the standing leg, while the torso pulls in opposition.

The end goal is to find how the head/spine/torso moves like an interior rippling wave, as the weight is shifted between the feet. Movements should be subtle, avoiding stiffness or awkwardness, and performed with effortless ease and flow. The poise series is performed with feet placed forward and back, on the diagonal, and with heels together (with side to side, front/back, and diagonal shifts of weight and rippling undulations of spine, torso and head). Harmonic poise exercises were also known as ‘Harmonic Gymnastics.’ Streeter provides images from 1891 of Harmonic Gymnastics (2023, 67), yet it should be said that these exercise examples had evolved from what they began as in the late 1870’s. The images from Charles Wesley Emerson show full backbends and forward bends which would have been more of the Delsarte-Ling-Stebbins work that Ruyter speaks of in her analysis of how these kinds of exercises evolved over time (1999, 109). Notably, in an advertisement for Stebbins’ 6th edition in 1888, Dr. Charles Emerson is quoted as saying “The work is original, eloquent, and fascinating. The chapter on ‘The Power of the Imagination’ is worth the price of the book. Godspeed the book and its author!” (*Werner’s* January 1888). Therefore, clearly Emerson was aware of Stebbins’ work, and most likely even used it as a textbook in his own teachings.

‘Savoir-vivre’

In a similar manner to social etiquette guidebooks, in *Society Gymnastics* Stebbins provides women with tips on how to transform their status in society. Learning culturally coded behaviors allowed for a way ‘in’ to ‘society.’ Entering a room with a graceful presence reflected shared values amongst dignified people— as a manner of embodied knowing. Salon etiquette included

knowing how to extend proper greetings, walk amongst a room of guests, to sit with ease, and rise to stand with the appearance of little effort.

Certain ritualized actions were signs of “corporeal codes of civilité,” as scholar Erica Christine Schawer explores in “Meaning in Motion: Curtsies, Cotillions and Counter Ritual in the Belle Epoque.”⁴⁵⁰ Women engaged in transformative experiential learning by exercising physical expression, as a way of forging new identities. In so doing, Schawer asserts, these women were not simply puppets unable to think for themselves, rather, they were the ones “pulling the strings” by applying what they learned (22). I agree with Schawer’s assessment that women utilized codes of etiquette as a power play, and that their actions were not “sartorial” but somatic (24). She draws from Simone de Beauvoir’s insight “on ne naît pas bourgeois, on le devient” (111), that is, one might not be born into an elite class of society, however, one can learn how to be bourgeois by choosing how to present oneself in an elegant and dignified manner. Acquired manners is a way of demonstrating “savoir-vivre” (22). Even, or especially, young children in French society, no matter from what social class, were meant to be well-raised and respectful with elders in their community.

‘*Savoir-vivre*’ suggests Judith Butler concept of ‘performativity,’ which builds on Michel Foucault’s theory of how hegemonic culture influences the production of identity. Delsarte scholar Taylor Lake situates Butler as combining the Foucauldian “critique of the body/soul with psychoanalytical theories of desire to argue that behaviors, and the identity of those behaviors. are assumed to express are performative.” Butler specifically includes sex, gender, and the ‘queering of identity’ in her analysis and explores subjectivity as existing in a ‘interior space’ as a “phantasized locale” in which the subject’s performance creates an illusion of appearance. The

⁴⁵⁰ 2008, University of Nebraska Lincoln.

concept of ‘illusion’ is much like ‘masking’ for diverse sexualities within heteronormative society and for neurodiverse peoples, when they find ways of hiding their actualities to create a more acceptable ‘face’ to present to society. Lake notes that gender theorist Susan Bordo found both Foucault’s and Butler’s thesis failed to address “historical specificity of cultural processes.” Bordo stresses that it is necessary to examine culture as something that exists “at that time and in that place” to speak to particular eras without the bias of ‘presentism’ (2002, 12). Lake argues that historical specificity and the idea of an ‘interior body’ and embodied subjectivity is not solely ‘Foucauldian,’ but found within histories of acting and theatre production (and additionally dance history). American Delsarte practices allowed women to explore gesture as visual codes and to examine the “social performance of femininity.” Yet, beyond coded ‘femininity,’ Delsartism also “provided women a sense of liberation and self-control” (Lake 2002 22, 24). Delsartism was certainly a way of learning coded social behaviors either for ‘society’ or for the dramatic stage, but overall Stebbins’ aim was meant to provide the practitioner with an avenue to advance self-awareness, personal expression, to develop an individual voice, and ultimately manifest a life that one desires. For Stebbins, to present oneself in an artful manner was not for vanity’s sake, but rather to sense the divine within and to outwardly express an “interior spiritual essence” (1888, introduction).

In upper- and middle-class white society in the 19th century, men and women lived within separate ‘spheres’ of existence. In the women’s movement (from mid to the turn of the century) women’s goals were to protect civic rights, social freedoms, gain access to higher education and remunerative occupations, be accorded the right to hold public office, and of course the right to vote. Women were expected to be accompanied by a male escort in public places to ensure their safety and respectability. Men gave women deference in social situations. Women were

symbolically held in high regard, they were seated first at the table, older women were given the best seat and the best cut of meat, were served food first, and could have the last word in conversation (Schawer 2008, 48). Men removed their hats in greeting, made room for women on the sidewalk, and did not take a woman's hand until it was offered first. Men and women were expected to demonstrate their 'know-how' without a thought, as a way of demonstrating their proper upbringing. Young women did not walk alone in public, did not leave a room with a man on her own, and did not speak of romantic interests. At social dances/balls, women were not to refuse dances but danced with whoever asked or who was scheduled by the mothers on dance cards. Social propriety was an integral part of cosmopolitan community life.

By 1888 Stebbins's renown as a Delsarte teacher had reached across the nation. The *San Francisco Post* mentioned attending a ball and watching a "graceful pantomime based upon the Delsarte System." Two students were said to be preparing for the stage, others were teaching, and some society ladies took classes desiring to obtain "this physical culture so beneficial to health and ease of deportment." The author states they had been "studying the art for many months" and were particularly "pleased to receive from the author a newly issued work, The Delsarte System of Expression, by Miss Genevieve Stebbins."⁴⁵¹

Above and beyond learning expected social graces, mid- to upper class white women were the leading practitioners of aesthetic physical culture performing in salons, women's clubs, community centers, collegiate institutions, and in professional concert theatre contexts. Dance historians Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, Linda Tomko, Helen Thomas, and physical culture historians Patricia Vertinsky and Martha Verbrugge assert that aesthetic movement practices provided women cultural agency, significant leadership opportunities, and prominent teaching

⁴⁵¹ "Special Delsarte Number," (*The Voice*, 1888, 13), Press Notices of "Delsarte System of Expression" 2nd edition.

positions in their communities.⁴⁵² As Carrie Streeter explores, Stebbins' work and that of other Delsartians was supported and reported on by press women such as Eliza Putnam Heaton of the *New York Reporter* who had nationally syndicated publications. Heaton was vice-president of the Women's Press Club founded by Jane Croly (also founder of Sorosis) (2023, 89, 101-103).

Stebbins and Feminist Consciousness

Stebbins taught dignified inner strength, or what she called 'silent repose.' While *Society Gymnastics* may not seem to be a feminist manual, as it included prescribed behavioral codes of gendered action, I would nevertheless argue that Stebbins intended to advocate for women's empowerment. Stebbins was undoubtedly influenced by her 'mother' Louise Clappe in this regard. The impact of Clappe's intellectual influence can be examined through an article Clappe wrote titled "The Equality of the Sexes." Here she presents her views on the "much vexed question of the Equality of the Sexes, Women's Rights, Bloomerism or whatever one chooses to call the uncouth thing" (1845, 85).⁴⁵³ Clappe speaks to patriarchal ideology which views men and women as existing in separate gendered spheres with different roles to perform in society. She posits that although God designed men their own sphere and women their own "perfect

⁴⁵² Tomko 1999, 2017, 177; Vertinsky 2009, 1116, 2010, 1117; Verbrugge 1988, 163, 2012, 20. Patricia Vertinsky, "From Physical Educators to Mothers of The Dance: Margaret H'Doubler and Martha Hill," in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 7 (May 2010), 1113–1132. Patricia Vertinsky, "Transatlantic Traffic in Expressive Movement: From Delsarte and Dalcroze to Margaret H'Doubler and Rudolf Laban," in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 13 (Oct. 2009): 2031–2051. Martha Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Oxford University Press, 1988). Martha Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Linda Tomko, "Considering Causation and Conditions of Possibility: Practitioners and Patrons of the New Dance in Progressive Era America," in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris, eds. (Taylor and Francis, 2017). Linda Tomko, *Dancing class: gender, ethnicity, and social divides in American Dance, 1890–1920* (Indiana University Press, 1999). "American Delsartism: Precursor of an American Dance Art," in *Gymnastics, a Transatlantic Movement: From Europe to America*, Gertrude Pfister, ed. (Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2011), 127–143. Ruyter is the sole dance historian amongst physical culture and sports historians including Gertrude Pfister and Patricia Vertinsky.

⁴⁵³ In *Pioneer Magazine* under the name S**** sic, for Shirley, 1854, 85–88.

circle,” the higher power “hath not said that it was *inferior*.” Indeed, she retorts “Methinks it comporteth not with her dignity to assert an equality, which she should never stop to suppose could be questioned” (85).

Clappe is using “indirect feminist rhetoric” as Suzanne Bordelon argues in her critique of the *Shirley Letters* (2018) and as defined by Susan Kates (1994).⁴⁵⁴ Analyzing elements of Clappe’s rhetoric includes pondering motive and underlying subtext which reveals her utilization of strategic essentialism. Clappe subversively problematizes the idea of separate spheres to reveal “problematic aspects of imagined male ideals of domesticity and femininity” (Bordelon 2018, 454, 457). In sympathy for women’s suffering, Clappe writes, “We know there are women, and women of genius too, who weary of the soft, feminine character; who chafe and fret to madness against what they call the unjust thralldom of their own sphere” (87). In response she declares women need not reason with men regarding equality, because women are quite simply *of the higher sex*.

Clappe tells a metaphorical story in which the intellectual abilities of women are likened to birds, and men’s abilities to dogs. The story positions a bird and a dog at the bottom of a hill with the goal of getting to the top. The bird flies up the hill singing all the way and arrives in half the time, while the dog (said to be the “duller companion”) took his time. The dog inspects brush and briar, every tiny and perhaps rather insignificant detail sniffing to the top. Once, he arrives, he then proceeds to describe the minutia of his journey with the bird ad nauseum. But Clappe proclaims, in response, why on earth would a bird ruffle its feathers to *describe how it got there*?

⁴⁵⁴ Susan Kates, “Subversive Feminism: The Politics of Correctness in Mary Augusta Jordan’s *Correct Writing and Speaking* (1904),” *College Composition and Communications* 48 (1997): 501–17. Suzanne Bordelon, “Reflecting on Feminist Rhetorical Studies and the Covert Rhetoric of Anita Loos,” *JAC* 33, no. 3/4 (2013): 712–22. Jason Barrett-Fox, “Rhetorics of Indirection, Indiscretion, Insurrection: The ‘Feminine Style’ of Anita Loos, 1912–1925,” *JAC* 32, no. 1/2 (2012): 221–249

She argues that thousands of men would rather listen to the bird's melodious song rather than be bored with the "excessively dogged" stories of men and their wearisome "argumentative growlings." Conclusively, Clappe says "Methinks one would *rather* be a bird than a dog" (86).

Clappe questions why women would want to be in men's sphere anyways, where they aren't *welcomed*. Notwithstanding, she entered the male sphere without expecting a 'welcome' sign. She went to the mines, worked in public as an educator, was an advocate for higher education, and a public speaker. She worked partly out of necessity as her husband left their marriage, but also because she had the capability and the desire to invest in others as well as herself. She published work when women weren't welcomed as "public persuaders" and therefore "responded to such constraints by devising alternate tactics" to make her voice heard (Bordelon 2018, 450, 449).

In the same vein as Margaret Fuller (a close friend of Clappe's), she argues that both men and women can possess masculine and/or feminine qualities. For example, she looks to the character of Joan of Arc as a warrior, and in Louis XVI sees feminine traits. Granted, she says Louis XVI was put to death and despite Joan of Arc having "a hundred woman-won victories," she was rewarded with nothing but "the dungeon and the stake" (87). Nonetheless, Clappe states that Joan of Arc burned at the stake with "cheek unblenched" (meaning undaunted and unflinching). Women, she stressed, should likewise preserve their dignity and poise in the face of male fury. She calls out women's rights leaders, "Lucy Stone & Co., [Emma?]," for being overly loud and allowing their cheeks to get flushed in anger. While she was disappointed with their enraged dispositions, Clappe did admire feminists, most notably women's rights activist and journalist Margaret Fuller (Bordelon 2018, 245, 246).

In Clappe's realization, women need embody wise repose to speak from a position of serenity and deep confidence. But she acknowledges that even then, men will still snarl and complain, decrying women who "bear themselves too queenly." She says men will still demand women prove their worth. So, Clappe presents *as proof*, a comparison of the male and female intellect. She states, "since you *will* have proof, for once we will condescend to indulge you." To end her article, she therefore retorts in "six, breathing, burning lines which we have dilated in as many stupid pages" from Schiller's poem on the "Worth of Women:

**"Woman, contented in silent repose,
Enjoys in its beauty, life's flower as it blows ;
And waters, and tends it with innocent heart,
Far richer than man with his treasures of art ;
And wiser by far in her circle confined,
Than he with his triumphs and flights of the mind."**

Clappe argues for women to *maintain their composure*, for if women act overly emotional and lose their stoic demeanor, men will continue to perceive women as hysterical and weak. She insists women maintain a position of dignified higher consciousness as an expression of wisdom. Clappe's conclusion concerning "silent repose" is reflective of her 'daughter' Genevieve Stebbins' later teachings in the *embodiment of repose*.

Stebbins describes repose as an "indwelling vital activity" as opposed to "mere rest" from movement (1892, 78). Some of her exercises were done with students lying down on the floor to focus their attention on breathing. Students would find a place of calm breath and then commence a series of breathing exercises.

EXERCISE I.

PERFECT RELAXATION.

- (1) Lie prone upon the floor, letting the head rest upon the side of the face.
- (2) One leg should be partly drawn up at an angle, and the arms spread out in any listless manner, generally with palms up.
- (3) Completely relax every voluntary muscle and part.
- (4) Breathe as in Exercise I.
- (5) Suppose yourself a perfectly independent being, apart from your organism and much superior to it.
- (6) Do not acknowledge any involuntary sensation you may possess; ignore it completely as no part of your real self.
- (7) In this state, let the imagination play in an easy, dreamy way with any natural object near you, but under no circumstances allow it to notice any real person or mental problem.

EXERCISE II.

RECUPERATIVE RELAXATION.

- (1) Resume Positions 1 and 2 described in the preceding exercise.
- (2) Strongly formulate the positive idea that you are able to indraw the living, vital principle of nature to any extent; that, in fact, you are doing so.
- (3) Let this idea present itself clearly to your mind, until it produces a consciousness of itself within you.
- (4) Having reached this stage, which may require some minutes, instantly let the will become passive, and with the imagination produce, in an easy, dreamy way, a mental picture realizing perfect strength.

Fig. 119. Sample of Stebbins' exercises in *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892): 92, 93.

In Stebbins' conceptualization, repose did not mean to relax and lie about with no aim. Rather, repose was a way to gather force and energize the self while in a state of stillness. She states that repose is "of the soul" which not only possesses latent energy but is also able to gather and store vital energy. In her work, this indwelling energy can be invigorated through deep breathing exercises, by finding moments of stillness to allow for the recuperation of dynamic and mystic inner power (82). Stebbins examines repose as stillness with an *active purpose* as way to galvanize the "nerve-centers," collect scattered forces, and "reinvigorate the body" (80). The value of repose lies in recuperating exhausted energy, "stimulating calm self-control," and being "consciousness of self-possession" (91).

A prime example of "repose in action," was presented by Stebbins when she went before an antagonistic audience in 1897 at the National Association of Elocutionists Conference in New York City. Participants in the conference included two professors from Columbia University who brought a strange voice machine with rubber tubing, electric lights, shelves, and a large upright cylinder for voice experiments. Dr. S.S. Curry gave a lecture on his aims to organize a

history of American elocution, followed by a talk by Stebbins on the “Relationship of Physical Culture to Expression.” In her presentation, Stebbins stresses the value of studying classical statuary to explore bodily posture and poise. Stebbins encouraged students to take physical culture classes as a means of developing and refining their bodily intelligence. Historian Carrie Streeter assesses that Stebbins appealed to the audience to consider ‘statue-posing’ as an art form that rightfully entertained with beautiful “expressive motion” (2024, 136).

During Stebbins’ talk some in the audience took offence, and the hall was said to begin to rustle with whispered excitement. A sense of an incoming battle was “instinctively felt there was something in the air.” Mrs. Curry of Boston followed Stebbins’ presentation and took to the podium “with an Anthony Cumstock expression” (a man known for his anti-obscenity stance). She angrily declared that statue-posing led to the variety stage, exhibitionism, and trading of what women should hold sacred (meaning *their bodies*).

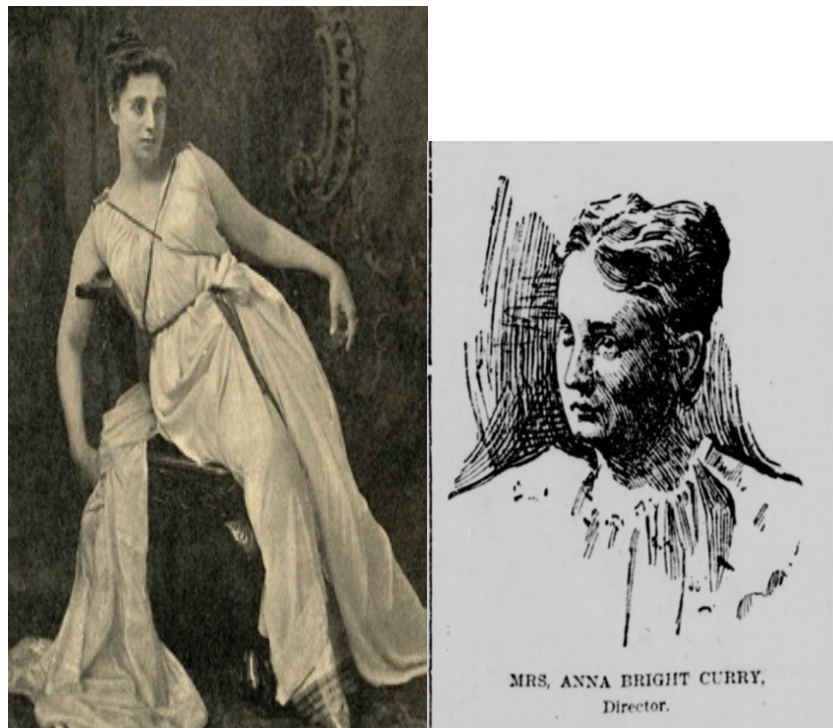


Fig. 120. Stebbins in *Werner's*, 1895, 870. Fig. 121. Curry's disapproving gaze. *New York Daily Tribune*, June 30, 1897, 5.

Physical culture,” announced Mrs. Curry, neither develops the body nor cultivates artistic ability. It develops affectations. It destroys a dramatic instinct. The grace aimed at is not an artistic grace, but simply a display of the physical perfection of women.”⁴⁵⁵ This led to a “spirited discussion” about the artistic value of statue posing, an art form that Stebbins was known for. Mr. Curry argued Stebbins’ pantomime, “rushing to the support of his wife, belongs to the circus alone.”

The hall was divided in opinion. Some women in the audience protested “against this public denunciation of Miss Stebbins!,”⁴⁵⁶ while another “rather prepossessing young woman” proclaimed that exposing the body was not a sign of degeneration, and justified her argument by saying that in ancient times nudity was not only acceptable but additionally the creation of nude statues was a high art!⁴⁵⁷ Mr. Curry concurred with his wife saying the style of Greek dress worn in statue posing was nothing more than “pandering to feminine vanity,”⁴⁵⁸ directly insulting Stebbins for her chosen attire. Stebbins came to the event wearing a soft cream Greek-like gown, with her bare arms exposed, much like the image from the previous page. Her dress would have been unusual for that time and place and was intentional on her part. For one, women at that time did not expose their arms. Her dress was in stark contrast to her opponent Mrs. Curry who wore a “severe black costume with somewhat forbidding headgear.” Stebbins was said to be the only woman in the hall without a hat.

The debate “waxed so hot it finally ended in a perfect fusillade of words.” Yet, amid the arguments, “one woman maintained her coolness and, in consequence, gained women’s dearest

⁴⁵⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “All Had Their Say: National Association of Elocutionists Battled for and Against High Art of Statue Posing,” June 30, 1897.

⁴⁵⁶ “The Only Women’s Pages: Elocutionists Assemble,” *New York Daily Tribune*, June 30, 1897, 5.

⁴⁵⁷ “Themes of Elocutionists: Interesting Debate on Physical Culture and Its Relation to Expression. Study of Antique Urged, The Day of No Clothes Was the Day of Art, Says One Speaker- Lessons from the Historical Method of Training,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1897, 12).

⁴⁵⁸ “All Had Their Say: Varying Views of Women on Physical Culture, National Association of Elocutionists Battled for and Against High Art of Statue Posing,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 1897.

privilege— the last word.”⁴⁵⁹ Stebbins closed the debate by taking to the floor, surveying “her breathless enemies calmly” to deliver her reply. She spoke of how the body reflects emotional states (and a journalist noted that the hall was indeed filled with distinct ‘physical signs’). Stebbins confidently, and in a poised manner, declared that each person is responsible for embodying the results of their own life study. She was clearly hinting at the idea that during public debate, angry outbursts were unacceptable and undignified. A mature and dignified individual should maintain their composure regardless of hot-tempered circumstances, and as such she was said to be a brave “warrior” who “snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.”

Suzanne Bordelon, a scholar specializing in feminist rhetoric, analyzed their argument. Earlier on, I referred to Bordelon’s insights on Clappe’s writing as a form of indirect feminist rhetoric. Regarding Stebbins, Bordelon similarly asserts that Genevieve drew on a “rhetorical strategy of contradiction” as she advocated for “female embodied rhetoric performance” in her artistic statue posing concert presentations (2019, 23).⁴⁶⁰ Stebbins describes artistic statue posing as a communicative art form, in which the body demonstrates the “idea of repose of an immortal soul” as can be found in iconic statue figures. Bordelon finds that Stebbins viewed the body as being capable of “possessing infinite capacity for expression” yet contrarily, the body also give “no definite expression except that of the capacity and power in reserve” (32, citing Stebbins 1902, 444). Bordelon sees Stebbins as employing the paradoxical notion that a body can be ‘both/and.’ In one sense the body can be emptied of thought and disembodied, while also alternatively allowing for the cultivated embodiment of transcendent ideals. As an accomplished artist, Stebbins was able to daringly dance the fine line between the absurd and sublime in her

⁴⁵⁹ “All Had Their Say, Varying Views of Women on Physical Culture,” *St. Louis Dispatch*, June 30, 1897.

⁴⁶⁰ “Female Embodiment, Contradiction, and *Ethos* in Nineteenth-Century Statue-Posing Arguments,” *Rhetoric Review* 38, no. 1, 23–38.

artistic statue posing performances. Dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter notes Stebbins advocated for artistic statue posing as being able to manifest “moral poise” and “noble ideas” in the mind (1999, 117, 1902, 456). Stebbins knowingly faced criticism of her work as immoral and licentious, while pushing the boundaries of what was deemed appropriate for women to do on a stage. The next chapter will finally begin to explore Stebbins’ dances more specifically to analyze and explore how her work contributed to establishing dance solos as a high art form.

The Dance as Yet Undreamed, Dreams of the Future.

Genevieve Stebbins, Aesthetic Dancer of the Antique.

Research focusing exclusively on Stebbins' statue-posing or dance performances are scarce (Bordelon 2019; Brandstetter 2015, 46–49; Ruyter 1973, 20–24, 1988, 1996, 1999, 45–56, 88–131). One of the goals of this dissertation has been to explore Stebbins' background prior to her emergence as a performer of solo works of her own creation. Without knowing her personal history as a well-educated woman with a decade of professional performance experience, it would be easy to dismiss Stebbins' role as a productive dancer and indeed she has been greatly misunderstood within American dance history.⁴⁶¹ This chapter sets out to investigate the creation of Stebbins' artistic aesthetic philosophy, her early artistic statue posing performances, dance as poetics, her 1892 publication, and the influence of the occult in her dance creations.

As previously explored, when Stebbins moved from acting in professional theatre to becoming an author and educator, her pedagogy was embraced by elite girls' schools, private salons, and in women's colleges. Her work coincided with other prominent American Delsarte educators who established their own careers in institutions such as the New York Chautauqua (Emily Bishop), Ohio Chautauqua (R. Anna Morris), Madame Albertis Delsarte School of Expression, New York City, whose student Gertrude Colby taught at Teachers' College, Columbia University, Georgen Aesthetic and Dramatic School, New York City (Eleanor

⁴⁶¹ Parts of this chapter pulls information previously published in an article under my former name Kelly Jean Mullan, © The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Dance Studies Association article, "Forgotten "New" Dancer of New York City's Gilded Age: Genevieve Lee Stebbins and the Dance as Yet Undreamed," *Dance Research Journal* 52, no.3 (2020): 97–117. No license required for excerpts used in a doctoral dissertation. Additionally, short excerpts and information is drawn from my publication as Kelly Lynch, "Aesthetic Dance as Woman's Culture in America at the turn of the Twentieth Century: Genevieve Stebbins and the New York School of Expression," *Feminist Modernist Studies* 5, no. 3 (2022): 247–60.

Georgen), The School of Personal Harmonizing (Mary Perry King), Hollins Institute (Edward Barbour), Curry College (Samuel Silas Curry), Lasell Seminary (Annie Payson Call), Boston School of Oratory (Moses True Brown, Clara Power Edgerly), The New York School of Acting (Franklin Sargent, Mary Thompson, Eleanor Georgen), and Wellesley College (Mary Currier). There were several other established educators, and the list is longer than supplied here. By the 1890's American Delsartism was truly a phenomenon, with students performing amateur demonstrations of statue posing, staged tableaux, pageants, and aesthetic dance performances.

Beginning in 1886, after a decade-long successful acting career, Stebbins began performing artistic statue posing utilizing dramatic movement and expressive gestures. She became known as a popular lecturer, covering such topics as the history of dramatic expression. Most significantly she created, interpreted, and performed 'ancient' Egyptian and Greek dances in a contemporary manner as aesthetic dances. She also created dance dramas and performed 'national' dances. According to Stebbins, Greek dances were referred to as pantomimes [dance dramas] seeing as they utilized movement and emotional expression in a symbolic manner.

Stebbins represented a new era of modernity drawing inspiration from ancient traditions. Her intellectual and artistic work engaged with aesthetics, psycho-physical culture, the occult/metaphysics, feminist consciousness, and gendered performance. She performed characters such as the Goddess Isis, Miriam the Prophetess, and Jephthah's Daughter dancing in costumes designed especially for her, in three or four acts with musical accompaniment.⁴⁶² Her solos personified iconic women informed by her studies in classical art, Christian theology, and Persian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman mystery religions. Decades before the term modern dance started to become in use (in the 1930s), journalists referred to Stebbins' solo performances as

⁴⁶² Ruyter 1999, 116, 125; *Werner's*, December 1893, 444.

‘new’ dance (meaning original), expressive, aesthetic, interpretive, or classical dancing (meaning inspired by classic myths), pantomimic dance, and dance dramas. The idea of what is ‘Modern’ is essentially relative to different eras in time, even with Stebbins being inspired by ‘ancient dance’ she presented her work in a contemporary manner. The *New York Times* said Stebbins intended “to bring out the art idea of grace and motion as exhibited in the old sculptures and in the ancient church, which was the theater where joy, lamentation, and all emotions were expressed in the dance. [She shows] how the motion of the body can be made to express what it used to do when dancing was a part of religious ceremonies” (December 22, 1893, 6). Another article notes Stebbins’ movements are “reminiscent of ancient religious dancing and that they represented a form of worship; All the poetry and religion of motion are expressed in it.”⁴⁶³ According to Stebbins, Greek dances were often referred to as pantomimes [dance dramas] seeing as they utilized movement and emotional expression in a symbolic manner.

Aesthetic Theory and Artistic Creation

Stebbins posits that aesthetics determines the manifestation of form, where “expression is artistically modified to harmonize with time, place, and character, when it becomes personified in living individuality” (1902, 379). In a similar manner, dance critic John Martin defines the theoretical foundations for modern dance as deriving from conceptions of Form, i.e., the creation of one’s artistic intent (Michel 1947, 129). As Stebbins explains, in performance, “the material form should correspond to the inner form (1887, 61) to create an artistic form.

Stebbins states, “the object of art, is to reproduce, by the action of a superior principle (ontology), the organic signs explained by semeiotics, and whose inherent fitness is estimated by

⁴⁶³ *The World*, January 26, 1894, 10.

aesthetics” (1902, 135). Stebbins argues that semeiotics studies sentiments emerging from an “inner impelling power” (137). To clarify her aesthetic theories, she maps out a series of thoughts. To sum up:

1. If, from a certain organic form, I infer a certain sentiment, that is *Semeiotics*.
2. If, from a certain sentiment, I deduce a certain organic form, that is *Aesthetics*.
3. If, after studying the arrangement of an organic form whose inherent fitness I am supposed to know, I take possession of that arrangement under the title of methods, invariably to reproduce that form by substituting my individual will for its inherent cause, that is *Art*.
4. If I determine the initial phenomena under the impulsion of which the inherent powers act upon the organism, that is *Ontology* (1902, 136).

Inspiration for the creative process, according to Stebbins, draws from “interior memory, that unconscious storehouse where inherited tendencies, traits, and aptitudes are found. At the call of art, this memory awakes from lethargy, and, without you having to again feel the emotion, forms the expression” (1887, 64). American Delsarte scholar, Taylor Lake posits that artists employ semiotics in creating their theatrical vocabulary of gestures and movements. Performing artists find appropriate gestural and emotional expression for ‘authentic’ portrayals in their roles. This basic concept is fundamental to an actor’s skillset in general that requires physical communication beyond words. Expression (i.e. artistic culture), in Stebbins view, relies on instinct, inspiration, and emotional consciousness as integral to the creative process.

Aesthetic appreciation on the other hand, includes initially ‘sensing’ art, which informs judgement and an assessment of ‘value.’ In essence, aesthetic appreciation involves the philosophy of art and psychology of ‘taste.’ Poets and philosophers have long explored the

nature of ‘beauty’ (or art) as a felt experience. Aesthetic experience for a reader of literature or viewer of art includes being uplifted by some sort of illusive excellence or awe-inspiring phenomena. The felt sense is irrational. A now obsolete French term, *chantepleur*, refers to a sense of experiencing joy and sorrow at the same time, such that you could sing and cry at once. Aesthetics includes bewildering experiences, like sensing the ‘eerie, surreal, or transcendent.’ The felt experience can move you to a place described as being ‘in between,’ i.e. liminality- where one can sense something magnificent without processing the moment consciously. Aesthetics is beyond something simply being ‘pretty or ugly,’ it is much more profound, related to elevated senses and the experience of anything ranging from astonished wonder to grievous knowledge. Stebbins cites author John Ruskin as an “apostle of light” who was able to assuage woe with his “burning words filled with fire and cheer” (1886, 223). Aesthetics in literature, theatre and visual art can involve the horrific or disgusting, where intense ‘negative’ emotions are created, and in this sense, aesthetics includes a range of experiences.

The etymology of Aesthetics is rooted in the Greek and Latin words *aisthetikos* ‘of sense perception’ from *aisthanesthai* ‘to perceive.’ 19th century aesthetics philosopher George Santayana argues, “beauty not perceived is a pleasure not felt, and a contradiction [...] because beauty is an emotional element” that is immediately perceived (1896, 41, 42). Aesthetic appreciation is often culturally determined, and changes over time in various social-cultural contexts. Santayana stresses that aesthetic perception is not universal but individual, seeing as what is ‘beautiful’ or awe inspiring for one, doesn’t mean another “ought to have the same experience” (1896, 39).⁴⁶⁴ Yet in general terms, witnessing the northern lights, the moon shining, or stars glittering can commonly be thought of as aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Roman orator

⁴⁶⁴ *The Sense of Beauty: Being an Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (Collier Books, 1896).

Symmachus argued, “We gaze up at the same stars, the sky covers all, the same universe encompasses us. What does it matter what practical system we adopt in our search for truth? Not by one avenue only can we arrive at so tremendous a secret” (384 C.E.). How we view ‘beauty’ and analyze ‘why it is so’ is ultimately determined by the viewer.

Stebbins defines aesthetics as an “account of beauty in nature and art,” and the human faculty “for enjoying” and even “originating beauty” through the creation of art (1888, 416). Aesthetic experience heightens the senses and can assuage a soul in need of grace. Einstein argued that the “most beautiful experience you can have is of the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. If you do not know it and can no longer marvel, you are as good as dead, and your eyes dimmed.”⁴⁶⁵ Truly heightened aesthetic experiences are transcendent, reflect an inner change of feeling, and can even initiate a shift in self-awareness.

As theologian Robert Doran terms it, “psychic conversion” is the recovery of the gift of the imagination which alters insight and thereafter, self-awareness (1990, 231).⁴⁶⁶ The spirit of beauty awakens a sense of delightful curiosity and expansive viewpoints, something which Doran calls “intentional objectivity.” This objectivity can refocus of one’s outlook, as one steps back from the ego and create a bird’s eye view to look at their life from a different angle. As such, when an individual processes an aesthetic experience, or the ‘out of the ordinary’ and consciously appreciates their emotions (from awe and delight to profound grief), the experience can alter personal awareness and one’s outlook on life. In Stebbins’ pedagogy, self-cultivation was integral, as was the joy of producing creative work to engage in aesthetic experiences.

⁴⁶⁵ As quoted in *After Einstein: Proceedings of the Einstein Centennial Celebration* (Peter Barker and Cecil G. Shugart, 1981), 179.

⁴⁶⁶ *The Notion of Psychic Conversion* (Theology and the Dialectics of History, University of Toronto Press, June 1990).

Stebbins' Philosophical Foundation for Aesthetic Dance

For the performing artist creating aesthetic experiences, Stebbins asks “how shall the artist translate the passion which he is called upon to express?” (1902, 58). In analyzing non-verbal behavior (semiotics), physical form is but a representation (aesthetics) to be used for artistic purposes. Her work was described as “Poetry in Motion,” because dance expression was thought to bring text-based narratives to life, and that dance itself could tell a story.⁴⁶⁷ This is the same concept as dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster’s “dance as text,” in which dance can be ‘read’ by audiences and understood as meaningful and evocative.⁴⁶⁸

The aesthetic dances Stebbins designed portrayed feelings and thoughts through intimation, suggestion, and consciously chosen movements woven into artistic choreographic design. Her aesthetic dances presented interpretations of classical myths, poetic tales, or heroic figures from well-known ancient texts or popular literature and were otherwise known as “interpretive dances.” The *New York Times* reviewed one of Stebbins’ performances saying she

attracted an audience that filled the Madison Square Theatre to overflowing yesterday. Every seat in the house was occupied long before the entertainment began [...] Stebbins has had Delsarte matinees at the Madison Square for three winters now, and they always draw crowds, perhaps because a large portion of the public is interested in the system of Delsarte, but probably simply because [she] gives a ‘good show’ (“The Delsarte Matinee,” February 13, 1889, 4).

The following year, the *New York Times* notes Stebbins’ impressive performance was a result of her own “grace and ingenuity” rather than a testament to any “particular system of art culture” [meaning attributing Delsarte]. Her execution of a Greek dance was a charming example of plastic grace” (March 26, 1890, 4). Stebbins’ performances were initially inspired by classical

⁴⁶⁷ “The Poetry of Motion,” *The Weekly Wisconsin*, May 26, 1895, 1.

⁴⁶⁸ Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dance: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (University of California Press, 1986).

Greek statuary and the performative art of statue posing.⁴⁶⁹ This may seem rather odd, as historical static images of women in poses often look quite awkward. However, it was a popular performance art form for women in the 18th and 19th century. ‘Statue poses’ were used in plays, ballets, in circus acts, fund raising activities, and other public events— known alternatively as *pose plastique*, living statues, or ancient statuary. In contrast to other tableaux or statue posing acts, Stebbins’ performance work was not only about ‘freezing in place’ but more importantly she performed ‘dance-like’ poses.

She presented different figures with her physicality changing “position so slowly and gracefully from one statue to another that there was no break or awkwardness.” In a panoramic display Stebbins presented “Ariadne, Venus with the Apple, the Flute Player and the Quoit Pitcher, the latter a pose so remarkably difficult and graceful as to call forth a hearty round of applause.”⁴⁷⁰ In her repertoire, Stebbins presented mythical figures including Venus Genitrix, Niobids, Ceres, Hebe, Lycian Apollo, The Amazon, Melpomene, Diana, Atalanta, and Fortuna, etc. Her poses of statues were said to represent thought expressed in motion. Stebbins’ dances built on the mimetic art of statue posing (in the sense of a creative *re-presentation* rather than copying or imitation/mimicry), in a unique manner by creating moving transitions between poses that lasted as long as the poses themselves.

Stebbins performed wearing a pure white Greek costume, passing from one pose to the next and the “audience could not constrain itself but applauded rapturously.”⁴⁷¹ She was said to be the “acme of grace and harmony [especially] when she danced,” and the audience went “wild over

⁴⁶⁹ For more information on Stebbins’ statue posing see Ruyter (1999, 116–120); Brandstetter “Vitalist Interpretation of Greek Sculpture: Genevieve Stebbins” (2015, 46–51), and Suzanne Bordelon’s exploration of Stebbins’ concept of ‘Artistic’ Statue Posing (2019, 30–36).

⁴⁷⁰ “Graceful Poses. Mrs. Genevieve A. Thompson Illustrates Delsarte for the Seidl Society,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 1, 1890.

⁴⁷¹ “The Delsarte Craze,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 1890, 2.

the beautiful, rhythmic action” (ibid). Stebbins was captivating, with *The World* saying although “Stebbins’ views on the meaning of the ancient deities and the power of the human body are well known,” she impressed the audience by showing “in flesh and blood what they had seen before only in marble.”⁴⁷² Stebbins chose a variety of statues to perform, and each figure represented a mythological legend with their own powerful story.



Fig. 122. Wounded Amazon from MET. Fig. 123. Melpomene at the Louvre. Fig. 124. Venus awarded an apple from Art UK. Fig. 125. Diana from Vatican City.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyze each character Stebbins depicted, however as a Classics scholar she fully comprehended their stories. Choosing which roles to play, or not, would have been important to her. In her Delsarte publication, Stebbins includes photos of Apollo Citharaedus and Apollo Musagete (Muses of literature, science, and arts) along with Juno, Isis, Magdalen, Minerva, Niobe, Pudicitia, Sophocles, Thalia, and Venus Genetrix.

⁴⁷² “Classic Statue Impersonations. Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins’ Very Picturesque Pantomimic Matinee at the Berkeley Lyceum Yesterday Afternoon,” January 26, 1896, 10.

Stebbins distinctly said, “artistic statue posing, in the sense I use the words, means embodiment and careful following out, as far as human beings can, of the divine ideal of high art” (1902, 444). Her artistic statue posing was the opposite of American Delsartean poses, in which emotional expressions were demonstrated in specific ‘attitudes’ as a means of demonstration. Stebbins intended her artistic poses to represent noble ‘power in repose’ and divine essence in the abstract (1902, 450–451). What is of utmost importance is that Stebbins believed a performance artist could only embody the ‘statues’ if they believed their own body to be sacred itself, without the “hideous dogma of human depravity” that comes from religious indoctrination. In a powerful statement Stebbins asserted, the “kingdom of heaven is within, we must try to make such indwelling beauty visible in our outward form, life and action; for it is impossible for people to become either noble or beautiful who are continually bemoaning themselves as unworthy and sinful” (1902, 455–456). Below are examples of pantomimic expressions, also called ‘Delsarte poses.’



FIG. 16.—EXALTATION.
And leaving in battle no blot on his name,
Look proudly to heaven from the death-bed of fame.



FIG. 17.—WONDERMENT.
Sure enough, Santa Claus had come down the chimney.



FIG. 3.—REVEALING.
Wait a moment; you shall know the whole story.



FIG. 1.—DECLARING.
This rock shall fly as soon as I.



Figs. 126. Henry Northrop, *Delsarte Speaker, or Modern Elocution* (1895).

As a performance art, Stebbins was described as pushing the art form of statue posing into a moving array of evolving pictures. She did not move in a stilted manner from pose to pose, but rather presented a fluidly moving vision with ongoing action described as

slow, rhythmic motion of every portion of the body until it stands before you as the most perfect representation of art. Every movement is beautiful. Every gradation of motion from the root and stem to the branch and blossom of the picture is discernible, and yet, so subtle is the magnetic motion, that, like the prismatic glories of the rainbow, it is impossible to tell where one line ends or the next one begins.”⁴⁷³

As such, her statue posing motions evolved into a performative dance,

This handsome graceful woman, then, gives “Statue-poses” – melting by the most subtly undulating muscular changes from the attitude of one well-known antique into that of another, now dropping upon her side in the pose of the Dying Gladiator, now risen to her feet (and the manner in which it is done, without jerk or jar, is revelation of the sinuously beautiful capabilities of this body of ours that is so awkward and irresponsive a vehicle of expression to the most of us) to assume the dignity of the familiar attitude of Augustus, again swaying forward with arms stretched back in all the marvelous vigor of the Discobolus; and so on through the succession of plastic representations. She also dances a Greek dance, supposed to be a reconstruction studied from the Greek friezes, and explains that the dances performed in the temples of the gods (as indeed the dancing mentioned in the Bible, as when David danced before the ark) were merely a succession of beautiful attitudes indicating worship and therefore

⁴⁷³ Werner’s, December 1893, 444.

eminently religious in their characteristics.⁴⁷⁴

Stebbins' 'poses were described as so "unique in that they are not a series of tableaux, or a collection of poses each one starting from a base position, as it were. Instead, they melt into one another as the views of a stereopticon" [a slide projector known historically as a 'magic lantern' in which two images dissolve into one another to create a three-dimensional image] (*Werner's*, February 1891, 31). Stebbins sought to distinguish her innovative solo performances by claiming to have been the first to perform "artistic statue posing" and the "high art of physical expression" in a New York theater (*Werner's*, December 1893, 392). While Stebbins' statue posing was not without precedent as it was a popular salon art, it can be argued that she was the first American to *publicly* present this work as a serious *solo art* on a professional concert stage. While Stebbins' solo statue posing has not been specifically analyzed in relation to any other American performer in her day, nor have I come across any historical resource that connects/relates/or compares her performance work to any other artist. She certainly was a key figure in making statue posing popular amongst American Delsarte practitioners, and additionally her aesthetic dance performances that emerged from this work was a pivotal transition.

Scholars Carrie Preston and Suzanne Bordelon assert that statue posing was a part of Delsarte's original ideas, however I countered these claims with evidence to the contrary in a 2020 publication.⁴⁷⁵ While Stebbins noted that Delsarte studied the statues to examine expressive attitudes, he was not engaged in the performance art of statue posing otherwise. Dance historian

⁴⁷⁴ "The Poetry of Motion," *The Weekly Wisconsin*, May 25, 1895.

⁴⁷⁵ In my article 2020 article, "Forgotten "New" Dancer of New York City's Gilded Age: Genevieve Lee Stebbins and the Dance as Yet Undreamed," *Dance Research Journal*. On another note, in 1883, the actress Mary Anderson performed as a statue coming to life within the play *Pygmalion and Galatea*, however she wasn't a soloist. In Anderson's memoirs she recalled having studied 'Delsarte' sometime in 1880 or 1881, and as suggested by Ruyter (in Lake 2005, 118) Anderson most likely studied with Stebbins as did Edward Barbour, the sole American male Delsartean statue poser (Ruyter 1999, 60).

Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter argues, “whether or not she invented this format, it was her hallmark” and statue posing became common amongst American Delsartists because of Stebbins’ fame (Ruyter 1996a, 72, 78).

In 2024, independent scholar K. Mitchel Snow examined Delsartean statue posing as a statement of gender equality because both male and female statues were presented by ‘posers.’ In their demonstrations women presented each statue without any form of gendered coding. Posers focused on the conceptual meaning representative within each deity or mythological character rather than their gender. In his study, Snow mentions American Delsartists such as Clara Power Edgerly’s all female posing group in Boston, Abby Mayhew who worked with women at a YWCA in Milwaukee, and Eleanor Georgen who taught pantomime (and who Snow states was a professional statue poser (1)).⁴⁷⁶ However, I have found no evidence of such, rather, Georgen was more so mentioned as an established educator. Regardless, his insights are quite keen.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, statue posing emerged from European tableaux vivants, in which a group of women presented a posed image from a well-known painting, well-known historical moment in time, or a popular narrative. Tableaux vivants became popular in America in the 1830’s through 1920s in home parlours as entertainments for guests, as a sort of mix between pantomime and charades (Chapman 1992, 5). Mary Chapman explored the popular historical phenomena of tableaux, finding during the 1840s to 1850s ‘artistic tableaux’ manuals were largely written by women, for women performing the roles. Magazines such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* described group tableaux, ‘how-to’ manuals gave detailed instructions to present dramatic narratives as tableaux, and novels included descriptions of salon performances (7). Even the celebrated author Louisa May Alcott wrote tableaux. While many tableaux presented

⁴⁷⁶ Snow, K. Mitchell, “Power to the posers: Delsartean women, the law of correspondence and the classical male body,” *Gender & History* (2024): 1–19.

women as subdued, static, and subject to objectification by the ‘male gaze’ as Chapman argues (1992, 12)⁴⁷⁷ there were also narratives, such that Stebbins deployed, countering the seemingly “erotic spectacle” by portraying women as immensely powerful and engaged citizens.

According to historian Monika Elbert in the 1840s, American woman’s rights advocate Margaret Fuller was known for performing poses to project qualities of classical goddesses that were “designed to inspire her female followers, to encourage them to strike new poses and to try on the personae of strong female role models (2002, 264).⁴⁷⁸ Fuller also declared herself as being a “mystic, and that mysticism was integral for women’s progress” (Leigh 2003, 286).⁴⁷⁹ Stebbins was working in the same vein as Fuller, by using art to perform embodied liberated expression and power in repose. Elbert states that in 1843, Fuller wrote a compendium of great women as “verbal sketches or tableaux” including queens and goddesses, holy women and saints, women from history, pioneers and famous women writers designed to inspire her audience of women. Tableaux, like artistic statue posing, allowed women to inhabit identities with a strong psychological presence. Louise Clappe was a friend and admirer of Margaret Fuller and after Fuller’s tragic death by shipwreck and drowning, Clappe wrote a poem in her honor (introduction to *The Shirley Letters*, 1922). Clappe could have attended Fuller’s salons held between 1839 and 1844 in Boston before she left Amherst for San Francisco. Clappe designed her own tableaux and passed on her enthusiasm for statue posing to Stebbins. The common strain for these three women is enacting and presenting women of noble and courageous character as a performance art form.

⁴⁷⁷ Mary Megan Chapman, “*Living Pictures: Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture*” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1992).

⁴⁷⁸ Monika Elbert, “Striking a Historical Pose: Antebellum Tableaux Vivants, “Godey’s” Illustrations and Margaret Fuller’s Heroines,” *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2002): 235–275.

⁴⁷⁹ Eric Schmidt Leigh, “The Making of Modern ‘Mysticism,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 273–302.

Stebbins intended to perform artistic statue posing as means of “spiritual aspiration toward a superior and definite type of beauty, in which lives and moves a human soul.”⁴⁸⁰ She describes being inspired by ancient Grecian statues as she viewed them as having a “deep indwelling vitality which rayed forth from the marble form” [their beings] spoke to my very soul [...] the frozen lips seemed to whisper: Body and soul are in one reality, for the body becomes the soul’s revealment and expression.”⁴⁸¹ Her performances were intended as an embodied sacred act, as a form of theurgy- a ritualistic practice of “divine action.” Theurgy has a specific “salvific end” as there is the intent for meaningful soulful engagement with the divine. Theurgy is associated with theories of magic and the occult, which I will explore further heretofore.

Aesthetic Dance as Poetics

In *Dancing & Dances of Today; the Modern Revival of Dancing as an Art* (1912), author Caroline Caffin (in an echo of Stebbins) states the “impulse of dance-drama is the expression of emotions, the earliest of which seems to be [found in] religious mystic cults, which reached high development of symbolism and beauty of ceremony in the mysteries of Isis, that originated in Egypt and spread to Greece and Italy” (22). It’s no wonder with Stebbins’ occult interests that she created a dance drama as Isis in 1892. Stebbins thought of pantomime as an ancient practice that emerged from the “first era of animated life as a means of expression [...] and yet, to live on with the promise of perpetual youth.”⁴⁸² Stebbins reiterates “if my readers would prefix the word pantomime to all the foregoing regarding dancing, they will obtain a pretty accurate idea of its

⁴⁸⁰ *Werner’s*, July 1894, 257.

⁴⁸¹ *Physical Training: Gymnastics For Women. Successful Woman in This Profession—The Royal Beauty of the Statue Reveals to Her an Excellent Field of Work—A Charming Paper by Genevieve Stebbins* (no date or page). Thanks to Carrie Streeter for sharing this article with me. (Scrap Album, 1889–1891, Box 3, Seidl Society Records, Brooklyn Historical Society).

⁴⁸² *Werner’s*, September 1894, 316.

importance as an expressive art during the untold eras of antiquity” (1913, 83). Stebbins believed ancient cultural stories and myths were preserved in pantomimic expression and ritualistic rhythmic dancing as found in “ancient Chaldea, Egypt, Greece, Palestine, Hindustan and Oriental lands.”⁴⁸³ As dance historian Artur Michel explains, the term pantomime used in the ancient sense meant a “muted dance drama” (1947, 61). The foundation of Greek drama includes ritualistic dance practices.

Oftentimes, aesthetic dance in the late 19th century was referred to as ‘Poetry in Motion.’ Dance was thought as a form of poetics capable of communicating expressive ideas. Specifically, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, dance is described as *mimesis* in that dance attempts to come close to a sense of human truth, like epic poetry, tragedy, and comedy. Mimesis stems from the Greek *mimetikos* meaning imitation. To clarify, dance historian Artur Michel explains ‘imitative’ presentations meant the actual creative process of an artist. Rather than being cheap ‘copy,’ imitative art intends to represent human experience through nonverbal communication, gesture, bodily ‘signs,’ and emotional expression (1947, 51).⁴⁸⁴ Michel compares 18th century dance theorists who referred to ancient models to justify dance as an art form alongside pantomimic dance from ballet d’action productions. Louis de Cahusac defined dance as the ‘art of gesture,’ stating “gestures are the bearers of the soul’s emotions. The dance itself which, so to speak, holds these together, is the art of executing them with grace and measure” (57). Similarly, the dance master Jean George Noverre describes ballet d’action as the “art of conveying our emotions and passions to the soul of the spectator by the true expression of our movements,

⁴⁸³ *Werner’s*, September 1894, 317.

⁴⁸⁴ Artur Michel, “The Ballet d’Action Before Noverre,” *Dance Index* VI no. 3, Eakins Press Foundation, April 1947.

gestures, and physiognomy” (59). 18th century ballet d’action roles are defined in the same manner as the theoretical basis for 19th century aesthetic dance.

Dance aesthetics is related to *kinesthesia*– the perception of the sense of movement in one’s body and the movement of others. Dance critic John Martin argues that the theoretical foundation of modern dance includes the fundamental discovery of ‘metakinesis,’ or the “ability to transfer emotion, ideas, thought, and feeling from a performer’s muscles to the audience members muscles, without any mediating cerebral processing” (quoted in Connor 1997, 129). As dance theorist Susan Foster describes it, “dance summons its viewers into an empathic relationship with it.”⁴⁸⁵ An audience embodies the aesthetics of movement through their own sensorial and intellectual responses to the dance, otherwise known as kinesthetic empathy, or more recently, as Affect Theory. Whichever terminology is used, essentially aesthetic dance was thought to be able to have a profound effect on audiences. Affect is the verb, and Effect is the noun- as in the result of the act. The act of dance influences the audience as an effect.

In *Dance and Aesthetic Perception*, classics scholar Anastasia Erasmia Peponi found concepts from classical aesthetics were included in European and American dance manuals in the late 19th century as a way of validating new dance forms.⁴⁸⁶ Peponi notes ancient Greeks considered a dancer as someone who could transform themselves and stimulate/engage the imagination and perception of a spectator (2015, 210). She explains in classical aesthetic theory, “one’s entire sensory and mental apparatus” is engaged in a psycho-physical experience (2015, 204). In Ancient Greek poetics, artistic ideas were expressed through gesture and facial expression to produce an extraordinary effect upon the mind and feelings of the spectators.

⁴⁸⁵ Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy* (Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁸⁶ Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, “Dance and Aesthetic Perception,” in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, ed., Pierre Destree and Penelope Murray (John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 204–217.

In a similar manner, aesthetics scholar Suzanne Braswell explores 19th century French authors and their conception of dance. She notes French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) admired dance artistry and spoke of movement as an evocative mode of communication with poetic potential. Baudelaire found aesthetics of movement to be a form of language, “not as a learned system or code of visible and audible sounds, but instead as an evocative mode of communication that is capable of mediating the expression of inner states onto visible forms” (2006, 3).⁴⁸⁷ Braswell’s exploration of the “aesthetics of movement” includes her consideration of Delsarte’s impact on American modern dance, stating Stebbins imparted “*his principles* to her disciple Isadora Duncan” (my italics, 4). This is not entirely correct, as Stebbins did not have Duncan as a student. Duncan *could have* studied with Stebbins at the New York School of Expression she founded in 1893. However, Duncan and her family were not financially secure when they lived in New York City, and therefore Duncan was not able to afford such studies. A year tuition at Stebbins’ school was between \$150 to \$200, which would be the equivalent of around \$6,000 today. While in New York, Duncan had a small role in 1895 in a group of dancers performing within the play *Much Ado About Nothing* at Daly’s Theatre. In 1898, well after Stebbins was established on the stage, Duncan performed “entertainments of aesthetic dancing. She was very much in requisition for church entertainments, teas, and affairs of that kind [...] In those days she danced to the accompaniment of a pianoforte played by her mother, and the dances were supposed to be symbolic, and also revivals of the ancient Greek terpsichorean diversions” (*New York Times* 1903, 36). Without managing to obtain success in New York, Duncan left in 1899 for London. Unfortunately, the Duncan family were so poor when they left New York for England they travelled in a cattle boat, yet Duncan sailed to future fame. At that

⁴⁸⁷ Suzanne F. Braswell, “An aesthetics of movement: Baudelaire, poetic renewal, and the invitation of dance.” *French Forum* 31, no. 3 (2006): 3–20.

time, American cattle were shipped to England on steamships for slaughter I would presume. It would have been a rather noisy and smelly ride but for those with little financial means like the Duncans it was a necessary choice.

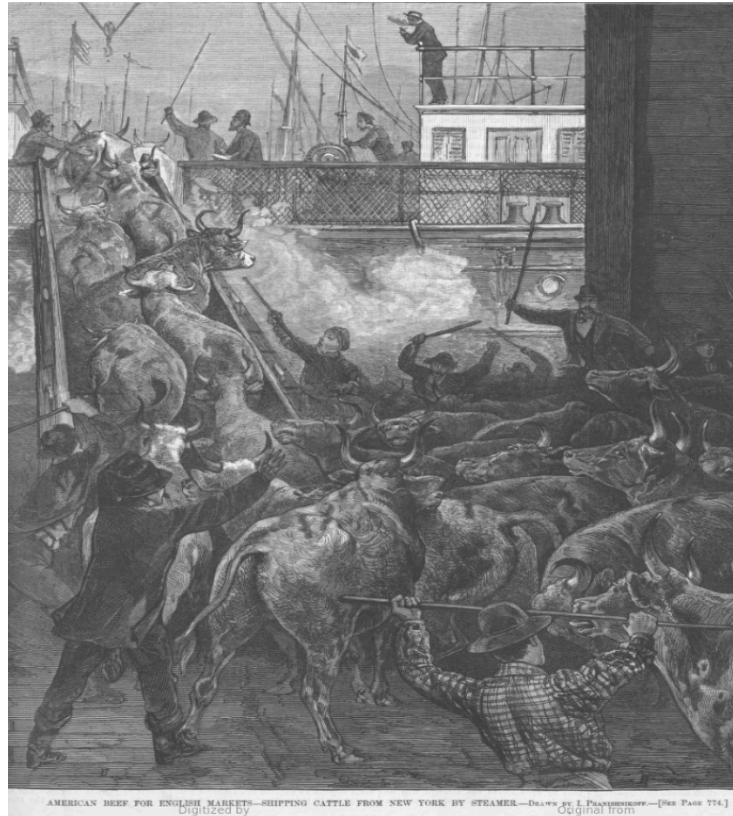


Fig. 127. *Harper's Weekly*, September 1879.

Aesthetics scholar Suzanne Braswell notes that the French novelist Honoré de Balzac (*Theorie de la Demarche*, 1833) describes dance and gesture as a manifestation of “le verbe,” as “thought and the force of the Verb through form” (3). This concept is in following with a biblical concept as Stebbins explains,

The first motion of being is a verb,” she says. “Verb means simply word. So, I read that verse in St. John, ‘In the beginning was the verb, and the verb was with God, and the verb was God.’ [Stebbins expands upon the concept by adding] The Hinddo name of God, Aum, has great significance. I think it must have been the first word in the universe, being composed merely of an outgoing breath, ‘au,’ and a closure, ‘m.’ It is more than a coincidence that the name of God in all languages is composed of a circle and a line. Say ‘Aum,’ ‘Dieu,’ ‘Gott,’ ‘God,’ and the word in any other language you may know, and

you will find that the mouth in pronouncing the word will assume the shape of a circle and a line (February 1891).⁴⁸⁸

Stebbins was non-sectarian and appreciated faith from cultures around the world (although she did question the veracity of some concepts held by different traditions). Her work was taught in Protestant and Catholic schools in New York, demonstrating that schools of faith were not wary of her teachings. While Stebbins spoke of God, her interpretation of ‘soul’ was not necessarily intended to be a religious concept of the ‘God’ within, rather, the soul was meant to be understood as “one’s inner state of consciousness.”⁴⁸⁹ Stebbins shared ideas like this in a salon “philosophical class” for middle aged women. Writer Elsie Wilbor watched Stebbins lecturing to the class and concluded, “Genius has been roughly defined as having ideas that other people do not have [...Stebbins,] whether she be a genius in that sense or not, certainly has a way of presenting ideas that other people do not have” (February 1891). Not only was Stebbins an aesthetic theorist who clearly articulated her views, she could also be considered an artistic genius. And why not? Indeed, Stebbins lectures were described as being “keenly intellectual” [...] and her “exquisite personal illustration of her theories make one feel it is only the lovely expression of her real self, so perfect has her art become” (*Ohio Wesleyan University, The College Transcript*).⁴⁹⁰ Stebbins was resoundingly admired for her teachings and performances, so much so, that in the large collection of over 500 newspaper and journal articles I have amassed, there are very few extant negative reflections on her work that I have come across. The few that there are, come from her early years on the stage. Mind you, there are materials that one could come across, as research is never ending, so there might be other viewpoints found.

⁴⁸⁸ Elsie Wilbor, “Delsarte methods. A Glimpse of the Work of Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Thompson,” *Werner’s*, 27–31.

⁴⁸⁹ *Jersey City News*, October 28, 1895, 3.

⁴⁹⁰ “Expression: How Essential it is to Culture, The Genevieve Stebbins Lectures,” October 10, 1896.

Yoga scholar Anya Foxen positions the first president of the American Delsarte Association Carrica Le Favre as being an influential figure. Although Le Favre was not a performer, she taught elocution and spoke on Delsarte ‘expression.’⁴⁹¹ There is little newspaper commentary on her, although apparently, she was known as being very thin and had little patience for those with “bad teeth, bad complexion, or any fault of figure” (*Evening World*, February 14, 1894, 4). Le Favre’s own Delsarte publication is essentially a mix of Stebbins’ prior writing including Delsarte Expression fundamentals and Society Gymnastics exercises (for which Le Favre provides illustrations). She does not speak about statue posing at all. In a Chronicling America historical newspaper search between 1885–1911, Le Favre has 14 brief mentions, while in comparison Stebbins has 131, Eleanor Georgen 60 (mostly ads or mentions of lessons on voice cultivation), Clara Power Edgerly 3 mentions (most likely because she was not a public figure but a respected educator). In comparison to these women, Stebbins was recognized as a public figure with more than just brief mentions but full articles speaking to her talents. As such, and as Ruyter situated in her scholarship, Stebbins was indeed the leader in her field (1999).

Publications and Performances: 1890–1892

On March 25, 1890, an annual Delsarte matinee was given by Stebbins and Mary Thompson at the Madison Square Theatre before a large house. Stebbins was 33 years of age. She recited a poem by John Keate’s, “Eve of St. Agnes,” and gave a series of statue poses that were much admired. She gave a short talk on Delsarte gymnastics, illustrating her points by a minuet, a Spanish dance and a Greek dance. Reportedly, Mary Thompson followed with an extract from Browning’s, ‘In a Balcony,’ and the program ended with a pantomime of Collins’

⁴⁹¹ Carrica Le Favre, *Physical Culture, Founded on Delsarte Principles* (Fowler & Wells Co., New York, 1894).

‘Ode to Passions,’ by Stebbins. The show was met with frequent applause.⁴⁹² Clappe’s former student and friend of the family, Mary Tingley Lawrence, came to the performance. She had arrived in New York to see about publishing a book,⁴⁹³ and would have enjoyed spending time with Stebbins and Clappe.



MARY S. THOMPSON.



GENEVIEVE LEE STEBBINS.

Fig. 128. *Werner's* December 1893, 445. Fig. 129. “Biographical Sketches,” *Werner's Directory* 1887, 288. The pearl necklace is quite significant, as at that time pearls were more expensive than diamonds and was a sign of great wealth (Dona Dirlam, Elise Misiowski, and Sally A. Thomas, “Pearl Fashion through the Ages,” *Gems and Gemology* 1985, 76).

By May 4, 1890, Stebbins was performing at the Broad Street Theatre in Philadelphia with her former student Miss Minnie M. Jones. The programme included statue poses, pantomime, “recitations, Greek and Spanish dances, piano solos, etc.,” said to have been given previously at the Madison Square Theatre, New York, with great success.⁴⁹⁴ Likewise, the show at the Broad

⁴⁹² *Werner's* June 1890, 163.

⁴⁹³ “An Aspirant for Fame,” *Merced Sun-Star* 10, no. 45, April 10, 1890, *N.Y. Correspondent S.F. Chronicle*

⁴⁹⁴ *The Times* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 10.

Street Theatre was a “hit” as the large audience “very quickly realized that the entertainment they were witnessing was one of the most unique and really enjoyable affairs given in this city for many seasons.”

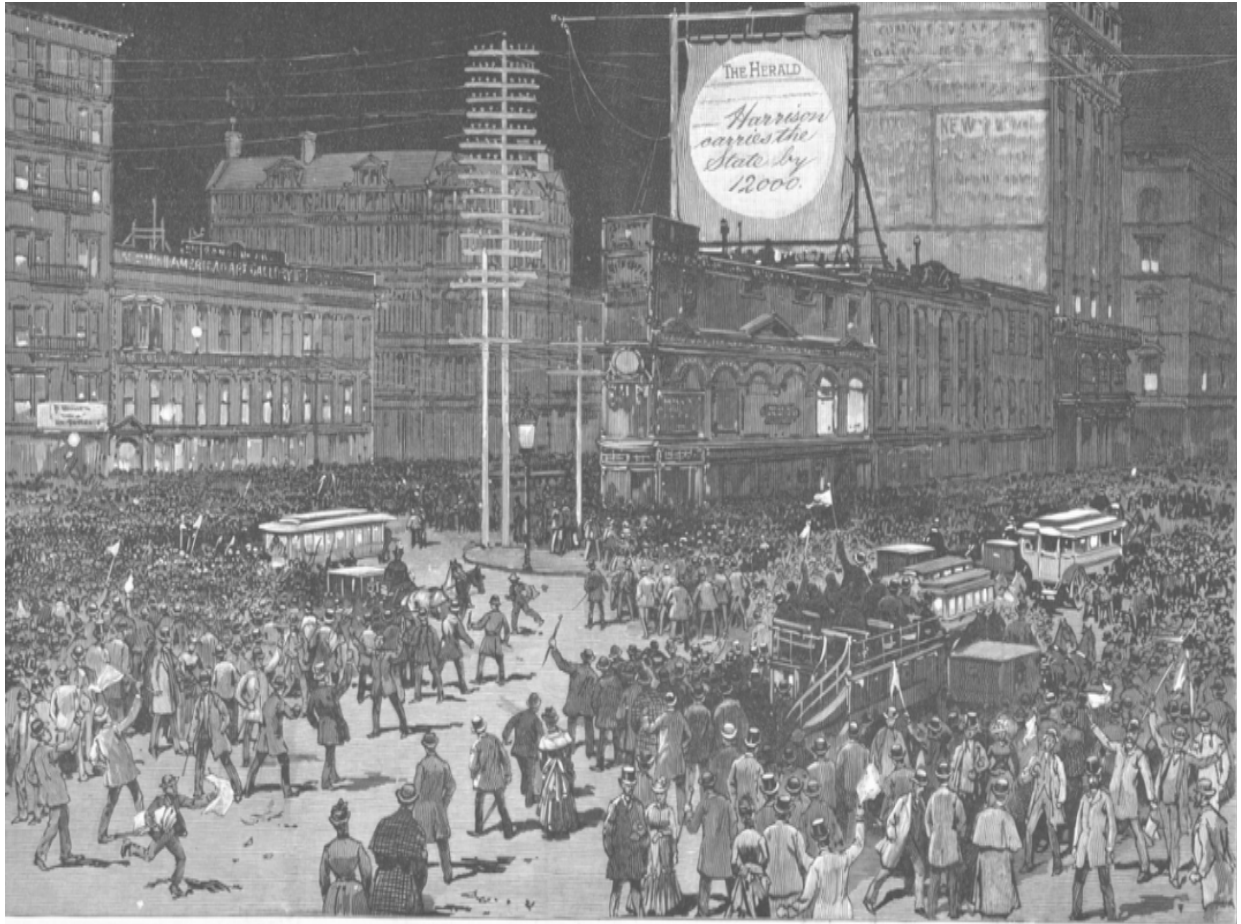


Fig. 130. Madison Square, view facing south from the vantage point of the Madison Square Theatre, *Harper's Weekly*, September 1888.

Both women wore pure white Greek costume, and Stebbins' statue posing was met with rapturous applause. Reviews state the “acme of grace and harmony was reached” when Stebbins danced.⁴⁹⁵ Back in New York, Stebbins performed again at the Madison Square Theatre dancing the minuet, Greek and Spanish dances and greeted with frequent applause.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ “The Delsarte Craze,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 1890, 2.

⁴⁹⁶ *Werner's*, June 9, 1890, 163.

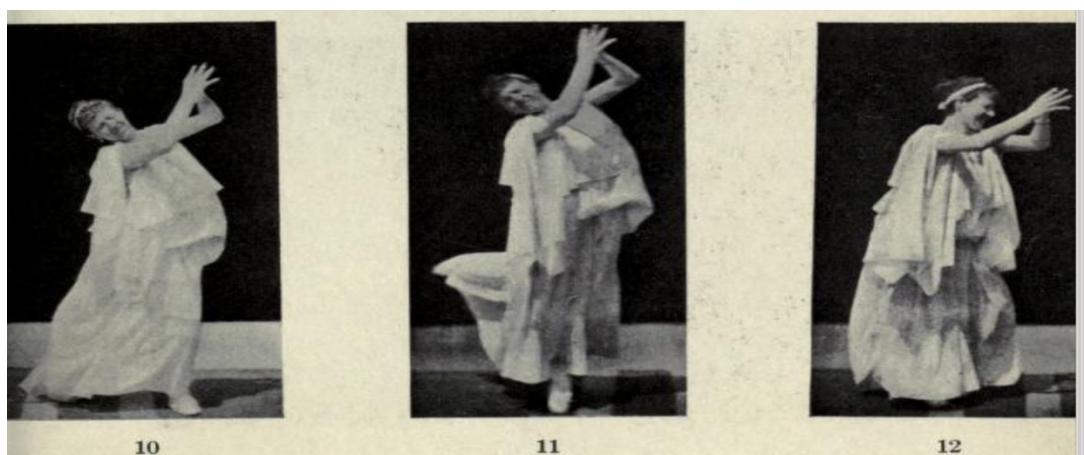


Fig. 131. There are no images found of Stebbins dancing, these are from *The Antique Greek Dance after sculptured and painted figures*, by Maurice Emmanuel translated from the French in 1916, 212 (John Lane Company).

Soon after, in November 1890 the Seidl Society invited Stebbins to perform in Brooklyn at the Polytechnic Institute College for over five hundred women. The Seidl Society was a women's only association founded by socialite Laura Langford in honor of conductor Anton Seidl. Stebbins gave a lecture on "Aesthetic Physical Culture," illustrated by artistic statuesque poses and recitations, with musical accompaniment. Stebbins was described as "calm, reposeful, Greek" and a "brown haired, supple Juno," who appeared clad in a flowing gown of pink and white high at the throat, with flowing angel sleeves, and loose enough to permit perfect freedom of movement, her hair caught high in a Greek knot." Stebbins recited Owen Meredith's poem 'Aux Italiens' (a love story), delivered "in a light voice but with extremely graphic and dramatic gesture and expression." She followed by demonstrating,

a variety of poses which would have been squirming in ordinary women but in which Stebbins showed her exceeding suppleness and grace. Among them were sinking to the floor forward, backward, and sidewise and recovery of an erect poise, and what used to be known on the stage as the back fall. That fall in "Meg Merrilies" is popularly supposed to have given Charlotte Cushman a tumor, but Stebbins took it quite as a matter of course and resumed her lecture after one of them with the composure of the country revivalist who interrupted the flow of his exhortation long enough to pitch a disturber through the window and resumed with an explanatory "As I was sayin', brethren!"⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁷ "Graceful Poses. Mrs. Genevieve A. Thompson Illustrates Delsarte for the Seidl Society," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* November 1, 1890.

Of course, Stebbins had experience in stage ‘prat falls’ from her various theatre productions. Stage falls were popular in 19th century theatre, meant to shock and surprise. Another popular American Delsartean, Henrietta Hovey (in the image on the next page) was known for entertaining society women with ‘stage falls.’ A teacher of physical culture critiqued Hovey “in a half-amused, half vexed manner,” saying while Hovey was “clothed in nondescript hued gown made al la Mother Hubbard” she demonstrated “tumbling downstairs to show a number of fearful-eyed and awe-struck women in tight corsets, high collars and narrow shoes, how to fall gracefully and with no danger to the tumbler.”⁴⁹⁸



Fig. 132. Images of Henrietta Hovey, *The World* November 21, 1897, 29.

⁴⁹⁸ *Scranton Tribune*, October 22, 1898.

It's unclear why Hovey would 'stage' prat falls other than it being silly dramatic fun. Stebbins' 1888 publication includes back falls, and Hovey likely drew from the popularity of Stebbins' work. Hovey was not known as a great lecturer, a negative review of her appeared saying, "Delsartism has more to fear from its alleged friends than from its avowed enemies [...Hovey] is an energetic woman and deserves much credit for overcoming the barriers that have been in her way, and for reaching her present prominence. However, by assuming the role of critic she must expect to be gauged by the same measure that she so unsparingly uses in her criticism of others." Hovey was said to have made "frequent violations" of the law of poise, was "full of meaningless gesture" and when she "forgets herself and is spontaneous she relapses into awkwardness."⁴⁹⁹ Despite this viewpoint, she entertained audiences and was known as an advocate for dress reform, even speaking within a delegation at the Worlds Congress in 1893.

Celestial Harmonics and Breathing Vitality

In Stebbins' November 1890 performance for the Seidl Society, she shared theories regarding the "rhythm of the universe and the music of the spheres." These concepts would have been familiar for audiences interested in metaphysics. Although late 19th century Americans are generally thought of as being pious and uptight, in reality, audiences were largely entertained by spectacle, séances, esoterism and the 'fantastic.' The 'music of the spheres' in the Pythagorean view, denotes celestial movements and harmonious resonance, such that planets 'reverberate' (*musica universalis*). The music of the spheres is considered as a sort of symphonic harmony between celestial bodies. A review states, Stebbins' keynote address spoke to "putting the

⁴⁹⁹ "False Delsartism," *Werner's*, January 1890, 20–23.

individual in harmony with the laws of the universe.”⁵⁰⁰ Stebbins explains that humans correspond to this celestial harmonic resonance like strings vibrating on a violin.

In Stebbins’ lecture, she utilized “analogies discovered by science” to assert that there is “electricity in the human body as well as in the clouds, and the force is subject to the same laws in both forms.”⁵⁰¹ Expanding upon concepts that Stebbins introduced in her lectures, in 1892 her publication *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics: A Complete System of Psychical, Aesthetic and Physical Culture* includes ideas on metaphysical and cosmological doctrines in which the power of the cosmos was thought to be everywhere, including in the air that we breathe. One concept she explains is that magnetic qualities in the brain and lungs draws in dynamic essence/ether from the atmosphere via inhalation.

In the publication, *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Yoga*, religious studies scholar Anya Foxen notes the esoteric belief in breath as ‘pneuma,’ a “divine ethereal substance that pervades the entire material cosmos.” Pneuma is likened to ether, a celestial substance that is thought to be inhaled and literally drawn down into the human body (2020, 54). Foxen provides a complex historical overview of Western metaphysics and esotericism— or rather, “Harmonialism” as she terms it— drawn from Stebbins’ use of the word ‘Harmonic,’ and a 2010 study by yoga historian Mark Singleton. In his work, the term harmonialism is drawn from a study on American religious movements in the mid-nineteenth century that later became known as Spiritualism. Singleton claims that Stebbins created her work drawing from a Harmonialist framework (2010, 146).

⁵⁰⁰ November 1, 1890, “Graceful Poses. Mrs. Genevieve A. Thompson Illustrates Delsarte for the Seidl Society,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

⁵⁰¹Ibid.

After presenting Stebbins' role as an editor for *Quest of the Spirit* (1913), which Foxen notes as being a "profoundly universalist metaphysical manifesto," she positions American Delsartism, and Stebbins, as being integral for the development of "aesthetic theurgy" (154). But she then argues that Stebbins' "own passion lay not in occult philosophy but in the practical application of these principles to daily life, and above all, art" (160), which is not exactly true. Stebbins' passion included both. Further, Foxen argues "Even Delsarte's trinities ultimately proved too intangible for her on a metaphysical level" (160) although she acknowledges that "Stebbins' own system is not lacking in metaphysics" (161). I would argue that there was nothing intangible regarding Delsarte, as Stebbins is the individual responsible for explaining Delsarte's mysticism for the American public. Finally, Foxen stated that Stebbins "was not, strictly speaking, a dancer" (166) which is misleading as she was not only an established dancer but additionally an actress, elocutionist, philosopher, and professor.

In her advocacy of esoteric ideas involving the "Breathe of Life," Stebbins argued that with a strong imagination, a person can visualize 'vitality' being drawn into the body from the air as recuperative life force. Vitality was thought to come from 'cosmic ether' which penetrates all things. Stebbins asserts that the force of indrawn vitality energizes and electrifies the brain to create a storage space for energy—like a battery. The human brain was the battery, she said, with the nerves acting like circuit wires. Stebbins stresses "it is of the utmost importance to *know how to inhale* the greatest possible amount of this ethereal essence, which is inspiration and life" (1892, 52). Stebbins used creative visualization to imagine breath moving through the body, bringing ether inwards as an energizing force stored for potential use at will, when needed.

Her theories drew from several sources including 17th century physician Dr. Frederick Hoffman who referred to ether as soul-force (by expounding upon the concepts of Galen) and Dr.

Rhodes Buchanan. In the 1880s, Stebbins shares that she privately trained with a Swedish Ling ‘Movement Cure’ specialist, Dr. George Taylor, who “spoke strongly in favor of deep and powerful rhythmic breath” as a means of renewing vital power and combating disease (1892, 72). Stebbins also had learned breathing exercises that were common to oratorical training (from Lewis Monroe and other elocutionists). Yet, Stebbins expanded beyond the basics to include vitalizing energy meant to bring the body into “vigorous health, the brain to powerful mental action, and the soul to higher aspiration” (1892, 59).

Yoga historian Magdalena Kraler extensively explores Stebbins’ Breath of Life philosophies and situates Stebbins as a “physical culture occultist” (2022, 153). Kraler considers that Stebbins’ pedagogy was based on many influences ranging from “esoteric ether metaphysics,” and various occult influences to advocate for alternative ways of living (222). Kraler notes the extensive influence on Western occult thought of eighteenth-century Swedish mystic, scientist, and professor of theology Emmanuel Swedenborg, who wrote of mental action being connected to respiration. As a trance medium who heard messages from angels and spirits from the planets, he greatly influenced later occult thinkers through international Swedenborgian societies. Beyond Swedenborg, Kraler finds that ideas regarding ‘the breath of life’ and ‘divine breath,’ were relatively common in occult thought, such as in the work of the spiritualist Thomas Lake Harris, and Stebbins ultimately synthesized a range of established occult ideas regarding breath, the inhalation of ether, and resulting vitality (2022, 167–172). Especially relevant to Stebbins’ breath of life concepts was the influence of occultist Thomas Burgoyne’s *The Mystery of Eros* and the writings of African American Spiritualist Paschal Beverly Randolph (written c. 1870) *The Mysteries of Eulis* (Kraler, 179). Randolph was a sexual magic advocate, promoter of mutual orgasm, and trance medium who died by suicide at the age of 50 (in 1875). In Kraler’s

informed analysis, she sees similarities in their occult writings and concepts regarding vitalization in Stebbins' work (178–183).

Kraler situates Stebbins in a soteriological framework, whose breathing exercises were meant to aid practitioners in a spiritual path to enlightened well-being (salvation). Most significantly, Kraler establishes evidence to demonstrate how Stebbins directly influenced modern Indian “yogic breath cultivation” practices via Swami Vivekananda and Rama Prasad when they incorporated Stebbins' work (2022, 153). Significantly, Stebbins' ideas not only influenced modern Indian thought but also the first yoga handbook in the Polish language by Wincenty Lutoslawski (written in 1904 but published in 1909). After obtaining a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Helsinki, Lutoslawski became highly interested in psychophysical culture. Like Stebbins, his psychophysical exercises took effect “through the power of imagination and the will of the practitioner” (Lami 2021, 408). Scholar Marlis Lami notes that Stebbins' influence as an “actress, dancer, and occultist on modern yoga has been widely recognized” (410). Indeed, Lami finds that in Lutoslawski's yoga handbook he quotes entire exercises from Stebbins' book *Dynamic Breathing*. Lami argues that Lutoslawski cites Stebbins work in some locations, while heavily drawing from her many publications without credited her elsewhere. Lutoslawski, similarly to Stebbins, believed that breathing practices allowed the practitioner to “connect with divine life force that animates the cosmos” (410). Stebbins' concepts regarding dynamic breathing and the relationship between breath, spirit and divinity “can be found in several exercises” in Lutoslawski's handbook (410).⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² Marlis Lami, “Guru and Messiah: On the First Yoga Handbook in Polish language: Wincenty Lutoslawski's, *The Development of the Power of Will by Means of Psychophysical Exercises* (1909)” in *The Occult Nineteenth Century: Roots, Developments, and Impact on the Modern World*, ed. Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). In the book series *Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*.

Many occultists combined various ideas drawn from different places according to what resonated with their own growing belief system. Kraler notes that American occult philosophy was influenced by ancient Egyptian, Persian and the Indian occult and therefor included a mix of Oriental and Occidental thought (178). Indeed, Stebbins was clear she was not alone as an innovator of spiritualized psycho-physical practices, stating that:

No one can justly lay claim to any originality regarding them, or aspire to the honor of formulating any original system of mental culture or physical training upon this foundation, since every priesthood of antiquity and of almost every nation enjoyed a peculiar monopoly in their day and generation of some special system of mental and physical culture, especially suited to the climatic conditions of their country and the temperamental peculiarities of their people. This can be seen in the elaborate rituals, ceremonials, ablutions, meditations, processions, rhythmical exercises, fastings and inspirational breathing by which they sought to hold communion with some unseen world. Hence their chants and songs were always accompanied with a skillful combination of the imagination and breathing to the music of the sacred musicians, so as to produce that peculiar dynamic nerve-voice upon which the success of their invocation to the gods depended. That they fully understood the vital principles underlying all gymnastics, for the development of physical strength and mental power, is amply demonstrated by the gymnasiums of Greece and Rome, and the sacred rites and dances of much older nations (1892, 19–20).

Stebbins' reflected on the commonality between ancient psycho-physical rituals, noting cross-cultural influence, or what is termed “transcultural exegeses,” as scholar Dominic Zochrer explores. He asserts that through intercultural exchange, ideas and practices are reinterpreted and transformed “by means of selective readings, adaptations, and innovative additions in new social contexts” (2021, 88).⁵⁰³ Stebbins had a keen interest in Western esotericism, the occult, and pagan spirituality. She went as far as associating the imagination with the metaphysical concept of infinite mind, otherwise known as universal consciousness. In this view, humanity is

⁵⁰³ “From Fluidism to *Prana*: Reading Mesmerism Through Orientalist Lens” in *The Occult Nineteenth Century: Roots, Developments, and Impact on the Modern World*, ed. Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 83.

interconnected with the cosmos through the spiritual principle of divine intelligence that permeates all the universe.

The Power of the Imagination

In Stebbins' breathing practices, performance work, her psycho-physical culture system, and in her dances the use of imagination was integral. She asserts,

The imagination is intrinsic action around which all mental movements cluster, and from which every other mental act is derived. It is the object-glass of the soul in which the human mind realizes and interprets all external forms and movements- symbolic when engaged with impersonal ideas and creative conceptions, and realistic when it reproduces the subjective images, the actual scenes and events of the past (Stebbins 1913, 26).

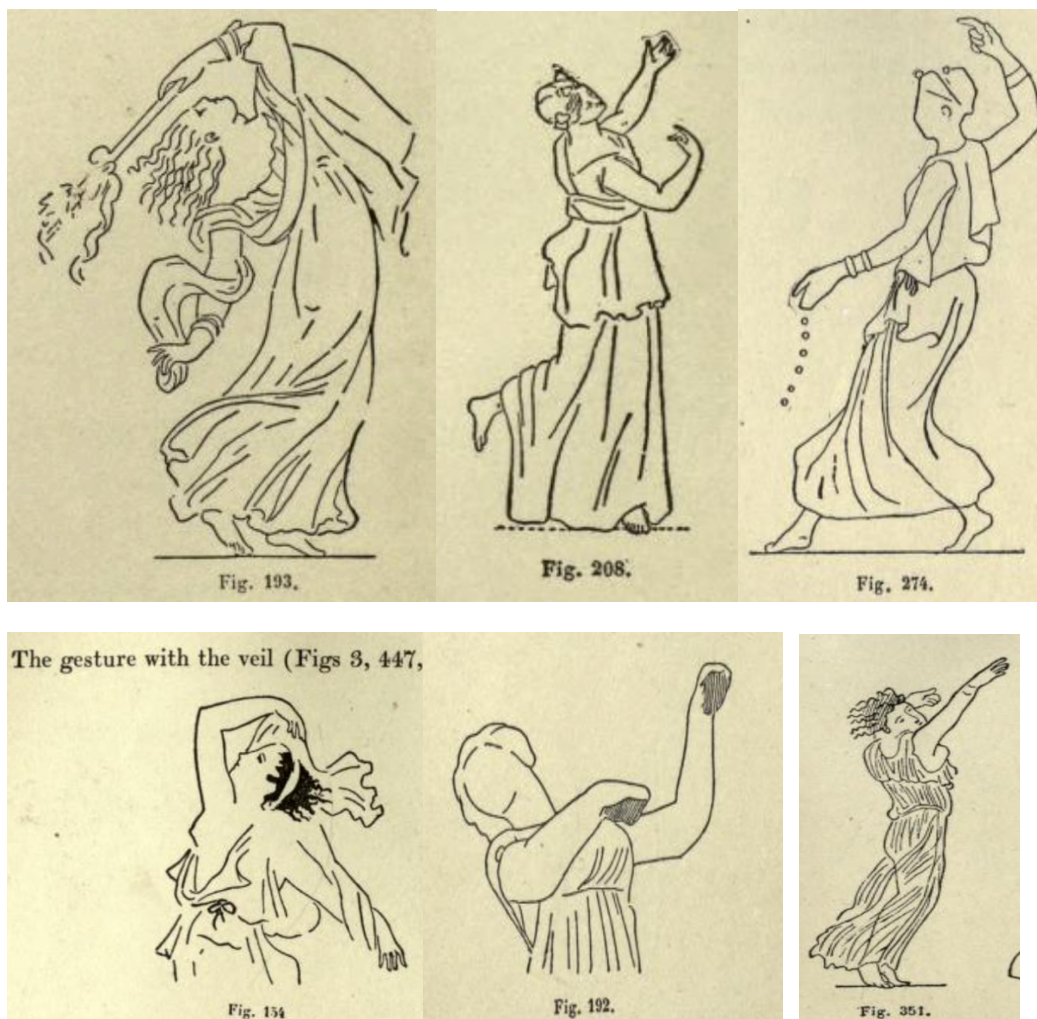
Stebbins mentions the imagination in relation to an 'object-glass' as it was an astronomical instrument. Invented in the mid 1700s, it was attached to telescopes to measure the diameter of the sun, Venus's transit, and the distance between celestial objects. It enabled measurements of planets and allowed for *a way to see* something not possible by the human eye alone. The object-glass is a metaphor for seeing *inwards* into the human mind where the imagination resides. Stebbins argues that if humanity were "destitute of the power of the imagination" we would be "unable to conceive of anything invisible to human sight" (1892, 32). As Stebbins emphasizes "all those who aspire to do well should cultivate the imagination in order to see and feel, mentally an image of the thing to be done" (1892, 40), meaning that the goal of engaging the imagination is productive creative action. Furthermore, Stebbins stresses that all "art must have its technique. Nothing comes without work. No one is worthy the name of an artist who knows not the technique of their profession" (1892, 133). Therefore, skill development ran hand in hand with creative production.

In Stebbins' chapter "Creative Power of Thought" (1892, 22–31), she reasons that imagination is not what we think but *how* we think. In the 19th century, the imagination was often viewed in the negative as 'Phantasma,' (from the Latin) i.e. delusions, apparitions, fantasy and hallucinations created in the mind. In contrast, 'Phantasia' (phainesthai) is when the imagination is connected to a *higher consciousness*, informed by experience, knowledge, and perception. Most occult groups aimed for 'Phantasia' as a means towards developing a strong intuitive sense.

For Stebbins, the imagination not only builds from a memory databank of images but also adds to, or intellectually re-designs, to create something that does not actually exist in nature—something unknown but imagined into being. Imagination is a form of speculation, seeing within the mind's eye an image of an object, person, or aspect of nature to play with the creative process and produce realistic or symbolic art as a thing, an action, or performance. Herein, life is art.

As an example, Stebbins created choreographed exercises to embody nymphs of wood, water, fire and air. In one exercise she asks the student to 'unveil, by imagining to gradually lift a long veil ("nature's veil concealing the fairy forms." Significantly, Isis is described as 'natures veil'). Her nymph exercise includes standing with feet apart, lift right arm to circling over the head as if lifting the veil and uncovering one's face while slowly swaying to the hips side to side, while circling the arm four times (then switch arms and repeat other side). Then move feet on the oblique to repeat each side. The water-nymph exercise uses swimming and floating arms with two measures of music each, then the legs switch position to front and back while arms swim and expand to open, to end with arms lifting overhead fingers touching (as if the water is spraying in the air). The wood nymph flies through the forest and sways on tree boughs. Arms begin with fingers touching overhead then swing around sweeping to one side in the air while pivoting on the feet and closing feet together as the torso sways. The Fire nymph to Apollo is

similar to her Eastern Temple Drill in which there is adoration to the rising and setting sun, and arms are separated with hands turned up and an uplifted trunk. The hands sink and rise like flames as the one kneels, then rises as the trunk circles while arms perform spiral serpentine motions to end in flame prayer form, palms together. The air nymph symbolizes the whirl of the wind and floating of the clouds (*The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training*, 1898, 124–129). The whole Nymph series could be performed with entrances and exits “in waltz time, gracefully waving the arms. The costume should be Greek with drapery hanging from the shoulders” (129).



Figs. 133. Illustrations from *The Antique in Greek Dance: after sculptured and painted figures*, Maurice Emmanuel translated from the French by Harriet Jean Beauhy (John Lane Company, 1916). Similarly to Stebbins, Emmanuel intensively studied Ancient Greek figures in art to determine what their dances might have looked like.

For young children, Stebbins had lovely creative movement exercises. In one class she asked students to raise their arms above the head, and imagine that “Your hands are like leaves, the arm is the bough; there is no breeze, and the leaves are hanging motionless. Now the bough drops, and the air coming under the leaves quickly raises them as the bough falls. Remember it is the air and not you that raises the hand.”⁵⁰⁴



Fig. 134. “How an American Girl is teaching Germans to be Graceful,” *Omaha Daily Bee* August 27, 1905. These illustrations represent Isadora Duncan teaching young girls in the same manner as Stebbins.

At a Young Ladies Seminary nearly 100 students (around 18 years old) practiced Stebbins’ choreographed exercises. Some who were said to be “so good of form that people would come to watch them at their gymnastic work.”⁵⁰⁵ Students wore a “charming gymnasium suit of white and gray, of their own design” (ibid). Stebbins was accompanied by the pianist “Miss Ewer” playing classical music for the students to keep the rhythmic timing, and “partly as an inspiration” for Stebbins. The “effect of dreamy music” created “gentler, more insinuating movements,” while the more powerful “heroic strains” of music coincided with more “aggressive action [bringing] to mind the poet’s idea of the ‘nothings which are immense.’”

⁵⁰⁴ Elsie Wilbor, “Delsarte methods. A Glimpse of the Work of Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Thompson,” *Werner’s* February 1891, 30.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

Stebbins was described as having “splendid control of body— I might almost say its defiance of the law of gravitation [...] To the uninitiated it may seem an easy thing to throw one’s body at will into attitudes such as the Flying Mercury, the Fighting Gladiator, or the Dancing Faun. I say to these people, try it; you will ever after have a sincere respect for all flesh and blood imitations of works of art” (ibid). It is quite likely Stebbins’ accompanist Miss Ewer was the daughter of Ferdinand Ewer a friend of Clappe’s whose family moved in 1871 to New York City. Clappe resided with Ewer’s widow after his death in 1883.

Exploring the Occult and Theurgy

Imaginative mysticism informed Stebbins’ artistry. She drew inspiration from the concept of theurgy, which Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Brian Copenhaver describes as meaning “applied theology” in that it is a *spiritual practice*, in contrast to “theology” which is contemplation. Theurgy in an ancient context meant engaging in ritualistic or magical practices as a means of invoking divine deities, most usually to channel into objects, totems or amulets, but also into statues as a receptacle. In the theurgical process of invoking the divine, *henosis* is achieved when one experiences union with the divine, which was the goal in Stebbins’ dances.⁵⁰⁶ Copenhaver notes that while ‘magic’ was a large part of the classical world, studies in this history have largely been obscured. It has only been in the last twenty years that prestigious publishing houses have taken up the topic of the occult.⁵⁰⁷ Copenhaver shares that occultism, as the study of magic, names a “larger and longer-lived set of beliefs and practices including alchemy, astrology, demonology, divination, Kabbalah, witchcraft, and so on” (2015, 24). In

⁵⁰⁶ Brian P. Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Copenhaver has contributed copious publications on the occult from over a forty-year research period, with his 2015 book including an impressive bibliography of fifty pages.

many ways, because of these associations, occult history has long been scorned with the most extreme theologians having equated occultism with demonology. Culture historian Christopher Partridge coined this religious hegemonic bias as “occultural,” to speak to how these views ‘others’ the occult as being at best irrational and foolish, and at its worst a form of devil worship. Partridge asserts that these mainstream value judgements have long rendered occult practices as pathological and sinister. For this reason, scholars such as Partridge and Copenhaver, have worked to honor the sacred rather than profane aspects of this history, to consecrate the occult as a form of magical mysticism.

In the mid to late 19th century, the occult was of interest to a broad swath of Americans covering the gamut of those interested in seances, to trance mesmeric healing therapies, or mediums communicating clairvoyant messages received from celestial beings. Those known as ‘Spiritualists’ held seances to communicate with the dead, providing messages from the beyond, and soothing therapy for those grieving loss of their loved ones. Spiritualists are said to be inheritors of a Renaissance worldview, indebted to hermeticism in general and Kabbalism in particular, that viewed the natural world as utterly shot through with the divine.⁵⁰⁸ Notably, the National Spiritualist Association had both Black and white members until 1925.⁵⁰⁹

Ann Braude, Director of Women Studies in Religion at the Harvard Divinity School, found that women were radical leaders in the Spiritualist movement as mediums, lecturers, and as activists in women’s reform. Spiritualist groups were a major radical force advocating for women’s rights, sexual enjoyment, and voicing strong arguments in the anti-slavery movement. Women, most importantly, were leaders in the Spiritualist movement as mediums. Mediums

⁵⁰⁸ Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

⁵⁰⁹ Former slave Sojourner Truth was the Vice President of the National Spiritualist Association, and the President Victoria Woodhull famously was the first white woman to run for president of the United States with Frederick Douglass as her running mate in 1872 (Gutierrez 2009, 98).

worked privately or for larger groups in seances, and many Spiritualists gave mesmerizing ‘trance lectures’ for large audiences. The idea that women innately had ‘feminine emotional sensitivities’ was seen at this time as being a spiritual attribute, and as such powerful spirit voices could speak through women. Mediums were thought of as being able to connect directly with the spirit world without needing mediation by a minister or the Church. An important concept in Spiritualism was that souls were not doomed to almighty hell, rather, in the spirit realm they were able to continue to grow, evolve, and even face their errors and sins against others during their lifetime on the ‘other side.’ As scholar Cathy Gutierrez explains in *Plato’s Ghost*, salvation of souls was paramount, especially in the mid 19th century when death by disease was so common that 70% had a chance of making it to age 50, and 40% to age 70. When the Civil War claimed the lives of millions of men, families turned to Spiritualists to communicate with the dead through trance mediums. Spiritualism was so popular by mid-century it is thought that half the nation attended seances. Braude argues that women as trance lecturers became “emboldened to overcome internal fears about their capabilities” to have their voices heard publicly. Their brazenness gave rise to the later acceptance and demand for women as platform speakers (2001).⁵¹⁰ Stebbins would have benefitted from the Spiritualist movement although its popularity had died down by the 1880’s with accusations against charlatans and stage trickery manipulating vulnerable clients.

Braude notes that the difference between Spiritualism and the occult was the lack of interest in magic, and unlike occult paganism, Spiritualism did not incorporate earth-based deities into its beliefs or practices” (2014, 2).⁵¹¹ By available evidence, Stebbins was not a

⁵¹⁰ Ann Braude, “Thine for Agitation,” in *Radical Spirits, Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 56–81.

⁵¹¹ Dennis Denisoff, “Performing the Spirit: Theatre, the Occult, and the Ceremony of Isis,” *Cahiers victoriens & édouardiens* 80 (2014): 2–12.

Spiritualist (or Harmonialist) but rather an occultist/esoteric mystical thinker. Scholar Mark Morrison explored 19th century American periodicals on Spiritualism and esotericism, in which there were tens of thousands in circulation. He notes in general, “Esotericism is based upon ideas of secret or hidden knowledge passed on only between initiates and upon ideas of direct experience leading to self-transformation and union with the divine” (2008, 3). Western esotericism is identified by four intrinsic characteristics— 1) belief in “symbolic and real correspondences [...] among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen 2) nature is animated by life energy or divinity 3) belief in the ability to explore realms between the material world and divine 4) a belief in humans' abilities to engage in spiritual self-transmutation” (10–14).⁵¹² Scholar Courtenay Raia notes that occult groups tended to be “secretive and ceremonial, reasserting the hermetic ethos of personal development, ritual enactment, and the pursuit of esoteric wisdom” (2019, 21).⁵¹³

Stebbins was interested in engaging with esoteric/theurgical rituals to invoke the divine. One of the oldest obscure texts on theurgy (found in fragments) is the Chaldean Oracles. Thought to have been composed in ancient Syria, possibly by the Persian prophet Zoroaster, the oracles include remarks on theurgical practices. Pre-Hellenistic cultures in the ancient Near East had a long history of intellectual and cultural exchange therefore the actual origins of the oracles are not entirely clear however it is known that these concepts continued to evolve. According to classics scholar Robin Douglas, the Syrian philosopher and pagan theologian Iamblichus, defended theurgical concepts in his Greek text *Περὶ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων μυστηρίων*. In the 14th century, medieval Italian scholar Marsilio Ficino translated a collection of Hermetic and

⁵¹² Mark S. Morrisson, “The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (2008): 1–22.

⁵¹³ Courtenay Raia, *The New Prometheus: Faith, Science, and the Supernatural Mind in The Victorian Fin De Siecle* (University of Chicago Press, 2019.)

Neoplatonic texts including the work of Iamblichus into Latin, *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (*On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*).⁵¹⁴ Copenhaver stresses that as a Christian and theoretician of magic, Ficino made a point of differentiating between demonic thaumaturgy used sometimes by the Egyptians as a sort of dark magic jinx, with that of the Chaldean *henosis* where the goal is union with the divine as a form of pious theurgy (2015).

Stebbins' Mysterious Manuscript

Stebbins is thought to have translated a version of *De Mysteriis*, however I found this attribution to be questionable and investigated. Dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter states that Stebbins “translated into English from French” a work titled *An Egyptian Initiation of Iamblichus, a Neoplatonist of the 4th Century* in 1901 (Ruyter 1999, 53). Stebbins’ translation was not published, and the original manuscript has not been found. Yet, some suggest she translated the text to share it privately with occult groups.⁵¹⁵ In 1965, “Stebbin’s” manuscript was typed and published by Edward Leon Bloom, a Mason. He cites Stebbins on the main page as having translated the manuscript from the French author Paul Christian, however it is unclear how Bloom came across ‘her’ manuscript, although it is thought to have been handed down via members of ‘The Brotherhood of Light,’ an occult organization. Here is where things turn slightly sideways. The French work by Christian, *Histoire de la Magie: du monde surnaturel et de la fatalite' `a travers les temps et les peuples* (1870) is a 667–page book, while the 1965 *Egyptian Initiation* text is 46 pages.⁵¹⁶ As such, it is not a complete translation of Christian’s

⁵¹⁴ “Poetry from the Gods: The Mysterious Chaldean Oracles,”

<https://antigonejournal.com/2025/02/chaldaean-oracles/>

⁵¹⁵ <https://green-door.narod.ru/pctarot.html>

⁵¹⁶ http://iapsop.com/ssoc/1965_christian_astley_iamblichus_egyptian_initiation.pdf
<https://archive.org/details/PaulChristianJeanBaptistePitoisHistoireDeLaMagie/page/n75/mode/2up?view=theater>

book but an excerpt. I compared these books, and the 1965 text is a direct translation of Christians' work from page 104–145. The 'Bloom version' of 'Stebbins' manuscript has added commentary (on the first pages he adds a sentence at the end of each paragraph, underlines words for emphasis and uses exclamation points which would not have been in Stebbins' writing and are not in Christian's). Bloom says that "Stebbins" stated Christian's work was "founded on the treatise of Iamblichus yet elaborated upon and portrayed dramatically" by him (1965, 60). In fact, Christian's chapter is not at all like the Iamblichus text and does not seem to come from this ancient text at all. Instead, Christian portrays an 'ancient Egyptian initiation' which seems to be a complete fiction. This is important, as it is the Brotherhood of Light's (later Church of Light) only claim to Stebbins' direct influence in their occult group, which continues to this day.

The narrative of the ancient Egyptian initiation is slightly amusing, as Christian's writing is entirely a flight of fancy. Set in Egypt, it depicts a mysterious initiation in which an adept is led by a Magus through a secret door to get inside the Great Sphinx of Giza structure. Once inside, they pass through a maze of underground tunnels in an ever-descending journey until they arrive at an inner temple. The hall has twenty-two paintings that are illuminated by oil lit lamps. The images in the paintings correspond to the twenty-two Major arcana of the Tarot, based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It could be possible Stebbins might have been asked to translate Christian's French text by a friend, for those who enjoyed the idea of ancient rituals and the symbolic relevance of Tarot. However, unless a written manuscript emerges of her translation there is no direct evidence that she did so, but then again, there's no reason to argue that she didn't either. She could have easily done so as her French skills were advanced, and Stebbins would have been familiar with the significant mythological and esoteric narratives behind each image in the Major arcana tarot. Yet, there is still something unusual about the claim as the

writing bears no resemblance to Stebbins.’ It is simply a translation which anyone could have done. Edward Bloom also published an enlarged version of an 1889 occult text, *The Light of Egypt* in 1963, before publishing ‘Stebbins’ translated material. It seems to me that Bloom is responsible for inserting Stebbins name in the Brotherhood of Light storyline, which to date has no supporting evidence.

The ‘paintings’ inside Giza, described in ‘Stebbins’ apparent unpublished manuscript in 1901 published in 1965 by Bloom are similar to the Major arcana of the Crowley/Harris Tarot deck created by British occultist Aleister Crowley in collaboration with the visual artist Lady Frieda Harris in 1944.⁵¹⁷ According to the Crowley handbook, their 78-card deck and accompanying commentary for each card were created through a complex analysis of “the world of magic, astrology, alchemy, the Cabala, the traditions of Mediterranean cultures and Celtic peoples, and particularly the secretive mythology of Ancient Egypt” (1995, intro).⁵¹⁸ Certainly, the Iamblichus *De Mysteriis* text⁵¹⁹ influenced Christian, Stebbins, and Crowley, as it was a foundational treatise on Mediterranean occult history, where the Goddess Isis is central.

The Church of Light, an occult group founded in California, claims that Stebbins and her second husband Astley were members. Formerly known as the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (est. 1884 in Great Britain), then Hermetic Brotherhood of Light (functioning around 1887 for a limited time), Brotherhood of Light (est. 1895 in the U.S.), then the Church of Light (est. 1932). Ruyter cites the Church of Light’s assertion that Stebbins was a member before she met her second husband Norman Astley, yet there is no verification of this (1999, 52). Most of the

⁵¹⁷ <https://tabi.org.uk/2021/11/magentas-musings-lady-frieda-harris/> Harris’ paintings were finished by 1944 and the deck published in 1969. Her paintings are in the collection of Warburg Institute of the University of London. I have owned the Crowley Tarot for over 25 years.

⁵¹⁸ Aleister Crowley and Lady Frieda Harris, *The Crowley Tarot: The Handbook of the Cards* (U.S. Games Systems, 1995).

⁵¹⁹ <https://archive.org/details/dillon-clark-de-mysteriis-gr-en-2003/page/n223/mode/2up>

timelines for the Church of Lights claims regarding Stebbins/Astley do not work. The H.B. of L had limited growth in the U.S. once it was found out that the group leader, Thomas Burgoyne had been found guilty of mail fraud in England and unauthorized use of another man's name and served jail time in 1883. He was said to be a devious black magician by other occult organizations who called him out in various occult papers as a "frightful fake," for creating a "catch penny affair" (Godwin et al 1995, 392).

Scholars Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chancel and John P. Deveney explored a range of primary resources and historical occult publications/weeklies to investigate the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor's lineage drawing from private collections, Harvard Houghton Library collections, and the municipal library in Lyon, France. After Burgoyne's scandal, the group split up moving to France and the U.S., Burgoyne left a wife and family and fled to Georgia with a member, Peter Davidson, where they hoped to establish a colony. The U.S. branch was troubled by Burgoyne's scandal that followed him. The desired colony did not get off the ground and they parted ways. Davidson stayed in Georgia and effectively took over the organization, changing the name of the group from Luxor to the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, wrote several manuscripts that were translated into French, and membership in the U.S. apparently closed in 1913. Burgoyne travelled to Denver where he found financial support and in 1889 published a book *The Light of Egypt* (under the name Zanon, said to be copies of copies of other occult works 1995, 44). After apparently moving to Monterey, California, (around 1899) the Church of Light claims that Burgoyne met Norman Astley who said he would pay for Burgoyne to print his occult lessons (Godwin et al 1995, 38). However, it doesn't seem that Astley was living there at the time, although he and Stebbins did move to the general area in 1917 (to Carmel by the Sea) and by this time the organization Brotherhood of Light was defunct. The Church of Light

website (K. Paul Johnson) asserts that Astley was not only a member of the Brotherhood of Light, but also that Astley *was an alias of Zaroni/ Thomas Burgoyne* or *Astley was Davidson*. This is mere speculation. In occult scholarship (by Godwin et al) on the various leaders in the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor after investigating volumes of historical primary source materials, Astley's name is mentioned only once in 440 pages. Most importantly, the rumored connections of Astley with the Church of Light are said to be hardly credible. Stebbins is not mentioned at all. Why would Stebbins marry a man known for using aliases, who was spoken of as having poor character, and who had been in prison as a result? She was a well-known public figure, and reports would have been made public if Astley was an alias of Burgoyne or Davidson (who meanwhile was with his family in Georgia). Occult groups regularly reported on other leaders and associates and warned of certain people's actions to maintain their own credibility. If Astley 'was Burgoyne,' it would have been made public. This is not to say that Stebbins or Astley were not involved in occult practices, but to what group they might have been associated with is not known.

The Goddess Isis

The first image of Isis on the next page is from a description in *The History and Practice of Magic* by Paul Christian 1870 and illustrated in *Le Tarot Divinatoire* by "Le Dr. Papus" (1909). In the 1944 Crowley/Harris Thoth Tarot deck, Isis is presented as "The High Priestess." She represents the unconscious, dreams, and visions. She is the mediator for those who want to connect with the divine, and she only admits those who are 'ready' for mystical contemplation. Passion plays were created in honor of Isis and Osiris as mythical archetypes for the marriage of heaven and earth. Myths and archetypes communicate at the poetic level of mind and speak to an

‘imagining soul.’ According to Jean Houston, theologian and researcher in the Human Potential Movement, the story of Isis and Osiris is ancient, thought to be older than Egypt itself emerging from settlers who came to Northern Egypt from the south (1998, 94). Isis and Osiris is a story about primordial time and the birth of the universe. It is also a story about cyclical time in which ‘realities overlap’ much like an infinity loop, where there are three realms of the ‘now, the previous, and the future,’ all occurring simultaneously.⁵²⁰



Fig. 135. Isis Image (Major Arcana II), as described in *The History and Practice of Magic* by Paul Christian 1870 and illustrated in *Le Tarot Divinatoire*, by Le Dr. Papus (1909). Fig. 136. “The Priestess” Tarot card, painting of Isis by Lady Freida Harris in *The Crowley Tarot*.

The occult influenced 19th century theatre through popular Symbolist and Gothic dramas. Stage craft smoke and mirror trickery created ghostly illusions, while magic lanterns projected phantasmagoria that both entertained and terrified crowds. As noted, ancient rituals in Egyptian and Greek mystery plays inspired Stebbins’ dances. In 1892, Stebbins created a choreography inspired by the Egyptian Goddess Isis called *Dance of Day* reflecting on the mystery of death and the afterlife. This is the performance that inspired a young Ruth St. Denis. The *New York Times* reviewed her performance at the Madison Square Theater saying Stebbins was met by an “accustomed large assemblage, occupying all the available space in the theatre” to watch her

⁵²⁰ Jean Houston, *The Passions of Isis and Osiris* (Wellspring Ballantine, 1998).

illustrate in “graceful pantomime and pretty dance” the allegorical symbolism of Isis. In her performance Stebbins wore a Greek gown and sandals, and “executed her statue poses of Greek mythological characters” before illustrating the evolution of dancing.⁵²¹ In the second part of the show, Stebbins gave a “cleverly illustrated recitation called ‘Apollo Belvedere,’ performed more statue poses to picture the ‘Niobid,’ and closed the matinee with a pantomime entitled *The Myth of Isis*.” The orchestra was under direction of established Broadway composer, Percy Gaunt.



Fig. 137. 1896 Isis engraving. Fig. 138. Stebbins in her Greek tunic, “Miriam, Sweet and Fair [...] Genevieve Stebbins, Exponent of Responsive Expression, to Appear” *Boston Globe*, February 11, 1894, 7. Fig. 139. Henri Fuseli 1830 engraving “Unveiling Isis” in Paul Christian’s text (1870, 633).

In Egyptian mythology, Isis is a goddess of life and death, fertility, and magic. In classical art, the Goddess Isis is presented wearing a veil which serves as a metaphor for nature’s inaccessible secrets. When the veil of Isis is lifted, it represents the idea that science, art, or philosophy has managed to uncover nature’s secrets by revealing some awe-inspiring truth. The Goddess is seen with prominent breasts or having multiple breasts as the Great Earth Mother

⁵²¹ “Amusements: Three Matinees,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1892, 4.

nourishing all life. At the Temple to Isis in the ancient Egyptian town of Sais, cult followers participated in secret initiation rites in her honor.

In the 19th century, occult groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1888–1901) based in England, created ceremonies in honor of Isis said to be a “site of feminist self-realization.” according to scholar Dennis Denisoff.⁵²² The Golden Dawn appealed to a broad swathe of people including the bourgeoisie, physicians, clergy, and political activists who were members of the Order. Theatricality played a large part in staging ritual practices within occult organizations. Denisoff states that “Due in part to its emphasis on the role of the imagination in spiritual development, artists and authors had a particular affinity with the Golden Dawn. Members were involved in all aspects of the occult theatre scene, from writing and acting to producing and financing” including financier Annie Horniman, playwright W. B. Yeats, actress Florence Farr, novelist Olivia Shakespear who co-authored dramas, as well as Oscar Wilde’s wife Constance. Stebbins is thought to have been a member of the Brotherhood of Light, however, I see more of an alliance with the Golden Dawn group.

The first Temple of the Golden Dawn, consecrated in London in 1888, was called Isis-Urania. Once the group split and some members moved to Paris, they continued to create ritualistic rites for Isis there (Butler 2000, 116).⁵²³ Private meetings were held in occult member’s homes with occult performances, staging, props and costumes as integral components— as was imbibing drugs to enhance the magical effect, though presumably some would have demurred. In a somewhat similar manner to statue posing, occult members would

⁵²² Dennis Denisoff, “Occult Ecology and the Decadent Feminism of Moina Mathers and Florence Farr,” in *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860–1910: Decay, Desire, and the Pagan Revival* (Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture. Cambridge University Press, 2021), 140–173. Dennis Denisoff, “Performing the Spirit: Theatre, the Occult, and the Ceremony of Isis,” Open Edition Journal, 2014. <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/1552?gathStatIcon=true&lang=en>

⁵²³ Alison Louise Butler, “The Revival of Occult Philosophy: Cabalistic Magic and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn” (PhD diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland), 2000.

perform rituals to embody a Goddess or God and channel their divine energy. Occult members would engage in ceremonies and rituals with theurgical intent to unite with cosmic intelligence and the divine world. In the Golden Dawn, rituals were created for the magical system of the Order that required “concentration, visualization, will power, peaceful inner state, good intentions,” (Butler 2000, 113) which is similar to Stebbins’ practices. Indeed, the Order believed that performance and the role of theatre was a form of spiritual engagement (Denisoff 2014, 2).

Animating the Statues

In the art of statue posing, Stebbins could act as a medium connecting with ethereal essences. Ancient Arabic texts on “Byzantine magic” translated in the medieval era, provide information about the belief that pagan statuary, especially cult statues, could be inhabited by demons or divine spirits if they were invoked. The ability to manipulate the supernatural power of these sculptures (their *stoicheion*, στοιχεῖον) was recognized as an occult skill with direct connections to pagan learning.⁵²⁴ In Stebbins work, it should go without saying that her statue posing practice focused on the divine rather than demonic. According to religious studies scholar Justin Sledge, Hermetic texts speak about practitioners trying to animate the statues as a magical device. One would engage in rituals using herbs or incense, incantations, fire, libations, etc. to conjure a deity’s descent into the statue as a vessel. In this theurgical practice, communing with a deity was a method of sacralization. These rituals were witnessed by some of the greatest philosophers of the day such as Proclus, Iamblichus, and Damascius who found them to be

⁵²⁴ Alice Walker, “Magic in Medieval Byzantium,” in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David Collins (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 209–234.

stunning and transformatory.⁵²⁵ Stebbins, was not bringing the divine into a statue itself, but into herself, performing as a living statute and ancient being.

GENEVIEVE STEBBINS will give a grand matinee, at the Madison Square Theatre, on Friday afternoon, November 25, 1892, commencing at 2:30 o'clock. This exhibition is to be given by the most beautiful and artistic woman known in the profession of elocution, or physical culture.

Partial Program—Music by the regular orchestra; Statue Poses; Song by GENEVIEVE STEBBINS; Dance and Pantomime; Jephtha's Daughter; Music by orchestra; Statue Poses; Song; Miriam's Dance, Pantomime.

Part Second—Song; Illustration of Modern Dances compared with Temple Dances; The Myth of Isis.

Fig. 140. New York School of Expression Prospectus, *Werner's*, 1893.

Stebbins' 1892 dance as *Isis* at the Madison Square Theatre was performed in a benefit for the National Christian League's promotion of "social purity." Revenue generated went toward supplying impoverished women the ability to gain an 'honorable' living (meant perhaps to keep them out of the sex trade but also to offer training in new skills for future employment).⁵²⁶ The performance had "the regular orchestra of the theater, and two tenor solos by William H. Rieger, who gave his services gratuitously." The event reportedly had "few vacant seats." The editor of the *Church Union*, Mrs. E. B. Grannis wrote that Stebbins also performed a dance as *Jephtha's Daughter*, saying she wasn't sure people could fully appreciate the "pantomime dancing" unless they have also thought about how "these dances compare with modern dancing." Judging from the enthusiasm of the audience filled with appreciative people, Grannis determined that everyone ought to have a chance to see Stebbins perform. She exclaimed that "in heart and imagination"

⁵²⁵ Dr. Justin Sledge, "The Lost Scriptures of Pagan Neo-Platonism," *Esoterica*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vkp3g3H3cOA>

⁵²⁶ "For Social Purity a Notable Matinee to be Given in New York Today," *Salt Lake Herald*, November 26, 1892, 9; "Entertained by Miss Stebbins," *New York Times*.

Stebbins' performance was "certainly a marvelous exhibition" (quoted in the New York School of Expression Prospectus, 1893, 28).

While Stebbins recognized 'ideal bodies' in ancient Greek statuary, her intention was not meant as a display of physical vanity, but rather to convey artistic representations of the noble spirit in goddesses. She found their stories profoundly inspiring. At one of her performances, the *New York Times* describes Stebbins as an "unusually graceful woman, endowed with great personal charm."⁵²⁷ Stebbins' "illustrations of the art, which revealed most distinctly its worth as a medium for the attainment of physical grace, had steady and admiring attention" by the fashionable audience.⁵²⁸ When Stebbins performed her artistic statue poses, she was described as having "splendid control of body— I might almost say it's a defiance of the law of gravitation [...] To the uninitiated it may seem an easy thing to throw one's body at will into attitudes such as the Flying Mercury, the Fighting Gladiator, or the Dancing Faun. I say to these people, try it; you will ever after have a sincere respect for all flesh and blood imitations of works of art" (Wilbor 1891).⁵²⁹ It required delicate balance and agility to perform these moving poses.

Physical Culture and Aesthetic Dance Studies

There is little to nothing known about Stebbins' dance studies. She did not cite any dance educators that she trained with in her publications. Stebbins performed baroque classical dances and must have studied with a dance master in her youth to prepare for balls and her "coming out" as a debutante. Most major cities had dancing master's to teach the latest social dance fads and traditional dances for balls and social events. Additionally, folk and aesthetic dances were taught

⁵²⁷ Amusements," *New York Times*, April 6, 1892, 4.

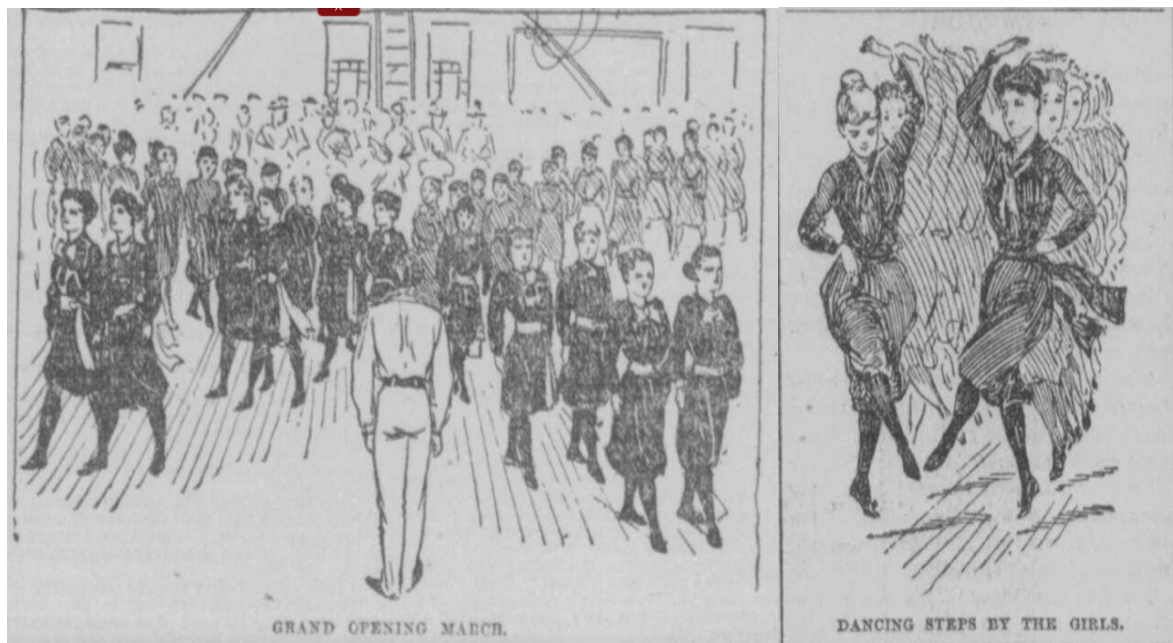
⁵²⁸ *Town Topics* 25, no. 18, April 30, 1891, 8.

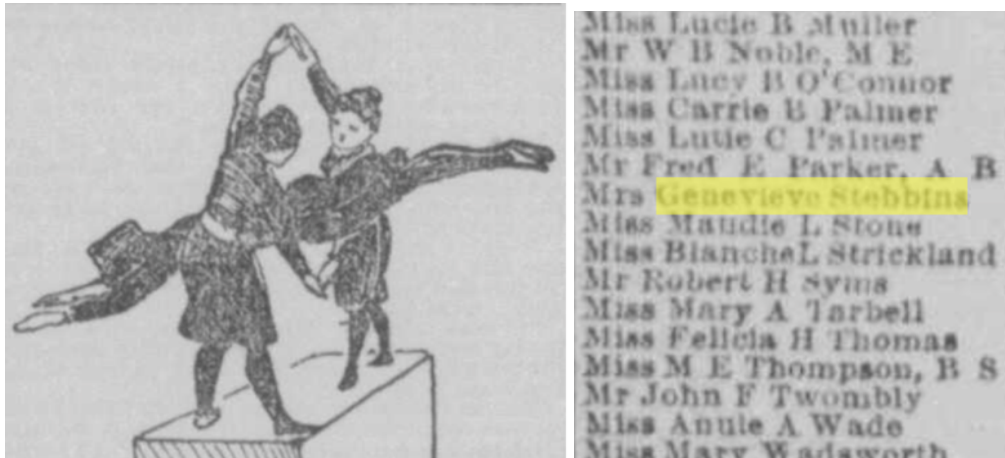
⁵²⁹ *Werner's*, "Delsarte Methods. A Glimpse of the Work of Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Thompson," February 1891.

in physical culture programs. San Francisco had many German psychical culture educators and community clubs, and Stebbins likely learned a variety of folk dances as a youth. Additionally, she could have taken private classes in Boston or New York to develop her skills.

In the summer of 1892, Stebbins attended the Harvard Summer School physical culture program in Cambridge, Massachusetts at the Hemenway Gymnasium. Dr. Dudley Sargeant oversaw the program of over 80 participants (men and women). The closing ceremony of the 1892 program was reported in the *Boston Daily Globe*, saying “Fellows are at a discount today” as men went to watch “the girls” perform. The floors and balcony of the gymnasium were filled and included members of Harvard faculty, many of whom were women.

It was said to be a hot day, and the women needed to use kerchiefs throughout the demonstration, but they didn’t mind as they were doing “the same thing which the boys do” without the slightest embarrassment. The event was under the direction of Sargent, Swedish educator Christian Eberhard, and “Miss Ballintine” who taught aesthetic gymnastics.





Figs. 141. There were over 80 participants listed, “Summer Athletes, Women on the Horizontal and Parallel Bars. Exhibition Day in the Hemenway Gym at Harvard College,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 5, 1892, 3.

After an opening processional march, groups were separated throughout the hall to perform on different apparatus including parallel bars, horizontal bar, vaulting, trapeze, climbing of ropes and flying rings but also demonstrated fencing, Indian clubs, Delsarte expression, and aesthetic dancing. It is unclear what parts Stebbins took part in, but she certainly would have been in the dances. One dance was so enjoyed as the women “led you on with their arms and expressive eyes until every man in the hall had almost overwhelming desire to hug the whole lot of them,”—a sentiment that may not have pleased parents or chaperones.

Dr. Dudley Sargent is recognized as a “fearless pioneer” in the history of physical education who dared to stress dancing as an important and integral adjunct to physical education [...] Much as we may smile at the conception of dance in those days, the fact remains that it was the beginning of what has become a major factor in physical education for women [...] Each year several original pieces of composition, either in dancing, floor work, or staging exhibitions were brought in by teachers in the field (always attracting a large audience).⁵³⁰

The following summer, in 1893, a full aesthetic dance program was established, directed by Melvin Gilbert. There is very little known about alternative dance practices prior to the establishment of American modern dance. In the late 19th century aesthetic dancing emerged

⁵³⁰ Carl Shrader, “The Old Hemenway Gymnasium,” *The Journal of Health and Physical Education* 19, no. 7 (1948): 477.

from physical culture educators experimenting with creative ways to teach a pleasurable and joyous way of exercising. Educators recognized that women, in particular, enjoyed dancing, with its complex physical demands including continual changes of the body in space, balance of strength amongst its parts, and the portrayal of a sense of effortlessness despite complex neuromuscular demands (Stanley and Lowery 1917, 34). Dance was recognized as being physically demanding requiring endurance, accuracy, a high degree of coordination, with endless twisting, torsion, bending of the torso, complex head and arm movements, and rapid contraction and relaxation of muscles.

According to educator Emil Rath in *Aesthetic Dancing* (1914), in decades prior, American innovators of aesthetic dancing synthesized European social and folk-dance forms and used technical movements from these forms to experiment with setting the movements to different tempos or rhythms. Aesthetic dance compilations combined steps from folk dances, such as the schottische, mazurka, polka, jig, quadrille, English country dance, or society dances like the minuet, gavotte, sarabande, pas de zephyr, or waltz. Ballet technique, such as pirouettes, glissés, chassés, sissonnes, jetés, pas de bourees, arabesques, coupé sautés, or assemblés also were creatively integrated. In aesthetic dance, torso movements included bending sideways, or arching backwards, and swinging the trunk from side to side, or in a circle. These movement aspects could be combined to create new dances, new movement patterns, and new choreography. In many ways, aesthetic dance came to be a distinctly American creation, as a variety of new European immigrants brought various national dance forms to their new home and shared them with others. Community engagement allowed dancers to see different dances, combinations of perhaps new and invigorating dance steps, and dancers mixed steps together as they learned them. In physical culture programs, educators mixed steps together in new combinations.



Fig. 142. *Boston Post* July 7, 1895.

Dance historian Nancy Chalfa Ruyter notes that some physical culture educators integrated a melange of dance steps, drawing from Russian ballet, Irish jigs, African American clogs, buck and wing, and soft shoe dancing.⁵³¹ Aesthetic dance exercises could also include “natural” movements, such as walking, running, skipping, stretching, bending, leaping, twirling, or galloping. These actions were recognized as being “Greek” or “Classic,” replicating images of dancing nymphs or maenads in light leaping steps and frolicking movements, as could be found on ancient Greek vases or friezes. Loosely formed attitudes and arabesques are seen in the ancient Greek dance, with bending torsos. “Natural” dance movements were inspired by nature itself, such as physically imitating the wind blowing or dancers representing waves in motion. Thus, the term “natural dance” sometimes replaced the designation of aesthetic dance.⁵³²

At the turn of the century being a physical culture teacher was a respectable job for a woman. Of the nations’ training schools in physical education, women made up 75 percent of the

⁵³¹ Ruyter, mentioned specifically the physical educator William Anderson, 1979, 90.

⁵³² For more information, see the publication *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance* (Springer Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

graduates in 1903, and in a 1905 study, 65 percent of women taught physical training in schools (Verbrugge, 1988, 163). In the physical culture movement, various methods were recognized for producing ‘salutogenic’ benefits, that is, physical practices were known to maintain health and well-being. Physical culture educators in Europe were trained as doctors, and in the U.S., many doctors were the directors of physical culture programs. In an 1891 report on physical culture training programs, in 272 American cities there were 41% using German gymnastics, 29% Swedish Ling, 12% Delsarte, and 18% were a combination of these. Only 10% of such programs were established prior to 1887.⁵³³ Out of 58 American schools of elocution and teachers of expression that advertised in *Werner’s Directory*, 21 offered the Delsarte method (Ruyter 1979, 433). Stebbins was at the center of a physical culture and aesthetic dance boom.

In 1892 Ohio State University established a teacher training school in which the principal study was Harmonic Gymnastics— essentials of expression; physical training; respiration; vocal culture; articulation; pantomime, sigh reading and recitation. Physical training was integral within their program including Ling gymnastics and Delsarte Drills (Stebbins’ choreography). The president, Dr. Delaware, was one of Stebbins’ former pupils (*Werner’s*, 1896, 1060). By 1903, graduate courses in Harmonic Gymnastics were added. Teachers were in high demand, as Ohio had mandated physical culture in high schools across the state. The Oratory and Physical Education program merged, lasting until at least 1913, teaching— a) The Organic, which aims to secure proportions and normal adjustments of all parts of the body; b) The Harmonic which prepares the body for Expression” Organic stimulates growth. Harmonic primarily psychic.⁵³⁴

⁵³³ Simon Jenkins, *Sports Science Handbook* (Multi-Science Publishing, 2005).

⁵³⁴ Clarence Wesley Molitor, *A History of Physical Education at Ohio Northern University* (Master thesis, 1956, Ohio State University).

Remarkably, prior to Stebbins establishing her own school in 1893, her pedagogy had already entered college learning. The following illustration shows German gymnastics (1875) which clearly demonstrates what became known as modern competitive gymnastics.

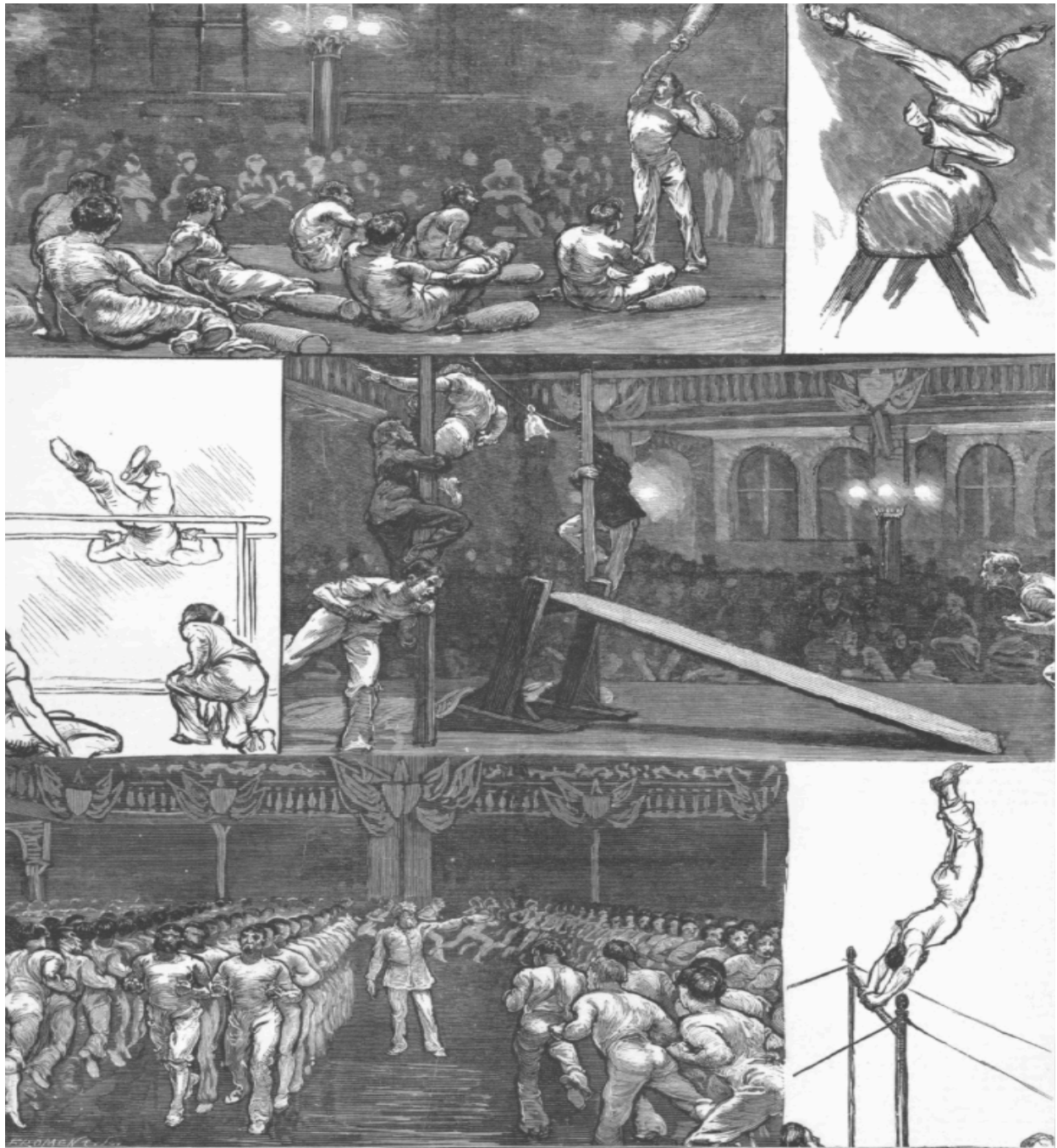


Fig 143. "German Gymnastics," *Harper's Weekly*, March 13, 1875.

Genevieve Stebbins and The New York School of Expression:

1893 and Carnegie Hall

In December 1892, the *Boston Daily Globe* reported that Stebbins was giving weekly Delsarte classes at the exclusive New York Ladies' Club. The club was between 4th Avenue and Broadway on 22nd street and boasted 500 members. It had a room with a great white fur rug covering the center of the floor and white and gold chairs, with a daily 4 o'clock tea (December 17, 1892, 10.) Stebbins soon after parted ways with Mary Thompson to establish the New York School of Expression in three studios at Carnegie Hall in 1893 (Ruyter 1999, 52, 104–113). At this time she also separated from her first husband as she had fallen in love with another man, Norman Astley, who became her second husband and business partner.



Fig. 144. Unknown illustrator, *Wheeley Sunday Register*, April 27, 1890, 6.

Carnegie Hall is located at 57th Street and 7th Avenue a few blocks from Central Park, near the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and numerous public libraries. A large theater was built seating 3,000, a Recital Hall seating 1,000 (which has gone through numerous renovations and name changes), and a Chamber Music Hall seating 500. Stebbins' students studied to become master teachers, magnetic performers, or vibrant public speakers. They held recitals twice a year at Carnegie Hall, "giving accommodations unexcelled by those of any school in the country."⁵³⁵



Fig. 145. Initial construction of Carnegie Hall in 1891, Carnegie Rose Archives.

By 1893, *Werner's* states that Stebbins was known to be "foremost among the artists and teachers devoted to expression, elocution, physical culture, and dramatic impersonation [...] No one has approached, either in theory or in practice, the formulative and practical work done by her. She stands unexcelled" and is the "acknowledged representative of practical Delsartism in America."⁵³⁶ The directory states that the "most valuable feature of her work as a teacher is that, unlike most of the profession, she is able herself to do, before a critical audience, everything that she teaches to her pupils, so that they have the advantage of both example and precept. She is

⁵³⁵ A.Y., *Werner's*, December 1894, 464.

⁵³⁶ "Sketches & Portraits, Artists and Teachers," *Werner's*, December 1893, 444.

creative in all her work, is a most accomplished and original teacher and exemplar of aesthetic art.”⁵³⁷ Building on fifteen years as an educator, her school was Carnegie Hall’s first educational program to offer a diploma, described in *The Teachers World* as ranking amongst the highest. Some of her former pupils are listed below,

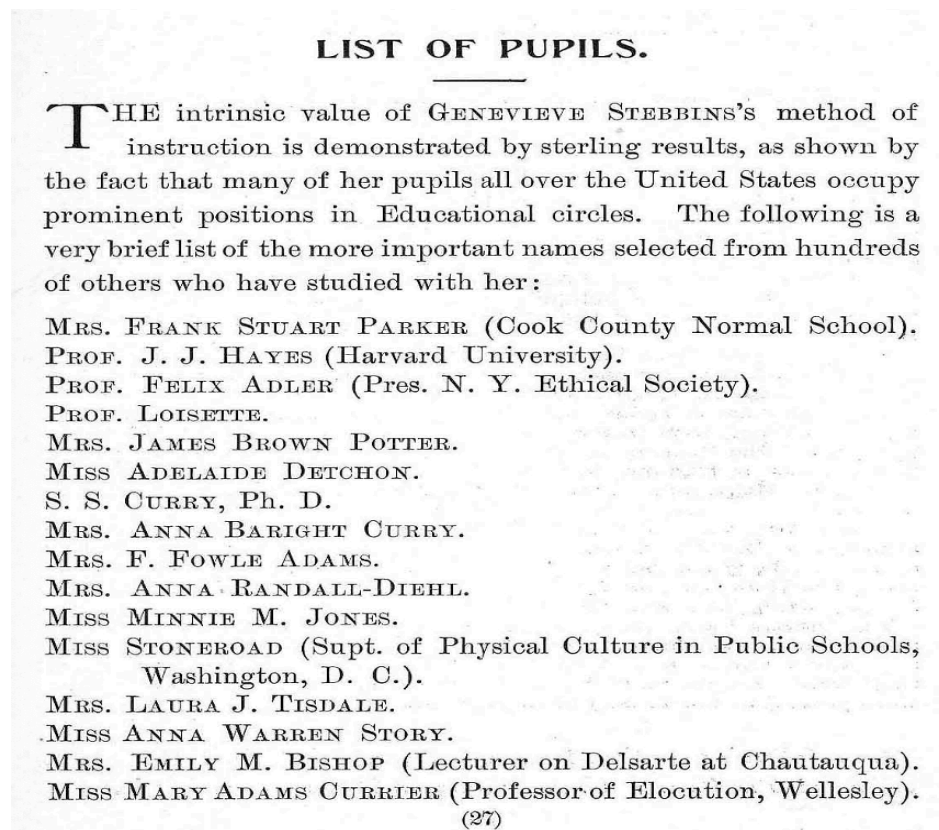


Fig. 146. *New York School of Expression School Prospectus*, Publisher Edgar Werner, 1893, 27.

In an 1895 article for *Keynote: Music, Art, Drama, Literature*, it was said, The New York School of Expression “is not merely the only institution of its kind in the metropolis, but in many unique features it can rightfully claim superiority to similar schools in other cities.” Furthermore, Stebbins appearances in Boston, Philadelphia, New Haven, Cleveland, Buffalo and Washington “extended her fame as a pantomimic artist, though they would add nothing to the reputation she already enjoys in the city.” She was known for teaching aesthetic physical culture that “holds the

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

first place in the estimation of all who are familiar with this important branch of education” (1895, 43). Stebbins’ school brochure argues, “Life is too short and Art too long to strive for the unattainable. Valuable time will not be wasted [...] in the attainment of beautiful sentimental nothings. All tendencies in the pupil to affectation, either vocal or physical, will be severely criticized, for the greatest charm in a teacher consists in being natural. It is a practical school for real work in the various branches of Expression, which command an immediate market value for the possessor” (1893, 7). Stebbins meant business— and she aimed to create a profession for women so they could seek employment as an educator or entertainer, or both.



Fig. 147. American Academy of Dramatic Arts studio at Carnegie Hall, an example of what the NYSE studios would have looked like, Courtesy Carnegie Rose Archives.

The *Keynote* said the school was a unique feature of the new Carnegie Hall occupying a “splendid suite of large sunny rooms (no. 807, 808, 809) fitted especially for their use.” Their studio had a “handsome stage, twenty feet by ten, tastefully draped in crimson and terra cotta,” with “border lights, center and side entrances, dressing rooms, etc.” Students could use the

Carnegie Recital Hall and Chamber Hall stages to practice and stage events. There was a café bar on the ground street level and a dining room on the second-floor seating 100 diners.

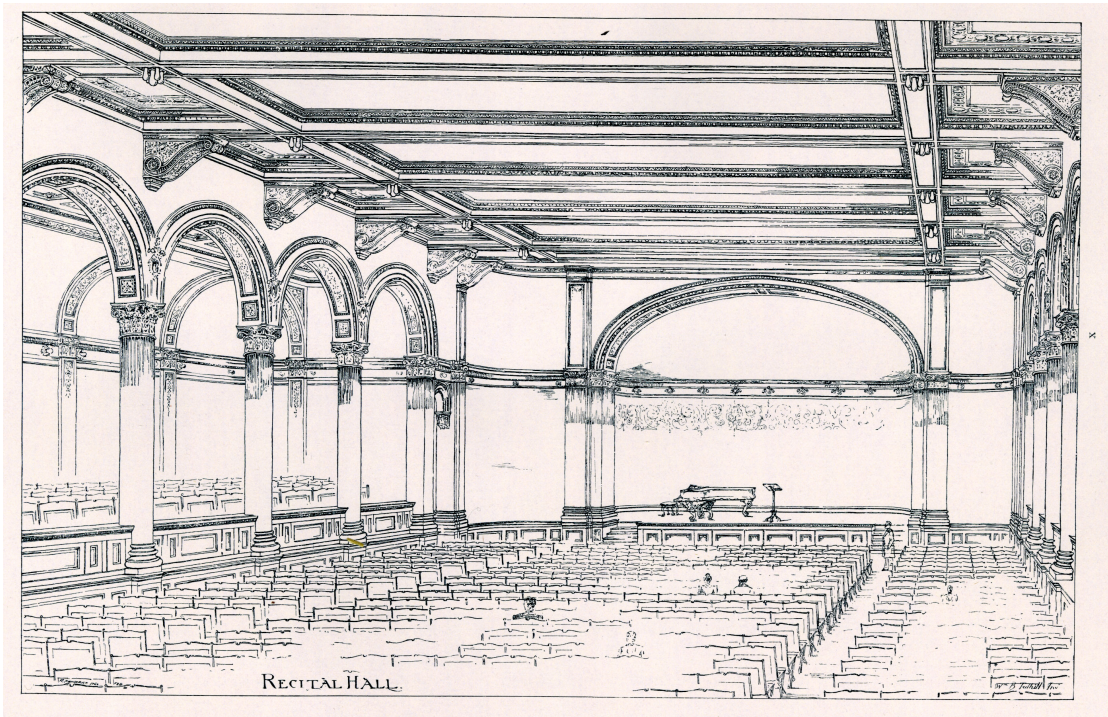


Fig. 148. Carnegie Recital Hall, 1895, renamed the Carnegie Lyceum in 1896. Courtesy of Carnegie Hall Archives.

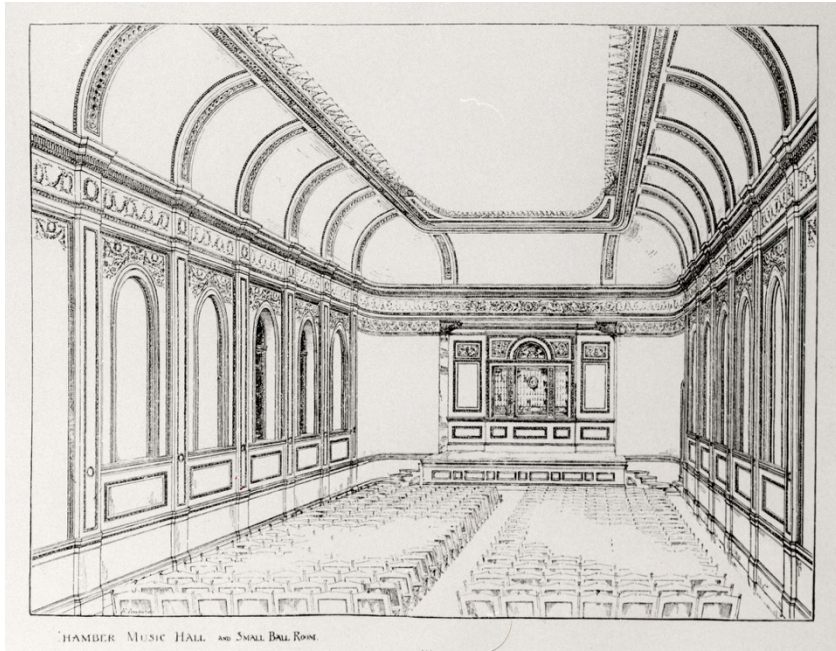


Fig. 149. Chamber Music Hall.

Stebbins' pedagogy was designed for students to become first rate, well-rounded teachers able to command high salaries of \$1000, public speakers, or performers. She stated that a teacher

of elocution was expected to embody their own training through “grace in motion, grace in action” (1893, 7). The program provided post-graduate training in Elocution (literature, dramatic criticism, Delsarte Expression, vocal culture, and text analysis) and Swedish Ling Physical Culture, with training held in a specially equipped gymnasium. Carnegie Hall did not have a gym therefore they used a gymnasium at “160 and 162 West 74th Street” equipped with apparatus “personally approved of by Dr. Sargent, Director of the Gymnasium at Harvard.”⁵³⁸ The gymnasium address was at the Veltin School for Girls, a college preparatory school.

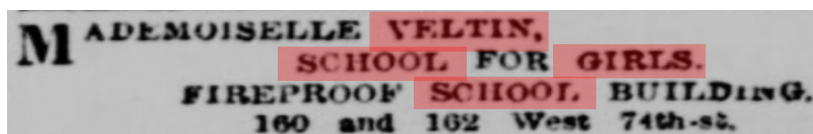


Fig. 150. *New York Tribune* advertisement, December 17, 1893, 10.

The proprietress for another school for young women, Caroline Reed, wrote a letter of recommendation for Stebbins, saying her school was to “correspond to that of Mlle. Reichenberg of the Comédie-Française, and others at Paris whose classes in diction are filled the *haute noblesse*” (Suzanna Reichemberg was a Baroness and sociétaire of the Comédie-Française). Stebbins previously taught at Reed’s school and after the first semester students were so enthusiastic Reed said, “they all besought me to give them another.” As such, Reed felt that Stebbins’ school would be a welcome addition for New York society (1893, 8).

In my search to find out what gymnasium Stebbins used for her school I initially thought she held classes at the Berkeley Ladies Athletic Club. It is possible they used the gym after 1893 as it was closer to Carnegie Hall and larger. The club had a large gymnasium built in 1889 on West 44th street. The gym was popular amongst the upper-class crowd, said to be “securely surrounded

⁵³⁸ *New York School of Expression* School Prospectus, Publisher Edgar Werner, 1893, 15.

by the iron band of the Four Hundred,” or in other words, the “Goddesses of Gotham.”⁵³⁹ The ‘400’ was a term coined at the time for families who were on the ‘invite list’ for parties hosted by New York’s high society. Women of the elite in Gilded Age New York were not as ‘precious’ as I had imaged. In fact, surprisingly, if not shockingly, I discovered that daughters *and mothers* of the ‘400’ loved going to the gym to partake in dancing and exercising, even using dumbbells to develop arm strength. Quite hilariously, if not bewilderingly, the gym had what was called an “Angel’s Swing” that would require what looks to be nine women acting in coordinated action to launch themselves in the air. Starting from a standstill, and each holding onto a bar, women would have to run in unison in the same direction to generate enough velocity before they were able to lift off into the air to fly around in a circle— all the while “laughing and shouting”! (Ibid.) Frankly, I would love to try this— what a bizarre blast of fun!! The image of two young women climbing the ladder, said to be from ‘society,’ ascend as quickly as possible then descend by leaps and bounds.



Fig. 151. “The Angel’s Swing: One of the Delights of the Swell Girl Gymnast,” *Richmond Dispatch*, September 29, 1895, 11. Fig. 152. Columbia Gymnasium suit, circa 1895, MET digital collections, The Jacqueline Loewe Fowler Costume Collection, Gift of Jacqueline Loewe Fowler, 1980.

⁵³⁹ *Richmond Dispatch*, September 29, 1895, 11.

It would require strength, agility, coordination, and a bit of fearlessness for these activities. Skirts would certainly have been an impediment, but clearly did not slow these women down or prevent them from enjoying themselves. They would have likely worn their own ‘gym suits’ when audiences were not present to view their activities.



Fig. 153. (First two images), “Fair Girls with Muscles,” *Salt Lake Herald* February 23, 1890, 16.

Fig. 154. “Fair New York Athletes,” *Cheyenne Daily Leader* (Wyoming), March 18, 1893, 4).

The Berkeley Ladies Athletic Club (No. 23, West Forty-fourth Street) was a women’s only club, with a membership of over 300 under the medical direction of Dr. Mary Bissel.”⁵⁴⁰ The gym was 2000 square feet, and by 1894 had additional equipment provided under the direction of Dr. Sargent of Harvard. Women’s basketball games were held for fun, and a young Mrs. Astor was said to be “clever at throwing the ball” but not as good as another woman who could run rapidly while dribbling the ball.⁵⁴¹ There was a swimming pool in the basement, a bowling alley and billiard halls.⁵⁴² The gymnasium was on the top floor.

⁵⁴⁰ James Grant Wilson, *The Memorial History of the City of New York* (New York History Company, 1892), 258. “Physical Culture,” *Waterbury Evening Democrat*, December 10, 1892, 4.

⁵⁴¹ “Basketball Adepts: Substitute for Football played by Society Women,” *Binghamton State Herald* (Alabama), January 12, 1896, 9. “Gotham Gossip,” *Daily Picayune*, February 12, 1894, 6.

⁵⁴² “Interest in Feminine Athletes,” *Jersey City News*, February 14, 1890, 2.

From what I have found, it is apparent that physical culture was actively pursued and thoroughly enjoyed by society women. Apparently, strength training was advocated not only for enjoying general health and well-being, but also because dance balls would run for hours and women wanted to be able to have the stamina to dance the whole evening.⁵⁴³

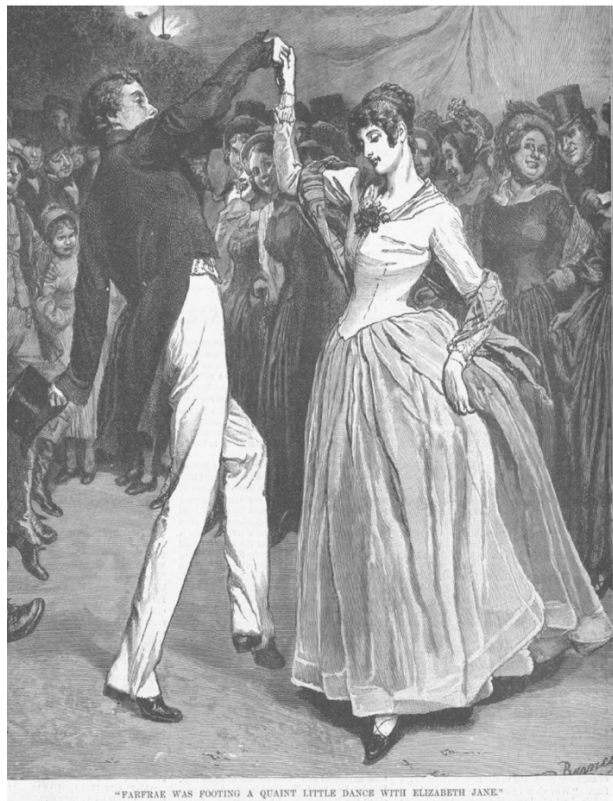


Fig. 155. *Harper's Weekly*, February 1886, 101.

Stebbins' program at the New York School of Expression included Swedish Ling, aesthetic gymnastics, artistic statue posing, Stebbins' Harmonic Gymnastics system, and aesthetic dance choreography taught as 'drills.' Some drills (movement sequences) were designed to elicit a sense of the spirit, the lightheartedness of a dancing nymph, anger and aggression/ or a 'fighting' spirit. In her Athenian Drill "The Victory" movements were intended to create a sense of "domination and power" (1898, 119). The 'Victory' movement sequence combines an

⁵⁴³ "Training a Society Girl for a Ball," *The Boston Post*, March 23, 1901, 21.

Amazonian warrior with a pose of the Greek statue of the goddess Nike called “Winged Victory” (which has been on display at the Louvre since 1884). Many of her publications include descriptions of her ‘aesthetic drills,’ however she states she “had not the time nor the space to write out each exercise for those uninitiated into my system,” as her publications were not necessarily for the novice (1898, 82–83).⁵⁴⁴ Students enrolled in the New York School of Expression could follow one specific plan of study to the exclusion of others in either a one or two-year program.⁵⁴⁵ Students had to pass critical exams before being granted their diploma.

1893 Teaching and Entertainments

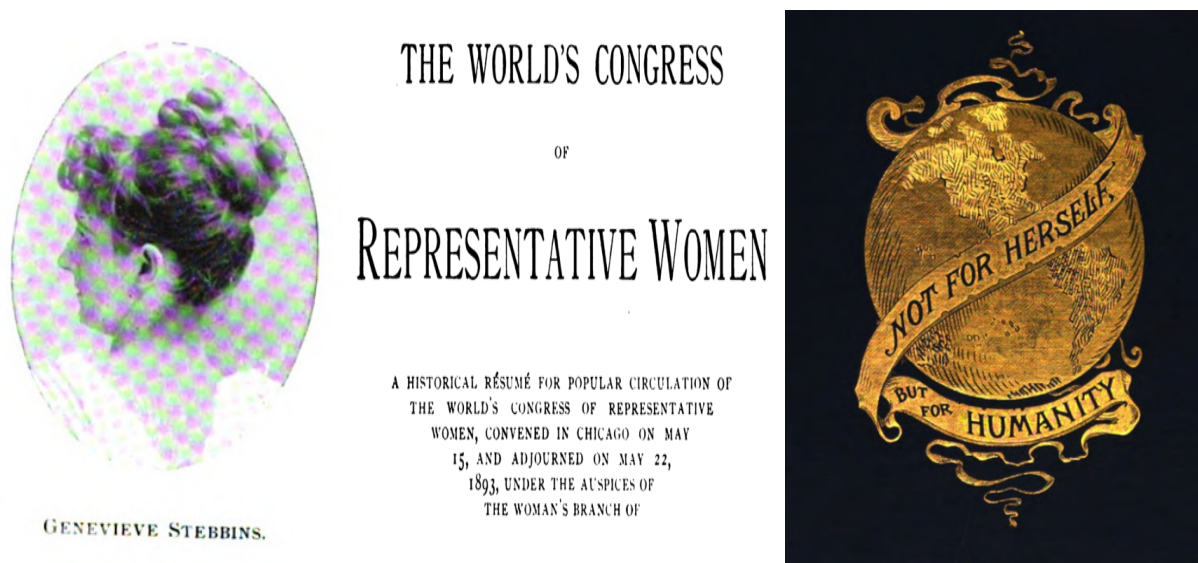
Stebbins participated in the World’s Congress of Representative Women,⁵⁴⁶ held in Chicago from May 15–22, 1893. Elizabeth Cady Stanton gave an address on suffrage, Hallie Q. Brown came from Tuskegee to speak on the progress of “Negro Women,” and Stebbins spoke on May 17th on the “Sacredness of the Marital Relation,” in Hall III (1894, 73). It is worth remembering that decades prior, women who spoke in public were generally vilified as being ‘unsexed,’ or ‘mannish,’ but by the 1890s women were admired (or at least demanding respect) as experts in organizations, conventions, and collegiate classes. The World’s Congress of

⁵⁴⁴ In the winter of 2025, I worked with a group of first-year undergraduate students from York University to explore exercises from Stebbins’ book *Society Gymnastics* that includes several drills and musical scores. It was fascinating to teach the drills, accompanied by live piano with the original musical scores, and to watch the students embodying the movements. Exercises in Harmonic Poise were quite revealing in demonstrating wave-like movements from the top of the head to the tailbone as the feet transferred body weight, ‘to and fro,’ in multiple directions (front/back, side to side, and on the diagonal).

⁵⁴⁵ In Stebbins’ innovative Harmonic Gymnastics system, she merged practices from Swedish Ling Gymnastics, Delsarte expression, poise, and exercises derived from her theater and elocution training. Harmonic Gymnastic practices included therapeutic embodiment exercises, breathing and vocal exercises, pantomimic use of gesture and facial expression, and expressive choreographed movement sequences. I examined the evolution and development of her physical culture system in “Somatics herstories: Tracing the educational antecedents of Elsa Gindler, Hade Kallmeyer, and Genevieve Stebbins,” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, Intellect Press UK, 9 no. 2, (2017): 159–178. “European Antecedents to Somatic Movement,” in *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* (Intellect Books UK, University of Chicago Press. 2016). “Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas.” *Currents: Journal of The Body-Mind Centering® Association*, (2016): 16–28.

⁵⁴⁶ *The Worlds Congress of Representative Women II*, ed. May Wright Sewall (1894), 684.

Representative Women was a week-long convention held at the Women's Building within the World's Columbian Exposition, gathering 500 women from 27 countries to discuss women's issues. The exposition, otherwise known as the World's Fair or 'White City,' attracted 27 million visitors over five months with international presentations of culture, heritage, and technological innovations. The World Women's Congress was said to be the first such diverse gathering of women in America, from the religious orthodox to atheist, fashionable women and working class, black and white, and from varied political backgrounds.⁵⁴⁷



Figs. 156. A photo of Stebbins in *The World's Congress of Representative Women*, 1893, 684.

Under the leadership of the Board of Lady Managers, the Women's Building was dedicated to presenting the work of women as leading scholars, painters, women's clubs, architects, artists, etc. Throughout the Women's Building there were exhibited paintings, fine art, sculptures, craft work, ceramics, decorative arts, books, and other artistic creations by women. The building was designed by architect Sophia Hayden of MIT and entirely run by women's organizational leadership. The board invited representatives from "France, England, Germany, Austria, Russia,

⁵⁴⁷ "World Fair Notes: The National Council of Women of the United States," *The Women's Tribune*, May 13, 1893, 1.

Italy, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Portugal, Japan, Siam, Algeria, Cape Colony, Ceylon, Brazil, the Argentine Republic, Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua.”⁵⁴⁸ Over 60 groups in the Women’s Building represented religious associations, philanthropic projects, education, women’s press, women’s clubs and organizations, and patriotic historical groups (1897, 244).

The exclusion of Black women in the planning process of the women’s congress was protested, and an official pamphlet was printed by Ida Wells and Frederick Douglass, albeit after the fair had opened. Their writing includes horrific statistics of lynchings and the slow state of social progress for African Americans.⁵⁴⁹ Black women’s representation in the Women’s Building, while minimal was existent. Sculptor Mary Edmonia Lewis exhibited, the New York room displayed Black women’s artistry, Fannie Barrier Williams spoke on the intellectual progress of Black women, Sarah Jane Woodson Early addressed the organizational efforts of Black women, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper spoke on women’s political future and Anna Julia Haywood Cooper spoke on Black women’s needs.⁵⁵⁰ Due to the neglect of being more involved in the World’s Congress, the establishment of more Black women’s clubs accelerated to speak to pertinent causes and advocate for representative voices.

According to one event program on May 17, the day Stebbins presented work, it was said to a private reception,⁵⁵¹ but another program shows that Stebbins was a part of the National Christian League for the Promotion of Social Purity delegation and delivered her evening reading in Hall III.⁵⁵² This organization offered training programs for working class women,

⁵⁴⁸ *A history of the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893; by authority of the Board of Directors*, Rossiter Johnson, ed. (Appleton and Company, 1897).

⁵⁴⁹ *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, available in French, German, and Spanish. <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wells/exposition/exposition.html> Ann Massa, “Black Women in the ‘White City,’” *Journal of American Studies* 8, no. 3 (1974): 319–37.

⁵⁵⁰ Anna R. Paddon, and Sally Turner, “African Americans and the World’s Columbian Exposition,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 88, no. 1 (1995): 19–36.

⁵⁵¹ <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15085coll2/id/9512>

⁵⁵² *World’s Congress of Representative Women*, Chicago, (Memorial Art Palace, 1893).

advocated for prison reform and against legislative efforts aiming to reduce the age of consent for girls from sixteen to thirteen (*Business Women's Journal*, March 1891, 112).



Fig. 157. The Women's Building.

The Assembly Room in the Women's Building sat 1500 and held 27 concerts, readings, and congresses. The building was flooded by hundreds of daily visitors who flocked to see the 'novel building' designed by a woman, to admire women's accomplishments, and enjoy the light filled entry hall. There was a restaurant, a roof garden, a tearoom, coffee and chocolate sold, a 'model' kitchen, and was filled with families who brought lunch baskets to take a break and have a snack.



MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE WOMAN'S BUILDING.



LOGGIA OF THE WOMAN'S BUILDING,
looking eastward across the Wooded Island.



INTERIOR OF THE WOMAN'S BUILDING.

Figs. 158. *A history of the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893; by authority of the Board of Directors*, Rossiter Johnson, ed. (Appleton and Company, 1897), 201, 208, and 213.

A controversial sight at the Expo were dancers at the Midway Plaisance. Stebbins commented on the dancers, writing that they were frauds, “in comparison with which Barnum’s greatest was an innocent joke” (1902, 471). Stebbins felt the dancers were taken from “European quarters,” essentially meaning they were ‘club’ dancers and not ‘authentic dancers’ brought from the ‘East’ to give dances of ancient origins. The dances did not have pantomimic qualities nor portrayals of religious mysteries. Some authors claim that Stebbins “recoiled” from the ‘reality’ of the dancers (Foxen 2020, 163), and that perhaps she was referring to the belly dance of ‘Little Egypt’ that some audience members took offense to (Ruyter 1999, 92). Yet, Stebbins felt there were dances from the East that were “higher and more beautiful” than the ones presented at the Expo. The following illustration gives an idea of the dancers presented. There was a Spanish dancer (with the tambourine, scarf and Spanish hair piece, an ‘Oriental’ dancer and French

cancan dancers amongst others. These dancers were obviously from vaudevillian stages, thus Stebbins' assertion that they were European and not 'real' or 'authentic dancers' from the East. Because Stebbins noted a difference in the intentional delivery of the dances, does not mean that she entirely loathed vaudevillian style entertainments. Stebbins could have simply meant that the Midway was not presenting 'high art' or artistic theatrical dances.



Fig. 159. "Beauties at the World's Fair," National Police Gazette, May 20, 1893.

The Midway was an international street bazaar, some 600 feet wide and seven blocks long. There was a mini-German village, Brazilian, Lapland, Javanese, Dahomey, and Irish village with a replica Blarney Castle, a Japanese Bazaar, Hungarian display, Viennese café, St. Bernard Dog Show, Ostrich display, Sitting Bull's cabin, Hindoo jugglers, Bedouin Camp, Egyptian street with camels and temple, a model of the Eiffel Tower, a gigantic Ferris Wheel, and a building

displaying 40 beautiful women from 40 nations.⁵⁵³ There was a smorgasbord of flavours, exuberant entertainments, and cultural sites meant to provide delights to the eye. Stebbins was not so ‘offended’ by the idea of national dances seeing as she created her own “Spanish dance drill- the Carmen” that utilized “manipulations of the Spanish mantilla (a long lace scarf attached to the head over a decorative comb), combined with curtsy’s, kneeling, arm and body motions, pointing steps, and heel and toe step patterns” (Ruyter 1999, 120). Stebbins advised wearing a Spanish costume of yellow dress adorned with black lace, a comb and rose in the hair. She also had her students perform with tambourines like gypsy and Spanish dancers.

By December 1893, Stebbins performed before a large group at the Professional Woman’s League of New York City. The *New York Times* reviewed Stebbins’ “Lecture to Actresses on Delsarte” (6). The League was a new club for women in the theatre profession, organized and led by “Mrs. A.M. Palmer,” born Laura Mowbray (her first husband was Sheridan Shook from the Union Square Theatre and Stebbins would have likely met her when she worked for his company). Active members were established and upcoming actresses, women playwrights and musicians. Actresses were called “Professional Women” quite literally because they worked for a living. The term gave an air of respect for their chosen career. At the League headquarters, classes were available in ‘society’ and stage dancing, fencing and physical culture amongst other offerings. The club had a library, offices, an assembly room for 250 people, space for dancing, fencing and other classrooms” (*New Peterson Magazine*, 1895, 73). The League held entertainments, business meetings, social gatherings and gave financial help or loans to those in need between theatrical jobs. There was a large costume (gown) collection from which members could rent or borrow which was quite helpful seeing actresses had to supply their own wardrobe

⁵⁵³ (<https://worldsfairchicago1893.com/home/fair/fairgrounds/midway/>).

for productions at that time as there were no 'in house' costume designers. The League held entertainments as fund raisers for the organization, the first being *As You Like It*.



THE CAST OF "AS YOU LIKE IT," PROFESSIONAL WOMAN'S LEAGUE.

Fig. 160. "Women in the Lyceum," *New Peterson Magazine*, 1895, 65.

Stebbins' lecture remarks were said to be "highly appreciated by the league, who applauded frequently. The *New York Times* claimed that the "terrors of barnstorming" had deterred Stebbins from "taking up a professional life, and she now conducts a Delsarte gymnasium" (Dec. 22, 1893, 6). Yet, contrary to the *Times* claim, Stebbins had a professional life as an actress *and* experienced the 'terrors of barnstorming' (which meant living the difficulties of tour life 'on the road'). The *Times* said Stebbins' "great idea is to bring out the art idea of grace and motion as exhibited in the old sculptures and in the ancient church, which was the theater where joy, lamentation, and all emotions were expressed in the dance" (6). Actresses in the League admired Stebbins' "dancing with all the abandon that popular imagination ascribes to all the daughters of Spain," followed by the 'dance of a vestal virgin' moving in "solemn beauty and grace." She was noted for her solo theatrical character transformations, given "without shifting of scenery or

changing of costumes.” She wore a “long, clinging Grecian garb of white and shimmering pink, with its open sleeves fastened across her arms by clasps of gold.” In another moment, Stebbins swayed back and forth with a fan in her hand “lifting it behind her head, waving it right or left seemingly at the caprice of the moment, bending, bowing and straightening her supple figure as the mood seemed to dictate. It looked like pure, spontaneous gracefulness” (6).

Most interesting was Stebbins’ dance as the goddess Isis that was constructed “into a whole ceremonial. She bowed low to the earth as a token of humility of those who dedicated their lives to the temple. Her hands were raised in supplication, opened in renunciation of the world, lifted in commemoration. Altogether, the temple drill was wonderfully done in the utmost beauty and grace” (6). Stebbins described the conceptual origins of her work saying, “like the theatre, dancing also had its beginning in the rites and ceremonies of religious worship” (6). In her ceremonial Isis dance, Stebbins performed

movements of the Egyptian priestesses who swung the censers slowly and rhythmically in their temple worship. She then gave the Greek idea of dancing and artistic management of the body, derived from a careful study of the friezes of ancient Greek temples on pottery, and of the Greek statues. Her Greek dance was enchanting almost to voluptuousness. Then followed the spritely Spanish and gypsy dances of a later day.⁵⁵⁴ Following the show, League members “crowded about her with congratulations and thanks.”⁵⁵⁵

By late 1893, Stebbins was so busy teaching she couldn’t entertain as much as she wanted, but *Werner’s* announced she would find available dates once a month for engagements. Her entertainment series was to consist of “musical, dramatic and pantomimic monologues, orchestrated for three or for six instruments, written and designed specifically for her” under the titles of Miriam the Prophetess, Jephtha’s Daughter, Esther at Shushan, The Myth of Isis,

⁵⁵⁴ *The World* (NY, NY), “Dancing and Talk at the League: Miss Genevieve Stebbins, Disciple of Delsarte and Teacher of Physical Culture, Furnished it All. The Spectators Properly Impressed,” December 21, 1893, 11.

⁵⁵⁵ *New York Times*, “Lecture to Actresses on Delsarte. Mrs. Stebbins gives a talk of his system and dances a minuet,” December 22, 1893, 6.

Ariadne, Psyche, Ceres, Brunhilda, and the Descent of Ishtar. Stebbins was known as being “equally original as a lecturer, her list of subjects embracing every branch of her profession—classic art, elocution, pantomime, Delsarte, aesthetic grace, physical beauty, physical culture, the evolution of dancing, ancient and modern, with personal illustrations.” Stebbins’ work was “widely different from the ordinary statue—pose. There is no spasmodic transformation of the body [...] no jerky, inartistic movements of the many incompetents who have vainly tried to imitate her.” Her statue poses were said to

flow gracefully onward from the simple to the complex. They are a natural evolution of beauty produced by the changing curve of the spiral line from head to toe, commencing with a simple attitude, and continuing with a slow, rhythmic motion of every portion of the body, until it stands before you as the most perfect representation of art. Every movement is beautiful. Every graduation of motion from the root to the stem to the branch and blossoms of the picture is discernible, and yet, so subtle is the magnetic motion, that, like the prismatic glories of the rainbow, it is impossible to tell where one line ends or the next one begins. The mythological series are equally impressive in their way. The Myth of Isis, for instance, is the story of creation, of life, joy, sorrow, death, and the attainment of immortality. It typifies, with wonderful force, the tragedy of the human soul.⁵⁵⁶

Werner’s 1893 review of Stebbins’ career included press notices from the *Boston Globe* describing a visit Stebbins made to Wellesley College. She was invited by Professor Currier, a former student from the Boston School of Oratory who privately trained with Stebbins. Currier’s elocution class, *Training of the Body and Voice*, included “poise and bearing, harmonic gymnastics for freedom and grace, breathing, and other exercises for health and strength.” To command a room as a teacher, vocal training was essential for resonance, articulation and “reading for spontaneous expression of thought and feeling” (Wellesley College Calendar 1894, 125). Perhaps the best argument for the value of expression can be found in Stebbins’ statement: “The future of progress of the world depends on expression, and not repression. There is a great

⁵⁵⁶ “Sketches & Portraits of Artists and Teachers’ Genevieve Stebbins,” *Werner’s*, December 1893.

need for artistic education, not as an accomplishment but as a necessity, to allow your soul to come out and speak and to show forth to another what is in you.”⁵⁵⁷ By 1894, Wellesley had 729 women from 38 states and seven foreign countries.

In the *Globe* article, “Wild over Delsarte, Mrs. Stebbins Dances for Wellesley Girls All the Dances Danced since Adam’s time and Makes a Great Hit,” it was reported that the Wellesley “girls yearn for grace as well as strength of body,”

Think of it! A woman who is learned in Latin and all the ologies, [...] This is the Wellesley girl’s ideal whom she saw in the flesh lately in the person of Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins, of New York, the well-known leader and teacher of Delsarte’s principles. [...] Since her visit the Wellesley girls have gone wild over Delsarte [...] At this great woman’s college, Mrs. Stebbins appeared at her best. She was picturesquely gowned in a soft clinging white silk with a Roman sash, the Oriental effect being further added by a little zouave jacket in gay colors. [...]

The article argues that “girls” need to be careful and not begin to think they could be dancers as had occurred with another Cambridge society woman, Miss Olea Bull. Apparently, Annie Payson Call of Lasell Seminary had taken it upon herself to train Miss Bull to dance, despite Call not being a dancer. Call presented Bull on the stage, but after two weeks she became “ill and distressed by her failure, she retired, to suffer several months from the result of the unwise advice she had listened to.” Call had also tried to convince Miss Bull to open a “terpsichorean school,” but it was said Call “will have some difficulty in putting another leader of new forms of art upon the stage in Boston for some time to come, I fear.”⁵⁵⁸ Bull danced with a dozen other women in a ‘Sea Nymphs Dance’ (choreographed by Call) within the play ‘Prince Pro Tem’ in Brooklyn at the New Park Theatre followed by a performance at the Boston Museum in September 1893. The dance was described as a “series of graceful and rhythmic movements.” Some noted that Miss Bull had “histrionic aspirations,” but was a delightful dancer. Apparently,

⁵⁵⁷ “Plea for Expression,” *The Evening Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), January 14, 1904.

⁵⁵⁸ *The Inter Ocean* (Chicago), “Fads in Old Boston,” February 18, 1894.

her Boston relatives were aghast that she took to the stage, yet her mother was not bothered. Bull was said to have had a minor part in the production, “beginning as she has at the lowest round of the ladder.”⁵⁵⁹ Miss Bull’s engagement was announced in January 1894, thereby “putting an end to her public career,” and likewise Call’s ambitions as a choreographer. The article ended with noting that Stebbins would soon arrive in Boston to perform, supported by several society women, on February 24, 1894.

It’s not known if Miss Bull or Call saw Stebbins perform, but it is likely as they were interested in Delsartism and dance. It is surprising to discover that Call choreographed a dance piece, as she is otherwise not known as having taught any dance. It is possible that Miss Bull, being a young woman of great wealth, asked Call to work with her as she had some Delsarte training. Call had published a successful book *Power Through Repose* (1891, 1900), which takes as it’s central premise, ideas that Stebbins had previously established in her Delsarte publications— such as “freeing the channels of expression,” and “power through repose.” In her book, Call quotes Delsarte and Alger but does not mention Stebbins, despite having clearly built her work on Stebbins’ ideas.⁵⁶⁰ Call taught elocution and ‘relaxation’ at the Lasell Seminary in Newton, Massachusetts (now Lasell University). Of some notoriety, Call was accused by a physician of “hypnotizing” her students with her Delsartian relaxation exercises, two of whom went home suffering from nervous collapse and were bedridden for months.⁵⁶¹ Regardless, the school continued to support her work.

⁵⁵⁹ *The Evening World* (New York), “Clever Children of Clever Men,” January 1894, 4. *The World*, September 5, 1893, 3. *Salt Lake Herald*, April 17, 1892, 12. *Portland Daily Press*, “Notes,” August 23, 1893, 5.

⁵⁶⁰ Scholar Hiie Saumaa notably situates Call as a somatic educator, without making comparisons to Stebbins’ previous publications. “Annie Payson Call’s Training in Release and Somatic Imagination.” *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 1 (2017): 70–86. Stebbins’ used the terminology ‘Power Through Repose’ years prior to Call’s publication in 1900. Many of the concepts in Call’s work are identical to Stebbins’.

⁵⁶¹ *Springfield Weekly Republican*, September 16, 1892, 10. John Andrick, “Delsartean hypnosis for girls’ bodies and minds: Annie Payson Call and the Lasell Seminary nerve training controversy,” *History of Psychology* no. 2, 2012, 124–144. Lily Houston Smith, May 31, 2022, <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/work-lazy-way>

Many newspapers mentioned their worries that Stebbins would start a ‘fad,’ inspiring young women to want to dance on the stage. The *New York World* notes, “it is a very narrow line, that which divides the serious from the absurd, and Miss Stebbins, in trusting to the truth of the theory of the poetry of motion, although herself successful, has set an example which would unquestionably prove dangerous for the less graceful and less physically favored woman to emulate.” She will

arouse in the hearts of half the women who saw her a determination to go and do likewise. The stout ones will all think they have the necessary roundedness and curves to convert themselves into statues, and the slim ones will insist on believing that they have sufficient suppleness to assume the statuesque poses. And if they once became convinced of this and undertook to be Venus and Juno at will; if they decided to substitute the ritual dance of the ancient time for the ones of today— then Mrs. Stebbins would have done a far greater injury to her time and country than she would be willing to do her worst enemy. And from the number of enthusiastic utterances which were wafted along Forty-Fourth street after the performance to the effect that various young women intended to ‘take up physical culture at once.’ It seems possible that that fate is upon the community.⁵⁶²

Perhaps the *World* critic was concerned by the thought that many young women would make fools of themselves trying to ‘pose,’ yet this is truly the only way to learn, through trial and error. It does seem positive that the critic envisioned that young women would want to “take up” physical culture, as a means toward self-cultivation. Stebbins certainly had admiring audiences, most of whom were women. The *New York Sun* said the Madison Square Theatre was filled with “pretty girls and fashionably attired women” who “held their breath in a transport of delight” as Stebbins “illustrated the bewitchery of the somewhat somnolescent species of classic revel.” Her Greek dance as a “fascinating spectacle, was proved beyond all cavil yesterday afternoon.”

She was Greek from the tips of her sandal-clad feet to the crown of her ringlet-adorned and well-poised head and was clad in a garment of some soft material, creamy white and shapelessly shapely, which hung in folds from her shoulders, leaving her arms bare the full length. Thus, tryingly attired, with no scenic accessories in keeping with her Grecian

⁵⁶² *The World* (NY, NY), “Classic Statue Impersonations. Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins’s Very Picturesque Pantomimic Matinee at the Berkeley Lyceum Yesterday Afternoon. Greek and Hebrew Representations,” January 26, 1894, 10.

pose to aid the illusion, she succeeded, simply by the exercise of exquisite grace, in framing to music, for her delighted spectators, life-like images of Melpomene, Diana, Ceres, Ariadne, Atalanta, Hebe, and Venus.⁵⁶³

Another review noticed that the Madison Square Theatre was “packed to the roof with pretty, enthusiastic women,” like a “conservatory ripe with blooming plants, or an art gallery during some triumphant loan collection epoch; at least, such were the opinions of the forty-seven males who, by actual count, were present in the densely packed house.” Speaking of the same matinee, the *New York Sun* witnessed that a “startling aggregation of femininity filled the Madison Square Theatre from front row through standing room to top gallery yesterday afternoon. Almost every person, man or woman present had paid \$1.00, with no guarantee of a seat, to see Miss Genevieve Stebbins.” As the *Sun* describes,

Her first number involved posing after the manner of twelve classical statues and they were awaited with no little degree of curiosity. She walked serenely in from a side entrance clad from throat to toe in a white Greek robe; [...] She stood in front of the stage, and while the piano was played by somebody out of sight, she slowly assumed the form of Venus Genitrix. A moment later she swayed gently about and became the Satyr Playing the Lute. The lovely audience applauded rapturously, where at Mrs. Stebbins undulated gracefully into the statue of Melpomene. Her next number was a Greek dance, a study from the friezes. This dance pleased the audience mightily and it had to be repeated.⁵⁶⁴

In his study, *Pantomime: The History and Metamorphosis of a Theatrical Ideology* (2019), theatre historian Karl Toepfer claims that according to Plutarch, ‘poses’ were *phrases of movements* that included transitions between poses, much like Stebbins’ performances did. Some ancient performers were described as twirling and spinning to then suddenly stop immediately to present a pose, suggesting that dance evolving from poses dating back to the times of Aeschylus. Most relevant, is that Plutarch correlated the ‘pose’ with *resting poise as power in reserve* (2019, 88), which is the same concept of ‘power in repose’ that Stebbins used in her work. Stebbins

⁵⁶³ *Werner’s*, “Sketches & Portraits of Artists and Teachers: Genevieve Stebbins,” December 1893.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

asserts that when resting ‘at will,’ with purposeful ease, the body recuperates power and energy (1898, 33). Toepfer explains that pantomime is a “mode of dance theater” (41) that dramatizes scenes without directly translating words into gestures, as pantomime has its own unique narrative movement logic (27). Deriving from the Latin, *pantomimus*, Toepfer notes that this term is “virtually interchangeable with *saltatio* (dancer) and *histrio* (actor); *histrio* being derived from the Etruscan *hister* (dancer) (36). As an educated woman who read the Classics in their original Latin and Greek, Stebbins was informed about the historiography of statue posing and pantomime. She could easily have drawn from these sources to justify her modern creations.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS:

From the New York Recorder:

“The Madison Square Theatre was crowded with ladies who enjoyed the afternoon. It was a sort of Adamless Eden, and the culpable cause of it all was the matinee given by Miss GENEVIEVE STEBBINS. It was a fascinating spectacle of wonderful grace and beautiful motion performed by a superbly developed woman. And while it was a great afternoon for Delsarte and his pupils, there remained triumphant, at the close of the entertainment, but one stellar attraction, and that was Miss GENEVIEVE STEBBINS.

•
WILLIAM WINTER, in the New York Tribune, says:

“The performance of GENEVIEVE STEBBINS is such as to command recognition for distinct ability * * * It revealed great force of character, definite intellectual purpose, acute sensibility, quick sense of the significance and value of dramatic situations, ample capacity for the expression of the emotions. She showed a remarkable self-control and command of the resources of posture, movement, gesture, facial and vocal expression.”

Fig. 161. Advertisement, *Werner's*, 1893.

William Winter, one of the most prominent and established dramatic critics in the country (who wrote for the *New York Tribune* over a period of 25 years), gave high praise for Stebbins’ work. Comparatively, in his review of a Sarah Bernhart performance, he praised her stage technique, grace of motion and diction, although he found her lacking in “nobility of spirit” (McGaw 1952, 115). He found her to be “insincere and artificial” in one role and said she was

more successful in passionate roles rather than those demanding tenderness or noble integrity. Notably Winter gave a severely critical review for Steele MacKaye's son Percy's play which began a public argument with the disgruntled producer.⁵⁶⁵

Teachings and Performances in 1894

In 1894, Stebbins was joined by F. Townsend Southwick in leading the New York School of Expression. Southwick merged his School of Oratory with hers and became principal until his death in 1903. Southwick was "pronounced by high authority the most scientific teacher of expression in New York" (*Werner's*, 1894). He acted as chairman of the Examining Committee of the New York Teachers of Oratory, and second vice president of the National Association of Elocutionists. Stebbins and Southwick instructed three hours a day. It was said that "no similar school in America can boast of such talent in their faculty" (*Keynote*, 1895, 44). He gave instruction in "voice-culture for speech and in the principles of artistic recitation, two departments in which he is recognized as an authority; while one day in the week is devoted to true oratorical training, including extemporaneous speaking and debate— studies which, strange to say, are usually completely neglected in so-called schools of oratory" (*Werner's*, December 1894, 464). Classes in 1894 included Shakespeare; vocal anatomy and physiology by Dr. Laidlaw (also a professor at a leading medical college of New York); stage technique and tableaux vivants; and "Miss Mary H. Ewer assists in orthoepy [the study of correct pronunciation] and fundamentals of Delsarte" (1894, 464). Stebbins must have trained Ewer in Delsarte exercises. Born in 1857, the same year as Stebbins, they must have been childhood friends. As noted earlier, Ewer had accompanied Stebbins on piano and was the daughter of Ferdinand Ewer, the publisher of Clappe's *Shirley Letters*. When Ferdinand moved from San

⁵⁶⁵ William McGaw, "William Winter as a Dramatic Critic," *Educational Theatre Journal* 4, no. 2 (1952):115–121.

Francisco to New York City to be a rector, the family stayed close with Clappe. It was not previously known that Mary Ewer was a friend and admirer of Stebbins. Below is a poem Ewer wrote in her book of poems, *Wild Flowers: Poems of Womanhood* (Werner, 1896).

To Genevieve Stebbins, “The Delsartean”

Aweary once of wrangling here below,
I soared above to free my soul from care;
Then scanning well the heavens in dreamy flight,
Jove’s throne I sought, and bowed in reverence there.

Implored the Deity, whose very breath
Could in his vast domains make tumult cease,
To yield us one of fairer mould than ours,
A spirit whispering melody and peace.

Then spake the god, “Now, homeward turn they way,
Nor with more complaints my sleeping ire arouse,
Behold I render rest in human form,
‘Tis Harmony with Beauty for a spouse.”

Amid the discord radiant she stands, In unaffected grace and simple mien;
We gaze, and with the poet breathe the words: “She moves a goddess, and she looks a queen.”

Pose while you may; thou only Canst sunder the veils that conceal
Painting sublime, entrancing Its mysteries hidden reveal.

*Dance while you may; chaste rhythm, That purest of dances impart;
Relic of ancient grandeur, Of movement ecstatic the heart.

Speak while you may, blest spirit, Thine accents melodious we hail
Breathe of thy glory the secret, The power of Athena unveil.

*The Greek Dance— a succession of poses copied from the Greek friezes (105).

In January 1894, invited by her former student Minnie Jones’ School of Oratory, Stebbins performed in the Drawing Room at the New Century Club in Philadelphia. The New Century Club is one of the oldest women’s clubs in America, founded in 1877 with a focus on social reform and charitable causes. The Club was so popular that it erected its own building in 1891,

designed by the architect Mrs. Minerva Parker Nichols.⁵⁶⁶ Apparently, the club was interracial, as Alaine Locke (known as the author of *The New Negro*, and ‘Father’ of the Harlem Renaissance) said his mother brought him there as a child.⁵⁶⁷

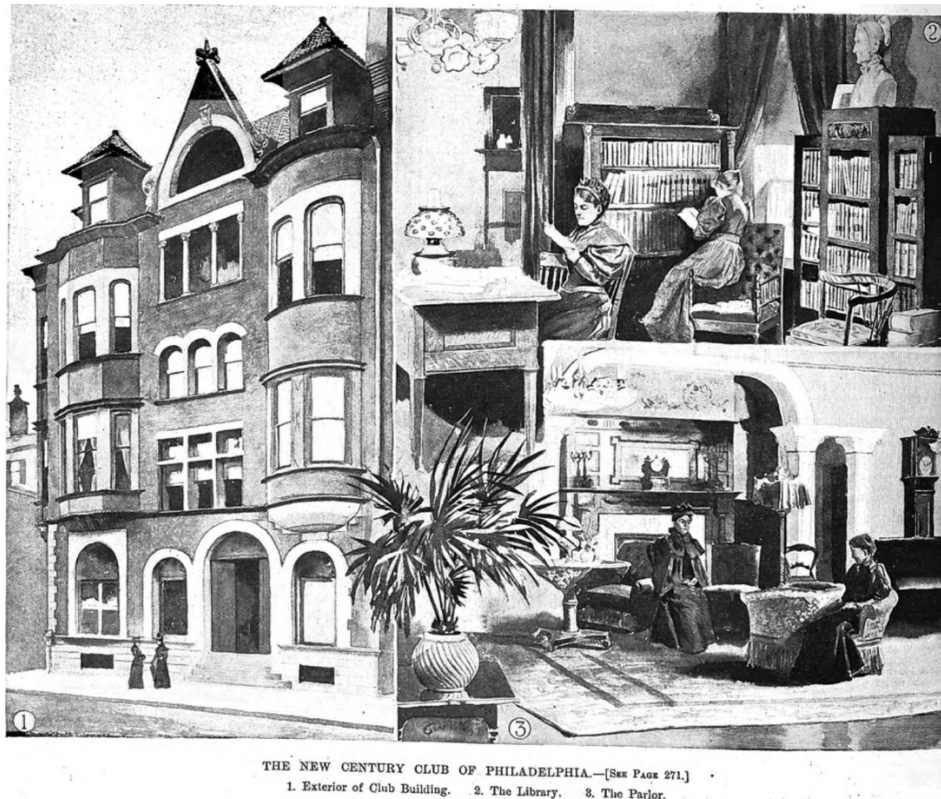


Fig. 162. “New Century Club,” *Harper’s Bazar*, April 1897, 272.

Stebbins was to demonstrate the “poetry of prose and motion” which the “metropolitan press had described as “something entirely unique and original.” She performed a variety of 10–20 poses before a “fashionable audience.”⁵⁶⁸ In the second part of the program, she presented a new work, *Miriam the Prophetess*, in which the “trials and the tribulations of this well-known Scriptural character are most vividly and beautifully portrayed.”

⁵⁶⁶ *The City of Philadelphia*, “New Century Club,” George Harris and Sons, 1894, 129.

⁵⁶⁷ Jeffrey Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life and Times of Alaine Locke* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁶⁸ *Philadelphia Times*, January 14, 1894, 14, *Philadelphia Times* January 15, 1894, “Entertaining,” *Philadelphia Times*, Sunday January 21, 1894, 13.



Fig. 163. Engraving of Miriam leading a celebratory dance.

A press report on Stebbins' performance exclaims,

Miriam, the Prophetess of God's chosen people, is no longer a mere name in the book of Exodus, but she stands vividly in front of you, dressed as those ancient Israelitish maidens were dressed, and you see enacted in all its tremendous realism the motive powers which impelled into being the glorious action of the exodus. [...] You see her pass through those weird but sacred rites of prayer and initiation, which we are informed were common alike to both Hebrew and Egyptian temples, and in which later Moses acquired his wisdom. [...] The song of Miriam, with pantomimic action, and triumphant dance of victory before the Lord, accompanied with the clashing music of the Queen of Sheba, are most impressive. It is a vision of expression that we shall never forget."⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁹ "Entertaining," *Philadelphia Times*, January 21, 1894, 13.

Why did Stebbins choose biblical figures such as Miriam the Prophetess, thought to be Mose's sister? For one, she would have been a familiar woman for the public who were generally aware of significant biblical figures. Choosing Miriam, or Jephtha's Daughter, also gave Stebbins a 'way in,' to present dance as a sacred act, a legitimate performative act, and furthermore a high art. Stebbins was essentially providing a context for the foundation of expressive dance, that while ecstatic was in contrast to the sexualized behavior in burlesque acts. She wanted to legitimate dance as having qualities of the luminous, divine, mythical, and rapturous. As such, she presented dancers as being divinely inspired artists.

Prophetic ecstasy, as Miriam experienced, was embodied bodily and spiritually. Theologian Anatheia Portier-Young argues that the prophet was thought to live on a liminal borderland between the earthy and divine realm.⁵⁷⁰ Prophecy is an embodied experience followed by speech, or sharing with a public the revelations one has seen. As such, Miriam is a powerful figure representing spiritually transformative experiences, ecstatic dance, and the idea that women in antiquity had influential voices. Stebbins was able to breathe life into Miriam as a 'ghostly' feminine trace from the past. In the ancient world, women were seen as being receptacles or channels. According to Hebrew translations, Miriam is thought to have engaged in a call and response, as a leader she drums or uses a percussive timbrel to create music with other women who likewise have instruments and perform in a ritualistic dance (2010, 20).⁵⁷¹ Egyptian priestesses were thought to perform in the same manner.

Following her performances in Philadelphia, Stebbins was invited by Daniel Frohman (one of New York's top theatrical impresarios) to give a solo performance at the Berkeley Lyceum

⁵⁷⁰ Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *The Prophetic Body: Embodiment and Mediation in Biblical Prophetic Literature* (Oxford Academic, 2024).

⁵⁷¹ Daniel Picus, "Body as Battleground, Feminine Prophecy and Identity in Ancient Mediterranean" (Master Thesis, Macalester College, 2010).

Theatre. Stebbins performed just after the theatre opened, following the premier of Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts*. It seems the theatre building adjoined the Berkeley Lyceum out of which operated the Ladies Athletic Association and the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. Both buildings still exist. Daniel Frohman, and his brothers Charles and Gustave, were New York's top booking agents and theatrical impresarios. The three brothers were members of the Theatre Syndicate which monopolized tour bookings. Notably, fourteen years after producing Stebbins, in 1908 Charles Frohman brought Isadora Duncan to New York for a six-month contract, which was cancelled soon after due to poor ticket sales.

BERKELEY LYCEUM THEATRE, 19 WEST 44TH STREET.

At the Berkely Lyceum, on January 25, Stebbins' performance was greeted by enthusiastic women in the audience who "held their breath; the aigrettes on their bonnets fairly glistened with excitement; they half rose from their chairs to watch the changing visions more closely."⁵⁷² I would imagine the theatre would have been filled with some society members of the Ladies Athletic Association. Stebbins' dance solo was based on the biblical character Miriam, the Prophetess, sister of Moses who led the Israelites in a dance of liberation after being exiled from Egypt (Exodus 15:20). Stebbins' innovative performance is described in the following article, quoted at length as it conveys the professional staging, costuming and essence of her ecstatic dance. Here and in following articles the words "dance" and "pantomime" are used interchangeably.

The experiment was unique, almost daring, and the audience, having nothing to compare it and thus form some opinion as to its excellence, and no leader to sweep them into enthusiasm, seemed hardly able to decide whether applause or censure

⁵⁷² *The World* (New York), "Classic Statue Impersonations. Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins's Very Picturesque Pantomimic Matinee at the Berkeley Lyceum Yesterday Afternoon. Greek and Hebrew Representations," January 26, 1894, 10.

was more appropriate. In this scene Mrs. Stebbins wore a blood-red silk scarf draped over the shoulders and around the hips and a small scarlet silk cap or turban. [...] The second scene was the consecration of Miriam. She enters, clad in pure white, and carrying a small lamp of ancient design. A small alter is at the left front, garlanded with flowers and leaves. The mystic rights of the temple worship are gone through, and Miriam gives a strange, slow dance many times, around the alter sometimes with wreaths and sometimes empty-handed. The next scene, which opens Act 2, was the gem of the pantomime. Miriam, in white, with blue silk drapery, the full insignia of her noble office of prophetess, enters with swinging censer, from which clouds of incense rise, and a scroll bearing a message from Jehovah. The dance accompanying this scene is a marvel of grace and beauty. The music pulses more strongly than before, and Miriam, swinging her censer now to the alter, now over the scroll, now around her head, bends and sways and bends again in a very ecstasy of religious fervor. A more emotional and chaste dance would be difficult to imagine. [...] The closing scene is the triumph of the Israelites [...] It is Miriam's dance by the Red Sea when she "took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." Miriam is a picture in white and gold, from the cap of gold and jewels to the golden sandals. Her dance with the cymbals is one of the utmost abandon and joy. Then falling to her knees, she chants a portion of the fifteenth chapter of Exodus, after which she resumes her dance, and the curtain falls for the last time (*Werner's*, February 1894, 69).

A New York review of the performance found "Even with the aid of Greek draperies and a Grecian coiffure, to say nothing of a single, long-stemmed lily pinned on the gown, most women would very wisely hesitate before attempting to pose before the public as various classic statues. Not so Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins. Given a Greek gown, she will undertake to represent the whole of the feminine portion of Mount Olympus, and the delightful part of the undertaking is that she succeeds." Moreover,

Stebbins' views on the meaning of ancient deities and the power of the human body are well known to World readers. Her theory is that each of the gods of classic times was not regarded really as a personal divinity, but as an attribute. [...] She also believes the properly managed human body is capable of expressing emotions and qualities, and so it is that she fearlessly and successfully interprets the 'story of the statues.' [...] For no more limitation of sex is bar to an enthusiastic Delsartean like Mrs. Stebbins. [...] In the second part of her programme, which was a dramatic pantomime called "Miriam, the Prophetess," she was equally charming. With her hair unbound and her head covered with the Jewish woman's head-dress, and wearing the robe of a Jewish maiden, she was as admirable as she had been in her Greek portrayals. The dance which closes the representation Mrs. Stebbins herself composed from a study of the Egyptian friezes and

statues. All of the poetry and religion of motion are expressed in it.⁵⁷³

The audience was said to be quite cultured at the Berkeley Lyceum, and “when the curtain rose on the stage-setting of a Grecian interior, the audience saw a graceful figure in a soft clinging, creamy robe of Greek design, a single tall white lily caught in the girdle that vaguely outlines the waist, the dark brown hair gathered in loose curls into a knot at the back of the head, and sandals on the feet.” The review continues,

And when, after a moment’s pause till the expectant rustle in the auditorium had died to a murmur, the figure approached the footlights and said, “I have come this afternoon to tell to you the story of the statues,” it seemed almost as if one of Praxitele’s marbles had stepped from its pedestal and glided through the long ages to tell the story of its brothers and sisters, and to show how very beautiful a thing the human form can be made. [...] Reminding her hearers of the mythology that gave the following statue impersonations, melting from one to another in perfect rhythm with the soft music of stringed instruments: Venus Genetrix, Satyr Playing the Flute, Melpomene, Lycean Apollo, Dianna of Versailles. Ceres, Nymph, Winged Victory, Ariadne, Atalanta, Hebe, Gladiator, Discobolus (*The World*, 1894, 10).

A month later in February 1894, Elsie Wilbor of *Werner’s* wrote of “Genevieve Stebbins’s Matinee,” that “seldom in our day have the Scriptures been drawn upon to furnish entertainment.” If the Bible had instances where dance was not considered profane, then contemporary spiritual dance could also be considered as an honorable art. Indeed, while audiences found Stebbins’ work to be “unique, almost daring,” they were so surprised by her performance that it was hard to know how to respond. Seeing as they had “nothing with which to compare it and thus form some opinion as to its excellence, and no leader to sweep them into enthusiasm, [the audience] seemed hardly able to decide whether applause or censure was more appropriate.” The pantomime (dance drama) was arranged in “three acts and five scenes. The curtain rose on a temple scene, with a couch to the left, on which reclined Miriam, the Israelitish

⁵⁷³ “Classic Statue Impersonations: Mrs. Stebbins’s Very Picturesque Pantomimic Matinee at the Berkely Lyceum Yesterday Afternoon,” *The World* (New York, New York), January 26, 1894, 10.

maiden, in that deep sleep that is supposed to have come over her when she received from Jehovah the message that led to the freedom of her people. [...] The second scene was the consecration of Miriam. She enters, clad in pure white, and carrying a small lamp of ancient design.”

A more emotional and yet chaste dance would be difficult to imagine. In the midst of the dance she sees Pharaoh, and, dropping upon her knees, beseeches him to free her people. His refusal at first stuns her; then, gathering herself to her full height, she hurls the words, “The wrath of God rests upon thee,” and the curtain falls.

The closing scene is the triumph of the Israelites, is Miriam’s dance by the Red Sea, when she “took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.” Miriam is a picture in white and gold, from the cap of gold and jewels to the golden sandals. Her dance with the cymbals is one of the utmost abandon of joy. Then falling to her knees, she chants a portion of the fifteenth chapter of Exodus, after which she resumes her dance, and the curtain falls for the last time. According to Wilbor, Stebbins’ dance drama was challenging to perform, and also challenging for her audience to comprehend. When “nothing but a single woman with the simplest of stage accessories,” appears, the audience receives their reward by making sense of what they are seeing and are “most pleased whose wealth of imagination is most easily fired, whose wealth of imagery is greatest.”

In New York City, on February 5, 1894, there was a large gathering of society club women, including Sorosis, the Ladies New York Club, and the Women’s Press Club. There was a luncheon and an evening reception with notable guests including female journalists, Stebbins, and society women such as Mrs. Thomas Edison, Mrs. Vassar Webb, Baroness Salvador, Countess Anna de Montague, Mrs. Astor, Mrs. Stanley Mortimer, and the Whitneys.⁵⁷⁴ Later that

⁵⁷⁴ “Gotham Gossip,” *Daily Picayune*, February 12, 1894, 6.

month, when Stebbins was invited to take her solo dance ‘Miriam’ to Boston, the press believed her dance would be of

special interest to all those who appreciate the beauties of trained and artistic motion, and to most spectators will be a revelation of the possibilities of an art but little understood and appreciated. [...] It is both from an artistic and educational point of view that the association is interested in this entertainment. It demonstrates that dancing may be made by an artist to illustrate the whole range of human emotion.”⁵⁷⁵

Stebbins was invited to Boston by the Boston Art Students’ Association (now known as the Copley Society of Art) to perform. Copley Hall was renamed Grundmann’s Studios (which later hosted visual art exhibits such as Claude Monet and John Singer Sargent) and had been recently transformed into artist workspaces and an exhibition venue. Boston Art Students’ Association was an alumni organization for graduates of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and Grundmann was the first headmaster of the school. The general committee in charge was Ethel Davis, Lucille Hill, Arthur Everett and Holker Abbott. A room in Grundmann’s Studios was painted “Pompeiiian red” with sage green accents. There were leather couches, electric lighting, and a small stage with deep red curtains. Paintings were created for the performance to be hung as backdrops by renowned eccentric artist John Abbott and the set designer Mark Lawson (of later Broadway fame). Stebbins’ performance was greatly anticipated. On February 11, 1894 (4), *The Boston Post* noted shows presented by the Association are “always delightful, always artistic, always well worth seeing, but that planned for this season [...] promises to eclipse even the previous records of this association.” The preview continues,

This entertainment is to take the form of “An Interpretive and Pantomimic Dance,” a terpsichorean drama entitled “Miriam.” [...] It is promised that this entertainment will interest all those who appreciate the beauties of trained and artistic motion, and to most spectators will be a revelation of the possibilities of an art but little understood and appreciated. It is both from an artistic and educational point of view that the association is interested in this entertainment. It demonstrates that dancing may be made by an artist to illustrate the whole range of human emotion.

⁵⁷⁵ *Boston Post*, February 11, 1894, 4.

The music had been composed and set for an orchestra by Dr. G. B. Prentice; the music, under the charge of Mrs. S. J. Mixter, was performed by the following artists: First violin, Mr. Albert Van Raalte; second violin, Mr. Robert Stearns; cello, Mr. Wulf Fries; piano, Mr. B. L. Whelply; cornet, Mr. C.K. North; flute, Mr. Bauern. In an interlude Mrs. Elda Cushing sang “Miriams song of Triumph.” Stebbins was announced as presenting a “mystic drama” which was to appeal “strongly to the imagination of an artist.” The event programme had a cover image of Isis and two of her sons, Horus and Thot, painted in watercolor by Boston artists.⁵⁷⁶

Stebbins was supported by a committee of 26 high society patronesses including Mrs. Julia Ward Howe (Stebbins’ relative and President of the Association for the Advancement of Women), Mrs. Clara Erskine Clement Waters (author of books on women in the fine arts), Sarah Whitman (Radcliffe library co-founder and stained-glass artist whose work is in Memorial Hall, Harvard and the Isabella Stewart Museum entrance), Mrs. Montgomery Sears (photographer and patron of the arts), Mrs. Augustus Hemenway (philanthropist), Mrs. Roger Wolcott (wife of the Lieutenant Governor), Mrs. Martin Brimmer (wife of first president of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Mrs. Nathaniel Thayer (descendent of Paul Revere), Mrs. Charles Loring, Lady Charles Russel (environmental advocate), Mrs. William F. Arpthorp (wife of Boston music and drama critic), Mrs. Charles Stebbins Fairchild (wife of the U.S. Secretary of Treasury), Mrs. Edward Codman, Mrs. Alexander Cochrane, Mrs. William Fay, Mrs. John L. Gardner, Mrs. Henry Whitman, Mrs. William A. Burnham, Mrs. Samuel Eliot, Mrs. Barrett Wendell, Mrs. A. L. Mason, Mrs. William Appleton, Mrs. F.P. Vinton, Mrs. Charles S. Sargent, Mrs. F. P. Vinton, and Mrs. Hallowell.

The *Boston Post* reviewed her performance, “Miriam Seen Again, Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Reproduced Her Dances, the Story of the Exodus” as seen before a large audience.

Mrs. Stebbins explained that she had made an exhaustive study of ancient rituals, history and everything bearing upon the matter, and her representation was in the nature of a ‘sketch’ of what research had revealed. She said that the sympathy and imagination of the audience would have to assist materially in full appreciation of her effort, as it was in pantomime and carried out alone. [...She gave] a dance around the alter in adoration of the Most High and the giving up of her heart and life to his service. This was all in pantomime but was eloquently expressed. The dance was a graceful, rhythmic measure, and intended to be an exact reproduction of the forms represented on the friezes and in the statues and relics of ancient

⁵⁷⁶ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, “Miriam Tonight,” February 24, 1894, 2.

Egypt. [...] Mrs. Stebbins was warmly applauded and received a number of floral gifts (February 25, 1894).

Stebbins had just come from New York as on February 23, 1894, the *New York Times* wrote an article about a show she gave at the Dress Reform Congress (“Women’s Slavery to Fashion: She admires ideal garments but will not wear them”). Margaret Stanton Lawrence, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was the first speaker. Stebbins danced, showing “how the motion of the body can be made to express what it used to do when dancing was part of religious ceremonies.” Stebbins toured ‘Miriam’ to South Norwalk, Connecticut to Hoyt’s Opera House and Cleveland, Ohio to an appreciative audience.⁵⁷⁷ The name of ‘Miriam’ traveled with an article “About the New Dances” in the *Detroit Free Press* noting there were “no ceremonies or religious rites of any antiquity in which there was not dancing. Israelites danced before the golden calf,” and the Bible “contains numerous references of dancing, Miriam placed herself at the head of the women of Israel and led the maidens in their dance” (October 21, 1894).

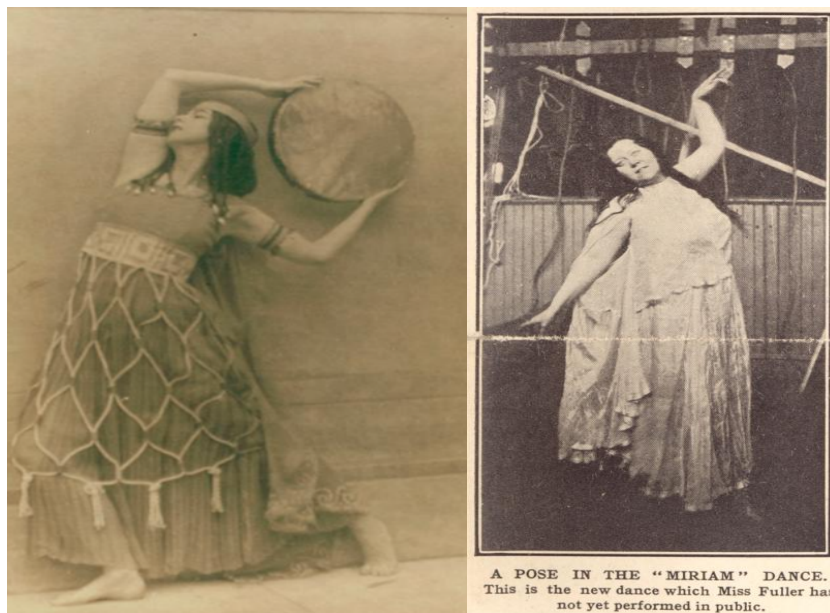


Fig. 164. Ruth St. Denis ‘a la’ Miriam, New York Public Library Collections. Fig. 165. Loie Fuller as Miriam.

⁵⁷⁷ *Daily Norwalk Gazette*, April 10, 1894, 4; *Werner’s*, May 1894, 196.

Following in Stebbins' footsteps, dancer Loïe Fuller created her own *Miriam's Dance* in 1911, and Ruth St. Denis performed as Miriam in Ted Shawn's choreography *Miriam, Sister of Moses* in 1919.⁵⁷⁸ Ruth St. Denis also took photos of herself dancing 'Jephtha's Daughter,' circa 1908 (Jowitt, 1989, 124) a dance Stebbins had previously performed.

New York School of Expression Graduation Ceremony

On May 31, 1894, the graduating class of the New York School of Expression gave a recital and reception at Carnegie Hall. Mr. Franklin H. Sargent (of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts) made a short address to the graduates, and at the close of the recital, refreshments were served, and a social hour was enjoyed. Students had a public examination "conducted by teachers in no way connected with the school and whose judgement is, therefore, likely to be unbiased by personal considerations." The following examiners were present, "Messrs. Geo. R. Phillips and Chas. F. Underhill, Mrs. Ella Skinner Bates, Mrs. Eleanor Georgen [teacher of pantomimic expression and voice culture at the American Academy of the Dramatic arts], Mms. Alberti [of a Delsarte school of expression at 557 Fifth Avenue], Misses Lois A. Bangs, M. Helena Zachos and Agnes Crawford."⁵⁷⁹ Crawford was a former student of Stebbins' who oversaw the elocution department at Columbia. Having such a prominent board of examiners demonstrates not only the high expectations for the skills of the students, but also importantly that Stebbins maintained professional camaraderie with teachers of 'expression.'

The Carnegie program included an hour-long student debate on the "question of the relative merits of the arts of acting and elocution." Students gave recitations including: *The Inventor's Wide, Molly, Dot Leedle Boy* (a German dialect poem),⁵⁸⁰ *My Rival*, scenes from *The Mills on*

⁵⁷⁸ Shawn, 1920, 83–85.

⁵⁷⁹ *Werner's*, July 1894, 272.

⁵⁸⁰ Listen to an early recording of the humorous poem <https://www.digitalindy.org/digital/collection/riley/id/2/>

the Floss, *Lasca*, *Echo and the Ferry*, *Ginevra*, *My Senatorial Secretaryship*, *The Night Watch*, and *In a London Fog*. Special mention was made of “Miss Boniface in the scenes from “*The Mill on the Floss*” and of Miss Marion Henley in the last two selections.” Other graduates mentioned were Miss Harriette Carpenter and Miss Josephine Randall. The report in *Werner’s* continues,

The work represented the unaided efforts of the pupils, who were put upon honor neither to give nor to receive assistance therein, not even the titles of recitations or the subjects of the addresses being known to the principal or examiners until they were announced by the pupils themselves. The work in oratory was extemporaneous, memorizing and the use of notes being absolutely forbidden.

It seems like quite challenging work. At the conclusion of the examination the chairman, Mr. Phillips, congratulated the graduating class on their proficiency (*Werner’s*, July 1894, 272).



Fig. 166. Examples of popular graduation ceremony gowns, typically all white, *Harpers Bazar*, May 15, 1897, 416.

Chautauqua, Summer of 1894

By June, Stebbins' graduating class finished their first-year exams (students were able to pursue a one- or two-year program). Stebbins was scheduled to perform in the upcoming summer season at Chautauqua Institute, located in upstate New York on Lake Chautauqua. The Institute had been running for decades as a popular summer destination with educational and recreational programming. Steamboats arrived daily from Cleveland, Buffalo, Cincinnati, New York, and Pittsburgh. There was a Pullman train service via the Erie lines with sleeper cars to New York, Boston, and Chicago. Guests could stay for a week or more in the community as there was a first-class hotel, several rental homes, numerous performance venues to enjoy, a gymnasium, a ball field, swimming, fishing, and other outdoor recreation programs. Chautauqua had a popular physical culture program led by Yale educator William Anderson who led a large team including established Delsarte educator Emily Bishop (who studied with Stebbins). Both men and women, young and old thoroughly enjoyed physical training. When Stebbins came to perform at Chautauqua, the Institute was quite familiar with drills and aesthetic dances, and fully supported women engaging in these activities.



Fig. 167. *The Times* (Pennsylvania), December 30, 1894, 4. With Swedish Ling ladders in the background.
Fig. 168. Bryn Mawr gymnasium, "Athletics for Women," *The Times* (Pennsylvania), March 29, 1896, 1.

In the week Stebbins performed there was a program of distinguished teachers scheduled including Theodore Roosevelt (later U.S. President), Leland Powers (popular Lyceum speaker), and George Riddle (Shakespearean reader).⁵⁸¹ The week prior a suffragette gathering was held, with a speaker stating, “I claim the ballot as an inalienable right [...] there is an idea prevalent that as soon as a woman gets political rights she will abandon the home, make a bonfire of all the kitchen utensils and do many a strange thing. Rather than that she will feel more keenly her home duties to make the world better for those whom she sends forth into the world.”⁵⁸² While somewhat humorous, the speaker stresses the promise of women contributing to society.

CHAUTAUQUA—1894

Pedagogics.	College	Schools	Classes
Pres. Walter L. Hervey, Teachers College, New Y'rk, in charge. Four weeks, 5 dep'm'ts, thorough work. July 5-August 1.	Classes. Dr. Wm. R. Harper, Univ. of Chicago, Prin. Six weeks, 12 departments, college teachers. July 5-Aug. 16.	of Biblical Literature, Music, Physical Education, Expression. Best methods. Leading instructors.	In Art, Decorat'n, Cookery, Short-hand, Business forms, etc., etc., under competent teachers.

Lecture Courses by Theodore Roosevelt, Richard G. Moulton, H. B. Adams, C. E. Fitch, Richard T. Ely, William R. Harper, *et al.* **Addresses** by E. E. Hale, H. E. von Holst, Carroll D. Wright, J. M. Buckley, Theodore Roosevelt, John H. Vincent, Graham Taylor, and many others. **Readings** by F. Hopkinson Smith, Sarah Cowell Le Moyne, Leland Powers, George Riddle, **Genevieve Stebbins**. Music by orchestra, band, and distinguished soloists. **Hotel Athenæum**—admirably equipped and managed.

Not a Dull Day all Summer. Expense the Lowest.

Write for full details to W. A. DUNCAN, Sec'y, Syracuse, N. Y.

Fig. 169. *Pennsylvania School Journal* vol 42, 1893.

Roosevelt was scheduled to speak on July 19th while Stebbins performed on July 25th and the 27th in two different programs in the Amphitheatre (built in 1893, this is where Salman Rushdie was stabbed in an attempted murder while lecturing in 2022). Since the late 1870s, Chautauqua was famous as a gathering space for travelers who would come to hear established

⁵⁸¹ *Logansport Pharos-Tribune* (Indiana,) July 2, 1894, 2. *Bradford Era*, “The Chautauqua Season: A Grand Programme Has Been Prepared,” June 25, 1894, 2.

⁵⁸² “Political Equality Day: Women Meet at Chautauqua,” *New York Tribune*, July 15, 1894, 4.

speakers including ministers and professors from such places as John Hopkins, Harvard, MIT, Princeton, and Trinity College, to speak on a variety of subjects. Summer studies were offered over nine weeks, along with correspondence courses throughout the year.

News reported Stebbins was met with controversy over her dances at Chautauqua, as she had “expected the other evening to give dances typical of different nations, but the management did not deem it consistent with the Chautauqua idea, and so the dances were dropped” (*New York Tribune*, “Dances Barred at Chautauqua. Mrs. Stebbins had to alter her programme,” July 28, 1894, 8). At Chautauqua there were strict Methodist restrictions against social dances so it’s possible this contributed to reasoning for Stebbins altering her program.⁵⁸³ Yet, it is surprising she would have been asked to do so, because she was invited as a recognized artist.

One review spilled a bit of gossip saying arrangements for the performance were made with the Chautauqua director George Vincent who understood that Stebbins would perform pantomimes and some Greek poses, along with a lecture demonstration. It is unclear why dances of “different nations” would cause offense. On the afternoon of her arrival, she had a rehearsal with an orchestra member, who found that she was moving so swiftly and with such variety that “fiddle and bow had to take their utmost speed to keep the lead of her.” The violinist then went to speak to Dr. Vincent in his office, saying that although he enjoyed her performance, and had even seen “Carmencita” perform “and all the famous foreign dancers,” but that he had scarcely ever seen the “rush and go and grace and abandon and indeed, everything else to be found in dancing which he had just witnessed in Mrs. Stebbins’s rehearsal of her religious dances.” Yet, he told the director that he didn’t think it would suit the Chautauqua audience.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of Chautauqua* (G.P. Putnam Sons, 1921); *Annual Report. United States: U.S. Government Printing Office* (1896, 991).

⁵⁸⁴ *The Evening Herald* (Syracuse), “Why She Didn’t Dance: The Orchestra Leader Dropped a Hint to Dr. Vincent,” October 6, 1894, 6.

Carmencita was a famous Spanish dancer, who performed in New York using her voluminous skirt while twirling and lifting the skirt with her hands, manipulating the fabric. She was filmed by Thomas Edison in 1894 and painted by John Singer Sargent in 1890.⁵⁸⁵ Recent controversy over ‘skirt dancers’ and Little Egypt at the World Expo in 1893 could have also made Chautauqua wary of ruffling the feathers of any of their congregants. Carmecita performed in music halls and vaudeville, so this could be a reason the violinist suggested that Stebbins alter her programming as these venues were likened with licentious audiences and bawdy behaviors. ‘Skirt dancing,’ took after the Spanish and the French cancan and was enjoyed by society at the time, so it seems odd that offense would be taken, but Chautauqua had a religious bent and was conservative so perhaps they were just being cautious.



Fig. 170. Example of an American ‘Skirt Dancer.’

⁵⁸⁵ US National Archives: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPCo3WmJpIE>



Fig. 171. "Skirt Dancing and Its Charms," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 3, 1895.

However, if the violinist had not argued that Stebbins' work would offend the Chautauqua public— if this was even true in the first place— it is quite likely the audience would have been delighted by her work. It had been reported by numerous other sources that Stebbins' dancing was artistically pleasing. A review on July 26, 1894, for *The Herald* "Graceful Delsarte," said "Stebbins was greeted by a large audience at the Amphitheatre last evening. She appeared in a beautiful Delsarte gown. [...] Accompanied by violin and piano she gave three delightful series of poses." Despite having to alter her programme, it seems like everyone remained on friendly terms. Dr. Flood, the editor of the Chautauqua paper, shared a private conversation he enjoyed with Stebbins, saying "she was an "animated converser and her whole body seems to interpret thought as she speaks." She spoke of expression, saying that people can hide their feelings by

masking their face to “conceal real thought,” but she also shared that the hand “is seldom a liar” and often the body can reveal thoughts unknowingly (July 28, 1894, 1).

At her Chautauqua performance, Stebbins lectured on “‘Practical Delsartism as a System of Physical Development,’ illustrated by a fan drill, a dumb-bell drill, and an Eastern temple drill.” Emily Bishop also made a point of teaching practical work as ‘Americanized Delsarte Culture’ (1892). Stebbins’ fan drill was “executed with a serpentine grace which was truly marvelous.” The fan drill was created for a group of women to perform, yet at the Amphitheater she danced solo. Despite Dr. Vincent’s concerns for propriety, it sounds as though Stebbins did quite a bit of dancing that evening.



There are no images of Stebbins’ fan drill, however these images give a sense of the movements. Fig. 172. *Atlantic Constitution*, “Swedish gymnastics adopted by British Girls, Madame Osterberg’s Training College for Women,” July 30, 1905, 5.



Fig. 173. Fan Dance, *Harper’s Weekly*, July 1888, 517.

Stebbins' fan drill made use of minuet dance steps and manipulations of the fan.⁵⁸⁶ For example, in a procession of minuet steps the fan is spun around with a light flick of the wrist and placed at chest level. Then the fan is carried through the air in a long circling arc as the trunk arches back, and once again the fan is held above the head and given a twirling flourish. While bending forward at the hips one leg extends to point forward, alternating three times stepping onto the front leg a deep courtesy is performed with fan movements. During the "courtesy" (curtsy) there is an emphasis on the oppositional twisting action of the torso (1898, 115–118). Apparently after her fan drill, an "intricate dumb bell drill followed, vigorous and elastic in movement, followed by a series of poses representing the devotional postures of the Eastern temple worship." Stebbins gave talk on dance and its "value from the standpoint of expression." Overall, the evening was said to be a "unique and pleasing entertainment," closing with an artistic pantomime rendition" of *Nearer my God to Thee*.⁵⁸⁷

The Chautauqua Amphitheater is a massive outdoor theatre seating over 4,000 with a roof and open sides. Stebbins' first performance on July 25th was said to be an "exhibition of the evolution of dancing, showing its place in physical culture," as she demonstrated an old English country dance, a gypsy dance, the Scotch Highlander's dance, an Alpine rustic dance, and both a French and a Spanish minuet" (*Werner's*, September 1894). However, if this report true, then it seems the 'national dances' were not cancelled. Yet, they are not mentioned in other articles, and it was said elsewhere the "dances representative of different countries"⁵⁸⁸ had to be cut.

⁵⁸⁶ Remember, a 'drill' meant a sequence of movements presented as a complete artistic piece. In 'drills,' students learned to master fundamental steps before moving to progressively more complicated steps, adding arms and other movements. Once students gained skills, dances were executed in group formations in columns, circles, chains, or squares. Dances were initially practiced slowly then gradually sped up to match a certain musical tempo.

⁵⁸⁷ "Cool Chautauqua. The Heated Term at the Assembly-Summer Pleasure. Chautauqua, N.Y. July 27." *The Inter Ocean* (Chicago), July 31, 1894, 12.

⁵⁸⁸ "Wouldn't Let Mrs. Stebbins Dance: Chautauqua, NY, July 27," *Hagerstown Herald and Torch Light* (Maryland), August 2, 1894, 3.

Regardless, *Werner's* notes that Stebbins "entertainments made a hit, the audience being the largest of the season," and this was also reported elsewhere.⁵⁸⁹



Fig. 174. Postcard, Chautauqua archives.

On July 28, 1894, *The Assembly Herald Daily News: Chautauqua* reviewed Stebbins' second performance in the article "A Finished Artistic Performance." It is quite remarkable that she was invited to perform *two solo* shows. The Chautauqua paper remarked that Stebbins "certainly demonstrated the claim of her admirers that she is a most remarkable woman. Her talk during the first part of the program on classical art and its mission to modern physical culture showed the keenest original thought and investigation." Certainly, considering they had daily lectures in their 'Hall of Philosophy' building, the audience and institution were quite capable of ascertaining and determining what was 'original thought.' Stebbins' emotional rendition of the

⁵⁸⁹ *The Inter Ocean* (Chicago), "Cool Chautauqua. The Heated Term at the Assembly-Summer Pleasure," Chautauqua, N.Y. July 27," July 31, 1894, 12.

poem *Aux Italians*, “proved her work strong and fine in interpretation and expression,” and her posing as the twelve Niobids, demonstrated a “silent gamut of most intense feeling and revealed a body more pliable to the behests of the mind than a leaf to a summer wind” (1894, 4) It appears Stebbins’ physically artistic work wasn’t considered offensive in the least, and it remains unclear as to why any of her dances would have been cancelled or censored. Her pantomimic action, reported by Chautauqua’s own newspaper, “was a revelation to the audience. The characters lived and breathed and suffered in the subtle transformations of this ‘artist of the beautiful.’” Athena, Marguerite, Miriam, appeared before us in ecstasy, in grief, in joy, in despair, in triumph. It was a finished, artistic performance” (1).

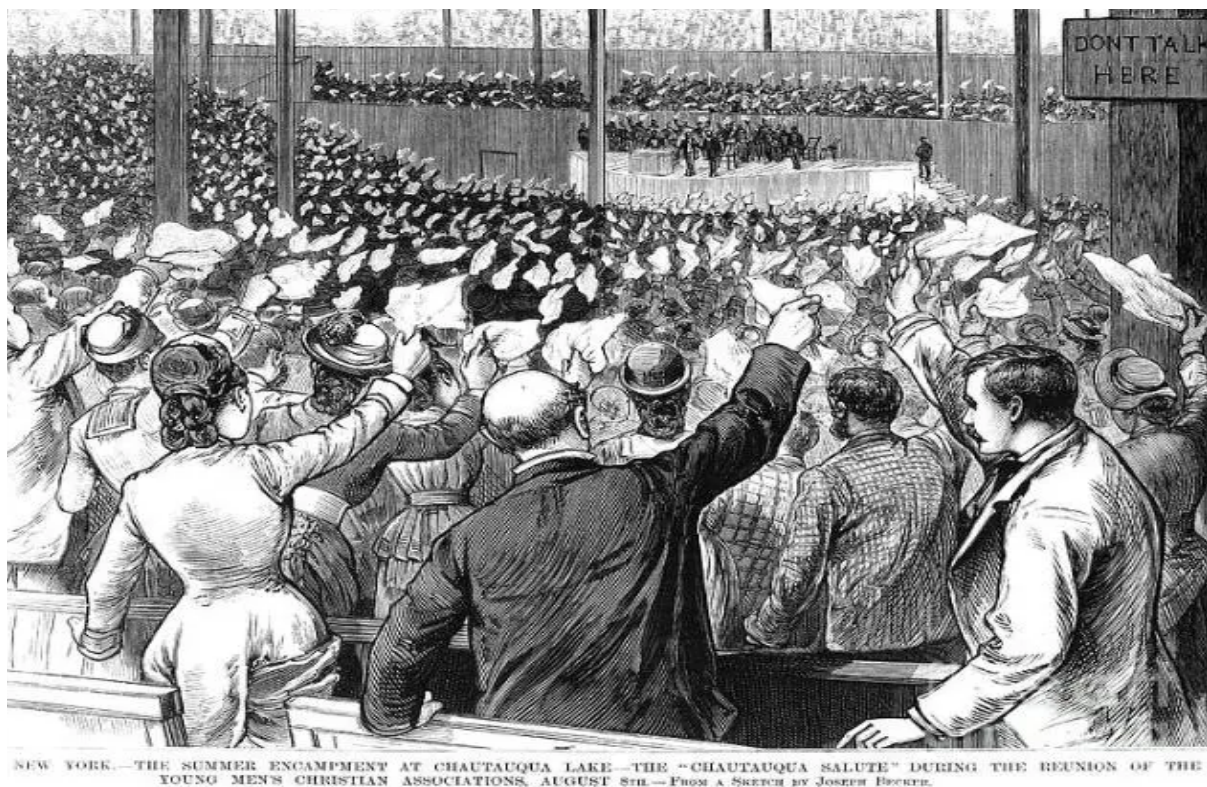


Fig. 175. A general view of the stage, Chautauqua archives.

It seems that ‘word’ spread of Stebbins’ performances, although she is not specifically mentioned in the following article, it’s clear that her performance work made an impact. On

October 21, 1894, the *Detroit Free Press* announced “About the New Dances. What the professors have devised for the season” (13). They reported on “the history of terpsichorean pastime,” and mention that the Bible “contains numerous references to dancing” such as Miriam who “placed herself at the head of the women of Israel and led the maidens in their dance.” The author could have heard Stebbins speak, as they also mention how “Plato spoke about dance in favor of the gods, and Apollo bears the title of ‘the dancer’ in the poems of Pindar, while in one of the works of Homer he is represented as playing upon the harp and dancing at the same time.” What is most interesting about the article is that they state America did not yet have its own national dance, instead, there is the French minuet, Spanish sarabande, Scottish highland fling, English Sailor’s hornpipe, and that “America adapts a bit from each.” There was a new social dance, ‘The Amsterdam,’ said to be “sanctioned by the 400” in New York City which resembles the Oxford minuet combined with the gavotte. Skirt dancing was said to be “essentially Spanish, and all the Spanish steps combined with the soubrette methods, but without castanets.” Most importantly the article states “there is no exercise better than dancing. It is quite equal to a course of Delsarte to take the Spanish dance alone. There is not a movement in Delsarte that is not found in this dance. Dancing is the rhythm of the body as music is the rhythm of the soul” (13). Certainly, the mention of Delsarte being essentially the same as ‘dance’ is notable as the terms had become synonymous. I would argue this is because *aesthetic dances* were likened to principles from Delsartean aesthetics. To be clear, Delsarte did not create dances, however some American Delsartists did. The article’s narrative highly resembles Stebbins’ lectures on these subjects not to mention her being renowned for performing as Miriam, therefore, I would argue that the article is about Stebbins’ work although she is not specifically mentioned.

During the summer of 1894, Stebbins and Southwick held a program in Newport, Rhode Island. Newport is well known as having been the summer haven for the wealthy elite during the Gilded Age, with extravagant mansions lining the oceans cliff edge. To have held a summer school in Newport demonstrates that Stebbins expected a full program of eager society students. Although I have yet to find reviews of their first season, seeing as they returned the following year, it would appear the summer session went well.

THE NEW YORK SCHOOL OF EXPRESSION.

Genevieve Stebbins,
F. Townsend Southwick, } PRINCIPALS.

SUMMER SESSION, AT NEWPORT, R. I.,
JULY 5 TO AUGUST 18, 1894.

* * A MOST ATTRACTIVE PROGRAM. * *

Eleven Courses arranged especially to meet the needs of Teachers and Readers.	Normal Courses in elementary work. Personal, helpful instruction in Artistic Pantomime and Recitation.
---	--

N. B. Mrs. GENEVIEVE STEBBINS will not teach in any other school during the summer.

For Circular with Full Information, call on F. TOWNSEND SOUTHWICK, Class Director, or, address,
NORMAN ASTLEY, Business Manager, . . . Room 20, Carnegie Music Hall, NEW YORK.

Fig. 176. Newport Summer Program, *Werner's* Advertisement, 1894.

Popular Physical Culture

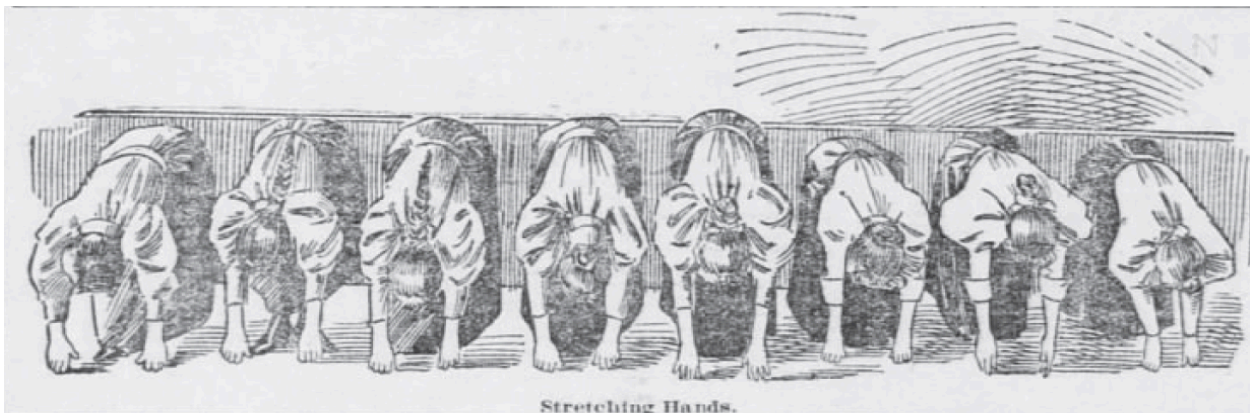


Fig. 177. "With the Body Strong and the Brain is Active," *The Washington Times*, June 19, 1895, 9.

In the 1890s Stebbins continued to be a regular contributor to *Werner's Magazine* with articles on 'Practical Delsartism,' along with completing two additional publications that further specified her combined Delsarte-Ling pedagogy as being her own unique physical culture synthesis. Stebbins advocated for the Swedish Ling form which was known for holistically conditioning the whole body in free-standing exercises. When combined with her Delsartean lessons in aesthetic movements and grace, Stebbins believed this complimentary combination provided for the best physical training possible.

In the 19th century, Ling was the main model for physical culture training in Europe and America based on a sound physiological basis for bodily 'conditioning' and strengthening overall musculature. As previously stated, Stebbins studied the Ling system with Dr. George Taylor, who had studied in Sweden at Pehr Ling's Royal Gymnastic Institute (in 1858). He was not the first American to have done so, as Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell preceded him. Taylor wrote *An Exposition of the Swedish Movement Cure* (1860) and established the Movement Cure Institute in New York City. Below are images of two Ling exercises, one of the free-standing back arches (within a complete exercise series of movements), and the 'slanted rope.'

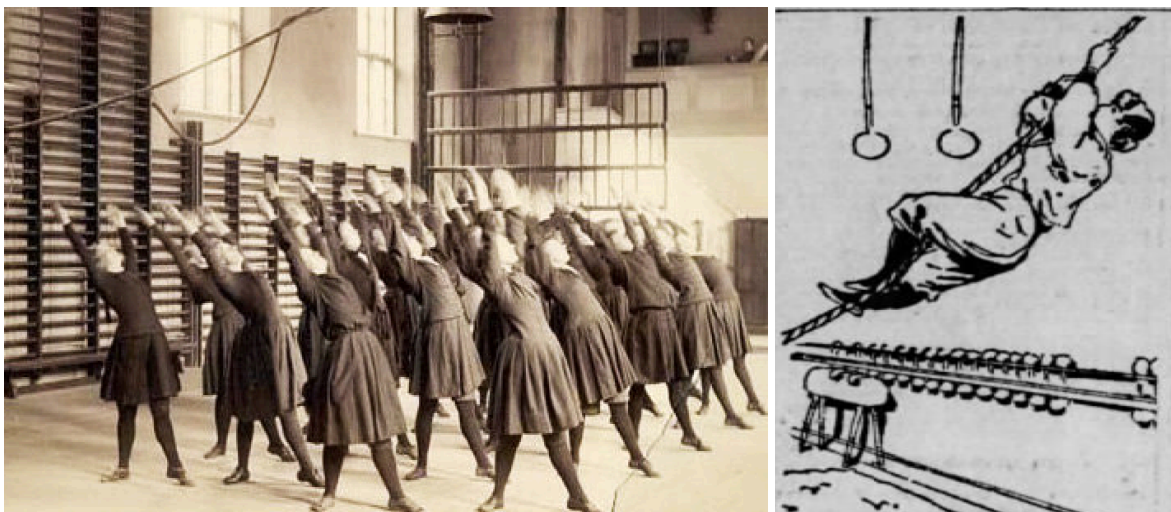


Fig. 178. Ling Movements, Courtesy GIH archives. Fig. 179. "Swedish Gymnastics: Pittsburgh Women who believe in Physical Culture," *Pittsburgh Press*, January 24, 1897, 10.

See the ‘ladders’ behind the group of women. These would be climbed, used to do backbends or a variety of stretches and strengthening exercises. The slanted rope was attached to the ceiling of the gym, running on a diagonal. Women would get up on the rope which began at head height, by wrapping a knee around and hoisting themselves up along the rope. Women would climb to the top of the rope at the ceiling and then descend. I have done such exercises as a former acrobat, and it is no easy task, as it is a ‘tid bit’ scary to be at the ceiling of a gym!

Swedish historian Johannes Westerberg finds that Ling created exercises specifically for women to fine tune balance, and bending exercises for women’s flexible nature, “wave-like body movements” and promoted dancing as joyful exercise (citing Swedish texts from the 1850s, 2018, 269). Westerberg argues women’s engagement in physical culture continues to be an under-researched area.⁵⁹⁰ I would concur, since not only is women’s participation in physical culture under-represented, their involvement in psycho-physical culture and aesthetic dance in the last decades of the 19th century is likewise often overlooked.

Stebbins engaged in these exercises, and advocated Ling for her students to develop their physicality in daily gymnasium classes. The school had a “fully equipped” anatomical “manikin arranged for dissection” to study anatomy, and a “large series of costly Physiological Charts” (School Prospectus 1893, 13). Physical culture scholar Gertrude Pfister explains that Ling’s “aim was to explain the relationship between the body and the soul and between physiological and psychological processes [...] based on a rational and scientific approach to body and movement that was anatomically and physiologically effective and that could be universally applied” (2003,

⁵⁹⁰ “Adjusting Swedish gymnastics to the female nature: Discrepancies in the gendering of girls’ physical education in the mid-nineteenth century,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 5, no. 1, 261–279. Patricia Vertinsky, and Susanna Hedenborg, “Physical Culture Practices: New Historical Work on Women and Gender,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 6, 487–493. “One System, Several Cultures: A Comparative Study of Swedish Gymnastics for Women,” *International Sports Studies* 22, no. 2, 2000.

69–70). The teaching of Ling’s movements was accompanied with vocal directives guiding the participant to draw their awareness to the breath and to specific actions of the body.⁵⁹¹ Ling’s exercises were ‘called out’ by a teacher (like any dance or yoga class) for students to follow. Ling’s (and Stebbins’) exercises can be considered a form of somatic movement education as internal physical cues guided actions, and movements were expected to be done with “undivided attention and full volition” to achieve benefits from the work (Baron Nils Posse 1890, 27).

An accomplished physical culture leader, Dr. Edward M. Hartwell of John Hopkins University, reviewed Stebbins’ psycho-physical culture pedagogy in her 1892 book. He said, “What a dreary, monotonous world this would be if we were all alike or thought alike.” Nevertheless, while stating that Stebbins gave an excellent “philosophical basis for her exercises,” he surmises that her book is suited for “fashionable people who are attracted by Buddhistic philosophy and the like, but it is not the kind to appeal to those of scientific turn of mind.” He also mentions the occult nature of her work which he did not take a liking to. He even speaks of Stebbins as essentially being conceited enough to have the confidence to write her own philosophy, because she appeals to other philosophies *just to establish her own*. Dismissing

⁵⁹¹ Ling was an elected member of the Swedish General Medical Association. Ling’s Royal Gymnastika Central Institute (est. 1813) was the first of its kind in Sweden (and arguably Europe) with teacher training programs and a medical gymnastics treatment center for the ill. Ling’s Institute later became a university, now known as the Gymnastik- och idrottshögskolan (GIH), or in English, the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences (gih.se). At his institute he focused on medical gymnastic research to advance his theories about movement having curative properties. While initially questioned, his methods were later embraced by many leading doctors and medical society. Courses in medical gymnastics were offered to medical students at the University of Uppsala (runeberg.org/Sweden) and a full medical gymnastics training program was created at Ling’s Institute. Doctors admired the efforts of Ling as “No approach was made to a method of designating and classifying the positions and movements of the body for the purposes contemplated in the Movement-Cure, till the time of Ling” (Dr. George Taylor 1860, 142). Ling used his knowledge in physiology and anatomy to test his movement exercises and discovered how muscular movements influenced the organs, respiration, and circulation. Movements were thought to cure diseased parts by bringing circulation, purity of the blood and oxidation of tissue, easing congestion through “tissue metamorphosis,” strengthening weak and imbalanced muscles, influencing direct and reflex action of the nervous system by diminishing excitability and irritability of nerves, and helping with lymphatic drainage and overall ‘nutrition’ within the body (Charles Taylor 1861, 31).

psycho-physical culture as nonsense, Hartwell nevertheless says that her “subject matter has been carefully thought out and the whole is a logical, consistent working out of her fundamental philosophy.” However, worst yet, Hartwell argues that Stebbins was either “profoundly ignorant” of Ling’s system, or she gave a “wilful perversion” by pigeonholing his original work as aiming solely for physical strength. Unfortunately, Hartwell minimizes her arguments and misses important points Stebbins made in her writing, including that the physical work of Ling, in combination with Delsarte aesthetics, creates a more perfect system of Harmonic Gymnastics (Book Review in *Werner’s*). She stressed that physical culture was necessary for bodily conditioning so that a performing artist could develop a fully capable physicality.

In her 1898 article “Physical Training: Gymnastics for Women,” Stebbins argues that anatomy should be studied to the extent that you can use your inner eye to see your skeleton, to imagine how the muscles move the bones, and to situate each organ. She advises her students to attain “knowledge of medical gymnastics, aesthetic gymnastics, fencing and dancing” and a “thorough understanding of apparatus work and gymnastic games.” Surprisingly, Stebbins says that women should not do “heavy gymnastics” for the risks it entails, such as “hanging by her heels, leap bars, climb posts, turn summersaults, etc.” She might have said so as trying to do acrobatic tricks in general can lead to injury and not that she didn’t think women were capable of such feats with proper training.

By 1915 in the *Handbook of American Private Schools*, the term physical ‘education’ had replaced ‘physical culture’ as the new terminology, and some dance schools were confusingly listed in the physical education chapter or under schools of expression and dramatic art.⁵⁹²

National listings included the Posse Normal School of Gymnastics in Boston (directed by the

⁵⁹² Published by Porter Sargent sixth edition, Boston, MA.

wife of deceased Baron Nils Posse, the Baroness Rose Posse followed by Hartvig Nissen); The Sargent School for Physical Education in Cambridge; the YMCA training school in Springfield, MA; New Haven Normal School in Connecticut with a director from Yale; the Louis Chalif Normal School of Dancing in New York City, in “aesthetic, interpretive, racial, toe, and ballroom dancing”; a YMCA branch in New York the Savage Normal School; the American Gymnastic Union School in Michigan following German methods; the University of Michigan program, Battle Creek Normal School; several Chicago based teacher training schools such as Hinman’s School of Folk Dancing; Ted Shawn Studio in Los Angeles; and the Norma Gould School of Dancing teaching Dalcroze Eurhythmics and other forms of dance (1915, 357–358). The New York School of Expression was listed under schools of expression and dramatic arts, along with the American Academy of Dramatic Arts; Anna Morgan Studios in Chicago; and the Cumnock School of Expression in Los Angeles (est. 1894 as a high school where Martha Graham studied as a youth).

Performances 1895 to 1897

In 1895, *Werner’s* reports that “Genevieve Stebbins’s Recital” with twenty of her pupils at Carnegie Recital Hall was an “interesting performance from both an educated and an entertainment point of view.” The show “served to bring her own marvelous control of body even more prominently to the front. Perhaps the work of the pupils suffered somewhat in comparison, but the net gain was distinctly greater.” The program began with an overture by the orchestra, followed by an address on “Psycho-Physical Culture” illustrated by “Diana Discovering Endymion, Ceres, Augustus, Cupid with Bow, Apollo Belvedere, Laughing Faun, Amazon, quoit Player, Daphne, Dying Gladiator, and Hebe.” Further, *Werner’s* reports,

After a brief talk, in which she considered the two great systems German and Swedish, which are struggling for supremacy in the schools, and the advantages of a judicious

mingling of Swedish and Delsarte work, five young women, with roses and smilax wreathes, came out and went through a graceful drill. They were followed by five more young women, who gave a more vigorous but none the less pleasing gymnastic exhibition, called Amazon Drill.



Fig. 180. Examples of women doing drills. “With the Body Strong and the Brain is Active,” *The Washington Times*, June 19, 1895, 9. The third image is representative of an action in the Amazon Drill.

The article continued by saying,

Delightful as Mrs. Stebbins’s statue-poses have always been, there seemed to be even more charm in her work on this occasion than a year ago. Mrs. Stebbins has certainly gone a step higher. In her pantomimes of the Festival of Pallas Athene and the Myth of Isis, she reached the height of perfection in bodily control- that control that is dominated by the mind- that only years of work with an exceptionally well-strung instrument could produce. [...]. The processional maidens in their Greek gowns for the Festival of the Pallas Athena and the Myth of Isis were well drilled; and though their action was that of a student, lacking the abandon of the artist as shown in Mrs. Stebbins, they were nearly always pleasing. Through an odd oversight, doubtless on the part of the girls, several of them wore high-heeled French dancing slippers instead of the correct and necessary sandal.⁵⁹³

The last costuming error comment is amusing as it is common enough in student performances for such a thing to occur. The commencement ceremony had positive reviews by

⁵⁹³ “Genevieve Stebbins’s Recital,” *Werner’s*, April 1895.

the *New York Tribune* (“They are Experts in Expression”), *The New York Herald* (“The Masked Ball was made the occasion for introducing a very stately aesthetic dance, and the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in monologue was exceptionally impressive”), *The New York Evening World*, *The New York Mail and Express*, *The New York Syndicate letter*, *The New York Recorder* (“The recitations interspersed through the program were given with a finish and excellence rarely exhibited”), and *The New York Press* which stated “of course, everybody has heard of the fame of Genevieve Stebbins. She has done more for the Science of Expression and Delsarte than Delsarte could have accomplished for himself; the disciple is greater than the master” (*Werner’s*, August 1895, 632).

Another article shared, “I went the other day to an exhibition, or performance or whatever you may choose to call it given by the lady who is at the head of the so-called New York School of Expression.” Students entered the Hall filing out to the sound of music each bearing flowers, wreaths, votive offerings, figuring forth the Panathenaic procession which yearly repaired to the shrine of Athene.



Fig. 181. *Thesmophoria*, circa 1894–1897, Francis Davis Millet, Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

The article continued by approving of

The votive offerings deposited on the supposition alter, these New York maidens simulating ancient Athenians knelt, threw back their bodies with outstretched arms, then brought their hands back to the forehead, palms outward, and spread them anew in the classic and magnificent gesture of Oriental supplication and when the entire procession had gone through the same rhythmic motions, the priestess of Athens (Mrs. Stebbins) issued from behind the ranks and prostrated herself likewise, after which she whirled about rapidly several times in the gyrations of the Greek religious dance proper. A dance studied from the Egyptian hieroglyphics came next in order, and this was also executed by the pupils. [...]

Stebbins was described as teaching her students more than just “ease, balance, and poses,” of the body” because they “gain a good deal beside in the way of the artistic instinct, under her tuition and influence.” Many of the students were said to be “still rigid and self-conscious, but many again had already acquired a graciousness and a flexibility that promised much.” Their posing and dancing were said to have “extreme refinement; a certain earnest, modest, and I might almost say, tender note was stamped upon it.” The reviewer states that while “I do not precisely know what the curriculum of Mrs. Stebbins’ school is,” regardless, it tends to “further womanly charm of body and bearing and thought; that seems one of the greatest desiderata, surely, of our present day, in which women have so many influences pressing upon them that lead them to ramp and rage and play the part of little men, instead of their own part.”⁵⁹⁴ The last sentence reveals expectations for women to play their own ‘part.’

According to Elsie Wilbor in *Werner’s Readers and Singers* (May 1895, 469), the commencement exercise had nine full graduates and six special graduates. While 15 graduates may seem like a tiny group, in an intensive conservatory training program this is an ideal number as each student obtains more focused attention. The commencement ceremony must have run for hours. In addition to pantomimes, dances, dramatic performances they delivered readings

⁵⁹⁴ E.T., New York Syndicate Letter, “Poetry of Motion,” *The Weekly Wisconsin*, May 25, 1895, 1.

including *Fight of the Armstrong*, *Fishing*, *Money Musk*, *Vision of Sir Launfal*, *Pauline Pavlovna*, selections from *Dolly Dialogues*, the Trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, and three scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Shakespearean scenes were given in costume with a full cast. “The Merchant of Venice” was under the direction of Mr. F. Townsend Southwick, and “Romeo and Juliet” was directed by Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins. In the first play, Miss Katharine Hopkins, as *Bassanio*, Miss Pearl Murphy, as *Gratiano*, and Miss Bessie Anderson, as *Portia*, deserve special mention. In the second play, Miss Harriette Morehouse, as *Lady Capulet*, Miss Nora Rousseau, as *Juliet*, and Miss Pearl Murphy, as *Nurse*, were especially good. In “Money Musk,” Miss Cora M’Clumpha gave a pretty dance, which was heartily applauded. Miss Hopkins in “Pauline Pavlovna” is also worthy of mention. The diplomas were presented by Mr. Frank B. Carpenter.

The second annual summer session of the New York School of Expression, held again in Newport, from July 1 to August 10, 1895, was designed for established teachers to refine their skills. As described by Elsie Wilbor of *Werner’s* the location was ideal for the “unsophisticated country girl” to get a “glimpse of the world of fashion,” considered of importance in her art-training. High society could be seen pursuing its many “pleasures, and the sight is well worth viewing by one whose world is just opening.” A day’s work began at nine till noon, with “Stebbins devoted herself, naturally, to Delsarte work.” Wilbor continues to share,

The pupils were put through a rigorous physical drill of swaying, poising, and general harmonic gymnastics, all done with a thought behind each movement. To bring out the thought-idea more prominently, Mrs. Stebbins has devised a number of drills, representing different forms of Eastern worship. They are to gymnastics what the modern melodic exercise is to vocal and instrumental music. The vocalizes of Siber and Marchesi and Garcia are veritable songs in themselves, yet none the less useful in training the voice. So the drills arranged by Mrs. Stebbins have an aesthetic value that enhances the muscular influence. One can throw oneself into story-telling bit of action with far more fervor than into a piece of work that calls only for muscular memory of one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four. The one sets the blood to tingling and fires the imagination till one becomes for the moment a veritable priestess; the other is as spiritless as the multiplication table. No one can watch Mrs. Stebbins in her drills without catching some of her enthusiasm.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁵ Wilbor, “New York School of Expression,” *Werner’s* 1895, 782–784.

The summer closed with a recital held at Old Fellows Hall “which was filled to capacity despite the heat, and many were unable to gain admission.” The show included recitations, a scene from Becket, Shepherdess and Amazon drills, pantomimes of the Eastern temple service, and the pantomime of “The Sioux Chief” by Mrs. W.C. Chilton, was encored. It seems the pantomime was more probably ‘The Sioux Chief’s Daughter’ according to my quick search in historical newspapers of pantomimes in that era (*Chronicling America*). This poem expresses the conflict between the daughter of a Sioux Chief who wished to be allowed to be with her lover.⁵⁹⁶



GRADUATING CLASS, NEW YORK SCHOOL OF EXPRESSION, IN EASTERN TEMPLE DRILL.

Fig. 182. *Werner's*, Newport summer program, 1895, 783.

The week of October 22, 1895, Stebbins gave an entertainment in Cleveland for the Sorosis Society women’s club. Several ‘society’ receptions were given in her honor. By February 1896, the New York School of Expression gave a recital at Carnegie Hall with recitations, the Eastern

⁵⁹⁶ Miss Frances Putnam Pogle (B.E. of the Cumnock School of Oratory, Chicago. Teacher of Physical Development and Delsarte Training and Elocution), *The New Popular Reciter and Book of Elocution* (International Publishing Co. Philadelphia, 1901), 163.

Temple Drill, and a new pantomime dance by Stebbins. By now, audiences were quite familiar with Stebbins' work, and they continued to flock to the theatre to enjoy her shows, despite the repertoire being much of the same format, albeit with different dramatic readings.

In a recent article on pantomimes, author Janice Norwood explains the concept of 'Ghosting' in the theatre (drawing from Marvin Carlson's scholarship).⁵⁹⁷ The idea is different than the common term 'ghosting' when a person decides to no longer communicate with a friend and simply vanishes without explanation. In the theatre world, one aspect of 'Ghosting' is the "recycling of material and techniques." The idea of repeated tropes, or the replication of characters being performed, is fundamental to the creative industry and ultimately, over time, to developing cultural consciousness. Audiences return again and again to see the same show because they become 'fans' of a particular actor or of a role they want to see other actors portray. Ghosting also refers to audiences remembering the past roles of a certain performer which influences the perception of the new actor creating the role. This lived experience/ influence of memory/ between audience and performer is a form of "intertheatricality." Herein, the audience learns how to analyze different portrayals of a given performance, and what is first unfamiliar becomes known and appreciated, setting a new precedent as a result.⁵⁹⁸

With every show Stebbins gave, she purposefully informed her audience—teaching them *how to interpret* the visual display, *how to see* her artistry and, as a result, *how to know dance* as an art form. In so doing, Stebbins provided philosophical reasoning for an audience to understand the new dance genre she was innovating. In some ways, similarly to the theatre world in which characters represent a 'familiar' historical past, her performances were re-presentations

⁵⁹⁷ *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

⁵⁹⁸ Stage Echoes: Tracing the Pantomime Harlequinade through Comic Ballet, Trap Work and Silent Film," *Theatre Survey* 65 (Cambridge University Press, 2024): 185–207.

of ancient Greek dance history and of mythological figures. Furthermore, the ecstatic dances were presented in paintings for centuries and commonly known to the public. Like scholar Maurice Emmanuel after her, Stebbins had intensely studied representations of ancient Greeks dancing from statues and paintings on vases. Cultured audiences who were familiar with classical art representations would have been able to recognize ‘ideas’ that Stebbins was inspired by— that of nymphs, ecstatic dancing, and ceremonial events for the gods and goddesses.



Fig. 183. “Ancient Greek and Roman dancing in prints,” Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections. Fig. 184. *Dance of the Maenads*, Cornelis Lens, 1765.



Fig. 185. Charles Gleyre, *La danse des bacchantes*, oil on canvas 1849. Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. Acquisition with a special credit from the État de Vaud and the support of the Gottfried Keller Foundation.

Towards the end of the school year in 1896, a performance was presented for the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences at the YMCA Association Hall (seating 1,400). A reviewer stated, “five unwarlike Amazons entered [...] showing the graceful use of the arms. Mrs. Stebbins, who wore the same costume as the rest, then herself exhibited statue poses from the Niobe and the Florence groups.” Following was a recitation of “Bacchus and Ariadne” with ten Bacchantes

who waved stalks of ivy above their heads and showed much suppleness if not fury. Ariadne entered, found the stage unoccupied and forthwith lay down and went to sleep. The Bacchantes and the god shortly appeared. Ariadne awoke, saw her Athenian lover gone and herself surrounded by the revelers of Dionysus. Bacchus consoles her by offering her his heart and hand, which she accepts. Immortal husbands were scarce even in those days.

The show ended with a dance of the Mist Maidens, and the dance of Miriam.⁵⁹⁹ *Werner's* states that it was the most successful show to date for Stebbins, with several numbers being encored. Around the same time, Stebbins travelled to Ohio upon invitation of Professor Robert Irving Fulton of the Ohio Wesleyan School of Oratory. She gave a series of lectures and recitals. The success of this event led her to accept an invitation at Ohio State University, as the president, Dr. Delaware, was one of Stebbins' former pupils (*Werner's* 1896, 1060).

In the summer of 1896, the New York School of Expression held their program at Round Lake, New York, just outside of the summer resort city of Saratoga Springs, New York. It's possible they decided to change location from Newport to take advantage of cheaper student accommodation. The school year of 1896 through 1897 had much the same progression with students attending classes at Carnegie Hall. Shows were given by the New York Symphony, Oratorio, Philharmonic, and Musical Art Societies and Carnegie Hall housed other schools including the Metropolitan School of Fine Arts and the American Academy of the Dramatic

⁵⁹⁹ “Women Posed and Danced: Mrs. Stebbins' Lecture on Ancient Art Illustrated by Living Pictures,” *The Journal*, May 15, 1896, 6. “Ancient Dances: Young Women Represent Classic Myths,” May 15, 1896, 11.

Arts. Hundreds of students were said to frequent the building daily. The hall was funded by Andrew Carnegie as none of the rentals covered his costs.

NEW YORK SCHOOL OF EXPRESSION.
PRINCIPALS:
GENEVIEVE STEBBINS, F. TOWNSEND SOUTHWICK.
WILL HOLD ITS
SUMMER SESSION '96.
At ROUND LAKE, N. Y.
July 6th to August 15th.
PRACTICAL DELSARTISM, ELOCUTION, ORATORY,
PHYSICAL CULTURE, PANTOMIME AND DRAMATIC ART.
GRADUATE AND POST-GRADUATE COURSES. ARTISTIC PLATFORM WORK A SPECIALTY.
THE LILLIE BERG SCHOOL OF SINGING.
Miss Lillie Berg will hold a Summer Session at Round Lake, July 1st to August 10th.
Some of the advantages of Round Lake for summer rest and study are:
1. Cheap board and a cool, invigorating climate, beautiful scenery, a life in the woods, with boating, driving, and bathing as relaxations from study.
2. Unequaled advantages in every branch of Education, Art, Music, Science and Philosophy.
3. The greatest orators, the most popular clergymen and lecturers, together with the finest readers and entertainers occupy the platform during the session.
4. **We have arranged for Advanced and Artistic courses for Teachers and Readers, in each of our departments, as well as Popular and Non-professional classes for those who desire them.**
"The Round Lake Journal" says:—This is the best opportunity ever offered at Round Lake for this class of work. There ought to be a large patronage of this school. Hundreds of persons are doing platform and public work who would be greatly improved and empowered by a month's hard study here in July.
For circulars and other information, address
NORMAN ASTLEY, BUSINESS MANAGER, Carnegie Hall New York.

Fig. 186. *Werner's* Advertisement, 1896.

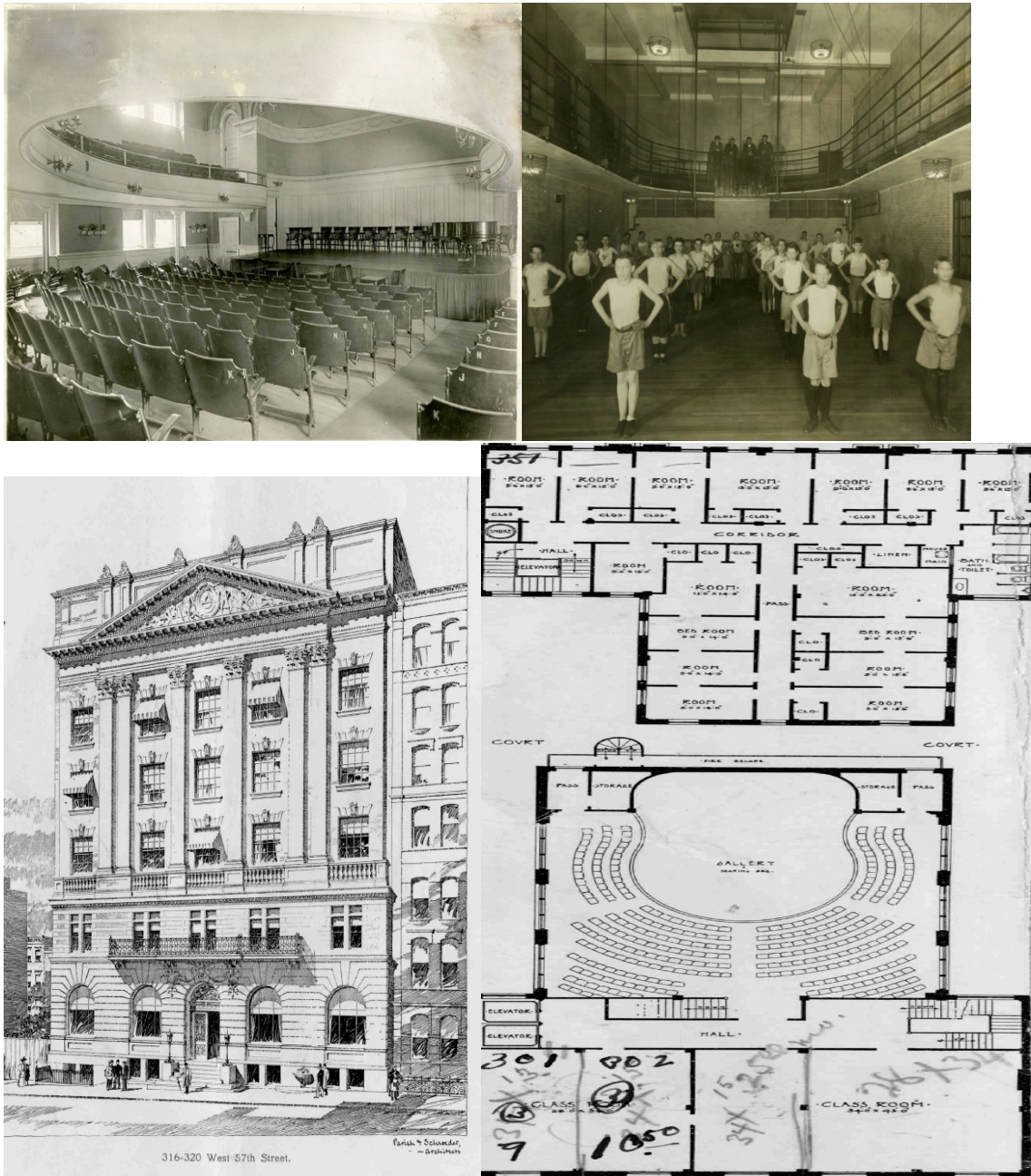
The New York School of Expressions' summer school moved from Round Lake to Asbury Park on the New Jersey shore for the summers of '87 and '88. There were boardwalks, sandy beaches, an orchestra pavilion, a Merry-Go-Round, and other amusements. The school was based out of Westminster Church and their final performance was well-received. Southwick gave several classic readings, and Stebbins "who is the personification of all that is graceful and beautiful in art" gave poses and pantomimes (August 4, 1897, *The Times* (Philadelphia), August 4, 1897, 6; *Asbury Park Journal*, June 17, 1898, 12.) After the summer session, Stebbins took a vacation for the month of September to the Great Lakes and the Northwest (*Werner's*, 1896, 23).

1897 marked a year of important events for Stebbins. The National Association of Elocutionists held their annual meeting at the West Side YMCA in New York City, and this is where the statue posing debates and Stebbins' 'vanity' became an issue. The New York School of Expression programmed a series of lectures on expression, free to card-carrying members of oratory and elocution associations. On April 23, 1897, the *New York Times* announced that Stebbins was set to perform for a benefit at the Waldorf Astoria for the National Committee of the Women's Indian Association. The proceeds were to be used to provide the "desert Indians of California with water" by means of building artesian wells. Stebbins was expected to recite "Cassandra" from Aeschylus (April 18, 1897, 19). By May, the New York School of Expression gave their commencement exercises, and for the first time performed the pantomime dance 'Jephthah's Daughter.' Dr. Charles R. Treat presented the diplomas.⁶⁰⁰ Stebbins' school was noted for having as part of their "stock and trade" classical dancing and posing (*The Times*, June 30, 1897, 8).

Before the school year of 1897–1898, the school moved to a larger location a couple blocks away to the West Side YMCA on 318 West 57th street. The West Side YMCA was built on land donated by the Vanderbilts and was the largest in New York at that time. The YMCA archives did not have much information regarding this specific building's history, yet they found the building plans and a photo of what they thought was a theatre at the YMCA. When I compared the photo with the West Side building plans, I could see that the theatre was far too large to have been from this YMCA. When I looked more intently at the photo, I realized that it was a Carnegie Hall gathering for the YMCA (the theatre is filled almost completely by men, with a

⁶⁰⁰ "The School of Expression. An Elaborate Programme Carried out By the Graduates," *New York Tribune*, May 21, 1897, 5.

few women in the upper tiers). When I sent the photo to Carnegie's archives, we were delighted to find that it was the first ever known photo of Carnegie Hall's largest theatre.



Figs. 187, 188, 189, 190, Courtesy YMCA archives. The NYSE had use of the gym and lecture hall, and the National Association of Elocutionists used this hall for their gatherings.

The school had use of some of the third-floor classrooms, the gym on another floor, and the lecture hall auditorium. The school's newly created journal, *Actions and Utterances*, reported on

careers of students, performances, and essays on various subjects. Students regularly advertised their performance work in national papers saying they had studied with Stebbins, as such association validated their expertise. Many of Stebbins' students/graduates were by now performing in their own shows or teaching in various cities across the nation.

One impressive feat in 1897 for Stebbins' career, was a performance she gave at the Metropolitan Opera House. Stebbins was to "dance herself in an apotheosis" [climax] of the epic operetta *Cinderella* ("Three Thousand Sunday School-Girls Dance as Fairies in Amazing Cinderella Ballets," *New York Journal*, December 14, 1897, 6). The show ran from December 27th to January 1, 1898. Volunteers were asked to participate as they needed "two thousand talented, refined young ladies and gentlemen over 16 years of age." The principal roles in the cast were said to be filled by "representatives of prominent New York Families." The show was given as a charity event to raise funds for a hospital for consumptives, a nursery and kindergarten, and St. Ann's Maternity Hospital in connection with the New York Foundling Asylum and associated with the Catholic organization Sisters of Charity. Volunteers were welcomed "without regard to sex, creed, or nationality" however it's not clear if that also meant race or not. It's unlikely, as they also advertised for 200 young men who could perform as "Funny Chinese Merchants, Komical Koloed Koons, and Jumping Tars." This production was absolutely massive with 200 good singing voices needed, 200 for speaking parts, 200 chorus singers, 200 ladies to be fairies, 200 to be Roses, 100 to train for special acts, 200 to be butterflies and bees, 200 to dance the "gavotte, Brazilian Caprice and Greek Dances," 150 gentlemen to be Knights, guards, and coachmen, 400 to perform marches of all nations (*The Sun*, November 28, 1897, 10). Stebbins was announced to "exhibit her graduating class in movements of the Delsarte method and will dance herself at the apotheosis, but it was clear that the masses

of youth were to be of the most interest. Cinderella was to arrive in a landau (carriage) “drawn by eight ponies, not larger than dogs, and she will lose her slipper in a dance” (*New York Journal*, December 14, 1897, 6). Each performance was to add something new and there was a changing cast of Cinderellas and Princes.



Fig. 191. *New York journal and advertiser*, December 14, 1897, 6. “Three Thousand Sunday School Dance as Fairies in Cinderella Ballets: Sixteen Years of Age and Pretty. They wear Street Dress. Professors of the Opera say “Smile” and “Higher” to them Incessantly. Girls Learn Coquettish Airs. In Revels of Roses, Bees, Hornets and Butterflies They Forget the Manners of the Strawberry Festivals.”

Sometime around 1899, Norman Astley bought 740 acres of land in the Upper Creek Township and Linville Township of North Carolina (*Burke County News*, Morganton, NC., August 11, 1899). It is not clear why he bought land there, perhaps it was an investment. From 1900, the school’s performances were at the West Side YMCA theatre, but until at least 1902 commencement ceremonies were held at the Carnegie Lyceum (*Werner’s*, 1902, 600). In 1901 the New York School of Expression was chartered by Regents, the University of the State of New York. 1902 also marked the 6th enlarged edition publication of *The Delsarte System of Expression*. The schools summer program was held in Monteagle, Tennessee in the Cumberland mountains in conjunction with the local Chautauqua chapter. By 1905, Stebbins issued \$10,000

capital stock (around \$350,000 today) divided into 1000 shares of \$10 each for five school incorporators, Genevieve Stebbins Astley, Charlotte Sulley Presby, Seraphine C. Fowler, Edwin O. Presby, and Irma V. Miller.⁶⁰¹

NEW YORK SCHOOL OF EXPRESSION.

499



Corabel Howe, Maine,
Graduate Teachers' Course.

Elizabeth Nelson, New Jersey,
Post-Graduate.

1. Marietta Wilsey, New York.
2. Katharine Clapsadel, New York.
3. Martha Rockefeller, New York.
4. Mrs. Bertha Ashley Searle, New York.
5. Louise Pallister Hubbard, Virginia.

6. Constance R. Tinsley, Virginia.
7. George Whitaker, North Carolina.
8. Louise Davis, Connecticut.
9. Lena Sanford, Ohio.
10. Helen Jean Reed, South Carolina.

Fig. 192. *Werner's*, 1900, 499.

In 1905, the *New-York Tribune* reported on a lecture Stebbins gave “Expressing Emotions: Elocutionists Discuss the Art of Portrayal at Convention” for the New York State Association of Elocutionists in Brooklyn (April 18). Stebbins commented on the effect habitual attitudes exert on the hopes and feelings of the persons who assume them. The article notes that “without considering modern mind cure or thought cure, she said, I have always found that to assume a position was to feel like that position. If I held my chest high with courage, why, I felt courage.

⁶⁰¹ Recorded by the Madison County Historical Society, January 18, 1905.

Now in coming here to-day I didn't know quite what I should say, but if I had come with a sunken chest, fumbling my fingers nervously and with a timid air (she threw herself into the posture indicated) Why, I really don't care to keep it, she exclaimed for fear it should exercise hypnotic influence over me right here and now." Stebbins was conscious of how posture alters the senses, and she encouraged this awareness in others.

England and back to California

Stebbins' 'mother' Louise Clappe passed away on February 15, 1906, and she must have been at quite a loss. Clappe died in Morristown, N.J., and was said to have adopted from "Mrs. James Stebbins" two children after her death, including Stebbins and "Lillie Atkinson of Fruitvale."⁶⁰² I do not know who Lillie Atkinson is, or if there is any truth to this statement. Fruitvale was a community outside of Oakland. Perhaps the reporter confused Atkinson with Stebbins' little sister, who passed away at birth. However, as I established, while Stebbins was not adopted, she was raised by Clappe and they remained close into adulthood.

After Clappe's death, the Astley's prepared to move to England and Stebbins passed on ownership of the school to her former student Charlotte Presby. In April 1906, Stebbins directed a play "Place aux Dames, or The Ladies Speak at Last" for the Carnegie Lyceum in an evening of three plays presented as a fundraising benefit for a home for animals ("Items of Social Interest," *New York Daily Tribune*). The play was later published by Mary Porter in 1910. It is a comedy with leading women from Shakespeare's plays. Set in a water-cure establishment, Juliet looks back on her earlier life as a "love-sick little goosey." She complains about Romeo before Portia enters, and they converse about their problematic marriages. Ophelia enters speaking to

⁶⁰² Mrs. Louise Clappe Dies in New Jersey: She was One of the Noted Educators of the early Days in California," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1906.

Portia followed by Lady Macbeth and the women share how they have been maligned by the men in their lives. It is quite funny, and a well written comedy.

Sometime in 1907, Stebbins and her husband Norman Astley are rumoured to have moved to Dittisham, England, in South Devon. There is very little known about their time in England or why they moved to the places they did. In 1911, it is thought they moved to Guernsey in the Channel Islands and by 1914 were in Slindon, England. In 1913, the *Quest of the Spirit: By a Pilgrim of the Way* was edited and arranged by Stebbins, published in London by Henry Glaiser and Company and in New York by Edgar Werner. While it is thought to have been written by her husband a ‘pilgrim of the way,’ as editor and ‘arranger’ Stebbins concurs with the working philosophies within, saying they represented the “deepest convictions” of her soul. I will briefly note some important summarized precepts from the text. For one, it speaks to various cultural interpretations of the ‘Spirit,’ from the Tao of the Chinese that recognizes a primordial force, to the idea that there is no Finite God or cosmic plan. The book expresses the opinion that evolution is a matter of who survives, as “the weakest, be they kings or cockroaches, ultimately go to the wall” (30), yet die to live again in another potential form (not karmically but organically). The Astley’s did not believe in Karma or suffering because of mistakes in a past life. ‘They’ wrote that the idea of Karma “is as crude and grotesque as the divine justice in Dante’s *Inferno* or the avenging devils of the Hindu pantheon” (123). They believed that struggle is ‘primeval’ and necessary for growth. The germinal system of dying ‘in order to live’ is seen in life forms emerging from millions of years of organic progression, “we would be worse than fools, we would be insane to imagine a beginning as a something evolving from nothing. We are seeds of change. Interestingly, they say that the ‘Quest of the Way’ is not to be found “through the wicket of any church. In fact, the way of the Church is a turnpike with tollgates built all along the

route.” True religion, in spirit, is devoid of specialized ethics or superior authorities (161). ‘They’ felt that there was no immaculate conception, rather it’s a legendary tale common to ancient times. Slavery is evil and Women are not chattel. The only sin is the violation of one’s conscience and acting against the voice of one’s soul (154). Auras surround a person like a protective instinctual cloak and “Hope is the light of the World” (176). They advised to use “speech that helps and heals, not hurts and scars. True religion is that which lives through altruistic actions. Hindu’s may follow the path of Buddha as a philosophy of life, Arabs will find Allah, Chinese and Japanese the Tao and Zen, there are many different roads. It is not necessary to try to adapt any religion into ‘one’ for the whole world (and waste time “chasing rainbows”). Ultimately, Ancient Greek philosophy is not to be relied upon for a vision of the future because Plato failed, as his speculation aimed to universally explain the whole of experience (32).

In 1914, Astley held a lease with Frederick John Francis Wootton Isaacson who had recently taken over the Slindon Manor estate in West Sussex, England. Isaacson and his sister, Lady Violet Beaumont, purchased Slindon Manor in 1914 and renovated it until 1917, whereafter it became a hospital for injured soldiers at the outbreak of WWI. The West Sussex Record Office says that Isaacson leased land to Norman Astley on the 25th of November 1914 until September 8, 1917. It is possible the Astley’s were friends with Isaacson and Lady Violet. Norman Astley (and thereby Stebbins) is listed as a private resident of Ember Cottage (there are three similar homes of flint and tile, no. 18, 19, or 20).⁶⁰³ These buildings are now designated historical sites.

⁶⁰³ University of Leicester, special collections, Sussex, 584. Slindon Downs National Park Authority, 2017.



Figs. 193 and 194. Ember Cottage, and The Pond, Slindon, Sussex, England.

While Stebbins was living abroad in England, her school continued to grow. In the 1914–1915 school prospectus, certain terminology had evolved notably Delsarte training is listed under Pantomime. Courses include Physical Culture (Harmonic Gymnastics, Swedish Gymnastics, Aesthetic Drills, Dancing, Therapeutic Exercises), Pantomime (Delsarte System, Applied Gesture, Oratorical Action), Drama (Selected Scenes from Classic Dramas, Comedy and Modern Drama; Stage Business, Make-up and Costume), Elocution, Recitation (platform work), vocal training (Emotional Tone, Vowel Melody, Principles of Interpretation, Emotional Studies, Literary Analysis) and teacher training courses. Students trained for the stage or as educators.

The second edition of her 1898 publication *Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training* came out in 1913, demonstrating a continued interest in her ideas. At the outbreak of WWI in 1917, Stebbins and Astley decided to leave England. They sailed from Liverpool on the S.S. Pannonia, stating their destination as Santa Cruz, California. In the ship records, a relative of Norman Astley's was listed as a Reverend of the Rectory in Slindon, Sussex (Church of Light, <http://adepts.light.org>). They moved to Monterey County, to the town of Carmel-by-the-Sea, a couple hours south of San Francisco.

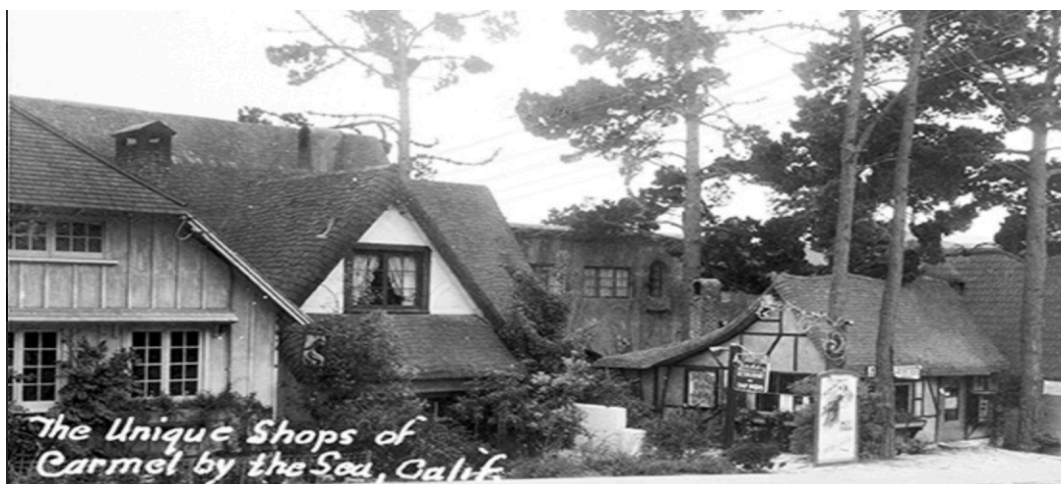


Fig 195. Carmel by the Sea.

Founded in 1902 as an artist's colony, Carmel-by-the-Sea became a charming bohemian village filled with poets, craft makers, and fine artists. The town had a lovely outdoor theatre, a theatre school called the Golden Bough, white sand beaches for enjoying the ocean, and unique town architecture of fairy tale like cottages. Stebbins' obituary spoke of her not only as a solo dancer but as an "esteemed philosopher" who would be remembered as the "little white-haired woman who used to read outside on the library balcony." She passed at age 79 after a bout with pneumonia ("Delsarte Pioneer Succumbs in Carmel," *The Carmel Pinecone* xx no. 37, 1934, 1). Stebbins died September 2, 1934, recorded as "Geneveiv Astley."⁶⁰⁴

On the following page is a library card Stebbins created for Clappe for the California State Library.

⁶⁰⁴ As found by Dr. Carrie Streeter, California Death Index, 234.

BIO-CARD
CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

Clappe, Louise

Name in full, *Louise Amelia Knapp Clappe*, 18*97*

Born at *Elizabeth, N. J.* on *Feb. 9, 1897*

Father, *Wm. Smith* Mother (maiden name in full), *Dr. Fagetta Clappe*

If married, to whom? *Wm. Lee* Date, _____

Place, _____

Where educated, *Amherst* Residences in State, *San Francisco*

Years spent in California, *29* Pseudonyms, *Same as by*

Place and date of death, *New Bar Mine, Mar. 10, 1906*

Signature, *Louise Stephens Clappe* (niece)

[OVER.]

PUBLISHED WORKS AND PERIODICALS FOR WHICH THE AUTHOR HAS WRITTEN:

The Pioneer and various other papers

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES:

the chief prominent position in California & schools & was also a lecturer & writer

The Impactful Career of Genevieve Stebbins

By 1921 the New York School of Expression had moved locations to 332 West 56th street near Columbus Circle (*New York Times*, November 13, 1921, 112), and then again to 101 West 78th street, across from Theodore Roosevelt Park, near the New York Historical Society building and the Natural History Museum. Remarkably, the school existed until at least 1930. Graduates held prominent positions at such places as Wellesley, Harvard, Curry College, Columbia, Yale, and Ohio State. Stebbins' pedagogical system was brought to Canada, Germany and Austria.

New York School of Expression
35th Year Chartered by Regents of the
University of State of N. Y.
Training for Public Speaking, Stage and
Talking Pictures. Speech defects corrected.
Full Diploma Courses. Saturday Classes for
teachers. Evening Classes, business people.
Singing. Sight Reading. Private instruction.
332 West 56th St., New York. Columbus 4884.

New York School of Expression
101 WEST 78TH STREET
CHARLOTTE S. PRESBY, Pres.
Public Speaking. Elocution. Day and Eve-
ning Classes. Saturday Classes Open Oct.
11th. Catalogue. Tel. Endicott 9020.

Fig. 196. 1921 *New York Times* advertisement. Fig. 197. October 5, 1930, 6 *New York Times* advertisement.

Aesthetic dance evolved through Stebbins' teachings as student's spread enthusiasm for the new art form in both amateur and professional performances. In 1908, the *New York Tribune* published an article by the dance master Oscar Duryea who said, "Up to ten or twenty years ago graceful gymnastics were unknown in this country, but now gymnastic teachers, as a rule, devote more time to dancing and rhythmical exercises than to physical culture exercises as understood generally by that name."⁶⁰⁵ He noted most significantly that the profession of "teaching of dancing and its allied arts has become a business with a recognized standing so much so that one school in New York has been incorporated and employs a large faculty to expound its own

⁶⁰⁵ "Aesthetics, Culture of Grace and Physique: Study is Cultured Physical Culture," 21.

system of aesthetics.” I believe he is speaking about the New York School of Expression, as they had incorporated as a business, and achieved recognition by the State of New York. Stebbins had built both a successful school and a business, but it could be another school.

Other creative schools existed in the nation, for example, the School of the Art Dancing and Aesthetics in Chicago taught ‘classical dance,’ Swedish gymnastics/ Gymnastic Dance, Fashionable Society Dancing and Deportment (18th century dances and dance poems), National, and Folk Dances. The teacher was from the Royal Gymnasium of St. Petersburg, and the Vienna Imperial Conservatory.⁶⁰⁶ Many schools established in the late 19th century and early 20th century included dance in their physical culture curriculum. Skidmore College of the Arts (est. 1911 originally as a women’s school, now Skidmore College- my alma mater) had a physical culture department with dance classes “designed to teach free, joyous movement which is an essential factor in physical education. The rhythmical movement of aesthetic dance, and the play spirit in folk dance are emphasized as most important in the development of poise and grace.”⁶⁰⁷ Aesthetic and interpretive dance, and choreographic development were taught at Skidmore until at least 1920 in the physical education department. They continue to have a strong dance program. Skidmore’s inclusion of dance precedes the University of Wisconsin’s offering dance as of 1916, after which Margaret H’Doubler established the first university dance program in 1926 (Ross, 2000, ix). The history of dance in education is intertwined with physical culture, largely through graduates from the Boston School of Gymnastics (like H’Doubler’s teacher Blanche Trilling) and institutions such as Stebbins’ New York School of Expression. Both schools taught Swedish Ling and American amalgamations of physical culture along with aesthetic dance practices. Much remains to be explored to discover the spread of aesthetic dance,

⁶⁰⁶ September 5, 1909, ad in *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8.

⁶⁰⁷ School catalogue, 70, <https://archive.org/stream/catalogue1912skid#page/n77>

and its inclusion in school programs as it was a much larger cultural phenomenon than has been previously recognized.

The Neighborhood Playhouse

One unknown aspect of Stebbins' influence is through her New York student Irene Lewisohn (1886–1944).⁶⁰⁸ While living on the Upper West Side on Fifth Avenue, Irene and her sister Alice opened the Neighborhood Playhouse on Grand Street in the Lower East Side. Taking after Stebbins, their first production in 1915 was the dance drama *Jephtha's Daughter*. Certainly, as a student of Stebbins, Irene would have seen Stebbins perform in her youth or teenage years and could have seen Stebbins perform her dance drama *Jephtha* in New York City.



Fig. 198. *Jephtha's Daughter* (La fille de Jephthé dansant) by James Tissot c. 1896–1902. Gift of the heirs of Jacob Schiff, Jewish Museum. Fig. 199. Irene Lewisohn performing as Jephthah.

⁶⁰⁸ John Martin, *American Dancing: The Background and Personalities of the Modern Dance* (Dodge Publishing Co. 1936; reprint Dance Horizons, 1968, 162).

The Lewisohn's were young German Jewish multi-millionaire heiresses. Their enthusiasm for dance and drama set in motion a lifelong dedication to the performing arts. It is unknown at what time, or what length of time Irene studied with Stebbins, and if it was at her school or in private lessons. It certainly seems that Alice could have also studied with Stebbins but that is not yet known. However, Irene most definitely embraced Stebbins' passion for dance as a producer and performer. In a preview for the opening night of *Jephtha's Daughter*, *The New York Times* reported chorus processions and ancient dances would attempt to convey the "spirit of the tribal days of the ancient Hebrews." Lilia Mackay-Cantell composed the music incorporating traditional Hebrew melodies, and Albert Elkus was the conductor. The cast had some 60 people from local "festival and dramatic groups."

The sisters worked with immigrants in the Lower East Side through the Henry Street Settlement creating dance and drama productions. Irene and Alice were dedicated to social justice reform and invested in the cultural education of an area populated with roughly 750,000 Jewish immigrants. In 1907, Irene organized the Festival Dancers for performances in the gymnasium of Henry Street. The sisters then bought land next door to expand the gymnasium and build the Neighborhood Playhouse (est. 1915), which grew to become a New York cultural institution. The Playhouse was completely run by women and had its own workshops to create costumes and provide technical needs for theatre productions.

Martha Graham joined the Playhouse as a Festival Dancer in 1921. From 1915–1932 Lewisohn Dance Productions funded the creation of several shows. Notably, dancers who performed for Irene Lewisohn included Graham, Blanche Talmud, Anna Sokolow, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman—thereby launching their young careers. Significantly, Henry Street and The Playhouse were dedicated to the NAACP, had integrated audiences, and

presented work by Black playwrights. The first Black play presented in New York was by playwright Angelina Weld Grimké, with an all-Black cast in 1917 (Coss, 1989).⁶⁰⁹

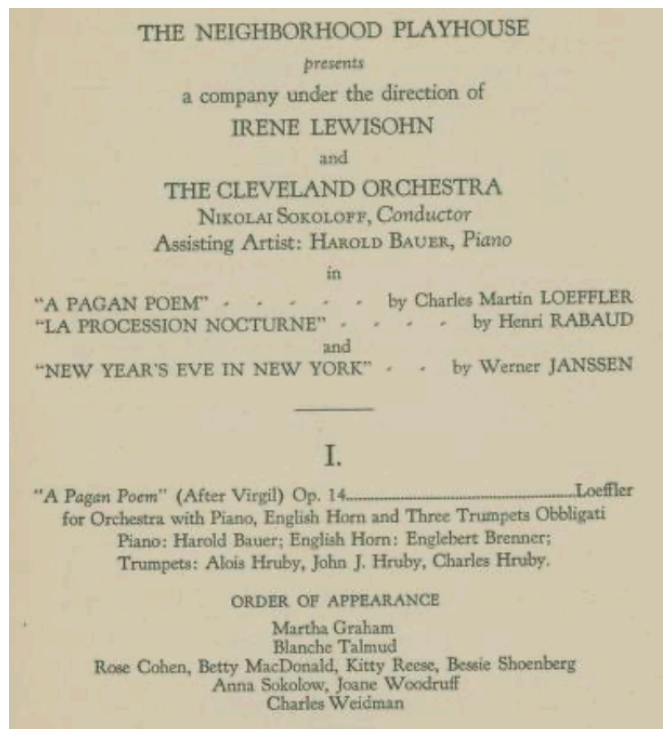


Fig. 200. The Neighborhood Playhouse presents a Company under the Direction of Irene Lewisohn and The Cleveland Orchestra. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2023861316/>.

The sisters ran the Playhouse programming until 1927 with plays and dance dramas being presented before it closed and became the Henry Street Playhouse, which remains today. The sisters then founded the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre, in 1928, hiring Martha Graham and Louis Horst to run the dance department (Agnes DeMille also gave classes). Irene was the administrator while Rita Mongenthau was the school's director. Irene continued to write "orchestral dramas," or expressive movement pieces set to musical compositions. She staged

⁶⁰⁹ <https://abronsartscenter.org/about/history>

Clare Coss, ed., *Lillian D. Wald, Progressive Activist* (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1989), 11–12.

various ballets, pageants, and festival performances.⁶¹⁰ The Neighborhood Playhouse Theatre school continues to this day and still includes modern dance in its training curriculum.

Costumes for the Playhouse shows were pulled from the Lewisohn's personal collection gathered during their global travels. The Lewisohn's amassed a large collection of 'traditional national dress' with the aim of presenting authentic portrayals of ethnic cultural groups in their productions. Their collection grew into a more than 8,000-piece collection that Irene donated by founding The Museum of Costume Art in 1937, which later merged with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1946 to become The Costume Institute.⁶¹¹ Irene Lewisohn's Costume Reference Library is housed at the Institute. Well-known today, the MET Gala is held yearly in the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art since its inception in 1948, as a fundraising event to support the Costume Institute. The Gala launches the Costume Institute's annual exhibit at the MET. It seems fitting that gowns shared in this dissertation are pulled from the digital collection of Irene Lewisohn, to invoke Stebbins' presence.

International Influence

On an international note, Stebbins' pedagogy came to influence German physical culture for women and early 20th century German expressive dance (Ruyter 1999, 71; John Martin *New York Times* article 1929). German student Hade Kallmeyer who studied in New York in 1906, returned to Germany to open her school of Harmonic Gymnastics, "Seminar für Harmonische Gymnastik," for girls, in 1910. Kallmeyer writes that when she first met Stebbins, "I forgot

⁶¹⁰ "The Neighborhood Playhouse," New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, March 22, 2011. "Neighborhood Playhouse Scenarios," <https://archives.nypl.org/dan/19770>

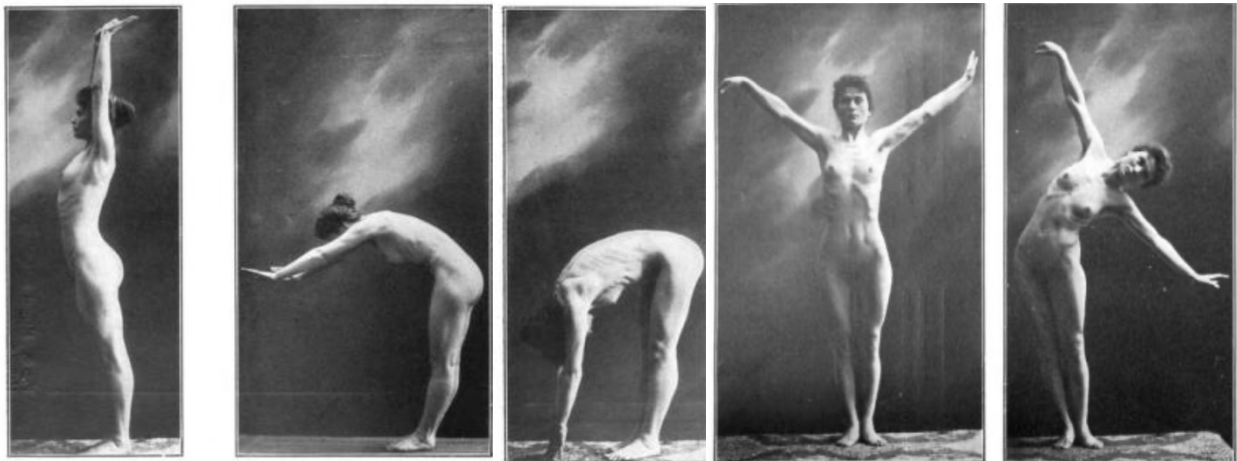
⁶¹¹ The Costume Institute now holds more than 80,000 costumes and accessories. Additionally, the Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library of the Institute has more than 30,000 books and periodicals on costume design and 1,500 fashion files. <https://www.metmuseum.org/departments/the-costume-institute>

everything in that instant. All I saw was her illuminated visage [...] Her eyes were brilliant with an expression of extreme vitality, and in her gaze a sort of love that I have never experienced. She greeted me graciously and became an example for the rest of my life” (Boutain-Laroze 2011).⁶¹² One of Kallmeyer’s students, Elsa Gindler, is connected to the advent of the field of Somatics, as I have explored in past publications.⁶¹³ According to Gindler’s assistant, Carola Speads, “harmonizing gymnastics” was originally developed for women by the “two great proponents” of the work, Hade Kallmeyer and Bess Mensendieck (1995, 26). Both women were students of Stebbins. Speads clarifies Harmonic Gymnastics “was Physical Re-Education, comprising psychological or personal development as well as the physical” (1978, 21). In the 1913 book, *Körperkultur der Frau* (Body Culture for Women), author “Dr. Hirsh” mentions that dance can have artistic value, “as could be seen in America through a system of harmonic body training which has attracted much attention among women” (24). In my translation from the German, Hirsh declares “dance resembles a song without words. Each nation has its own dance forms, like its songs,” and it to the “merit of Miss Stebbins” that she has developed her methodology through serious, long-lasting studies on her own body (1913, 25).

⁶¹² Information on Kallmeyer is my translation from the French biographical article of Boutain-Laroze, <http://www.gym-holistique.fr>. Boutain-Laroze created her bio from German texts. In 1910 Kallmeyer got a book published, *Künstlerische Gymnastik; harmonische Körperkultur nach Amerikanischen Systems Stebbins-Kallmeyer* (Artistic Gymnastics: Harmonious Physical Culture after the American System Stebbins-Kallmeyer). Kallmeyer’s last book (the second edition of her first book), published in 1970 and written in German, *Heilkraft Durch Atem und Bewegung: Erfahrungen Eines Lebens für die Gymnastik* (Healing Through Breath and Movement: One Experiences Life for the Gymnast) is a general guide to Harmonic Gymnastics including posture, the three fundamentals of breathing, relaxation, and muscle stretching. She includes Delsarte’s three laws of motion: harmonic poise, opposition, and succession, which she would have learned from her mentor, Stebbins, and some “forty pages of exercises from the book *Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training* follows” (1999: 70).

⁶¹³ Under former name Mullan, “Somatics herstories: Tracing the educational antecedents of Elsa Gindler, Hade Kallmeyer, and Genevieve Stebbins,” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, Intellect Press 9 no. 2 (2017): 159–178. “European Antecedents to Somatic Movement,” in *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*. With editor and author Martha Eddy (Intellect Press, University of Chicago Press, 2016). “Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas,” *Currents: Journal of The Body-Mind Centering® Association* (2016): 16–28. “Somatics: Investigating the Common Ground of Western Body–Mind Disciplines,” *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy: An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice* 9 no. 4, (2014): 253–265.

Dutch born American, Bess Mensendieck, studied with Stebbins and created a modified version of Stebbins' physical culture system in addition to promoting the maintenance of proper posture for everyday activities. Although she is thought to have abandoned Stebbins' metaphysical inclinations, she still stated that the soul is expressed in one's personality through the whole body and not the face alone (Veder 2011, 828 citing Mensendieck 1931, 33). After studying with Stebbins, she studied medicine in Paris then Zurich before being hired by the German Kaizer Wilhelm II to improve the postures of his courtiers (828).⁶¹⁴ As scholar Robin Veder insightfully explores in an article tracing tensions between the physical culture movement and expressive body cultures, Mensendieck founded schools in Germany, Austria, Holland, France, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia. Her 1907 book, *Körperkultur des Weibes praktisch hygienische und praktisch ästhetische*, Mensendieck details her working philosophy in the same line as Stebbins and includes nude photographs performing movements from Stebbins' physical culture drills. The below images are from the 'Eastern Temple Drill' moving from right to left in sequence.



⁶¹⁴ "The Expressive Efficiencies of American Delsarte and Mensendieck Body Cultures," *Modernism/Modernity* 17, no. 4, 2011: 819-839.



The book continues with images representing Stebbins' exercises. After the outbreak of WWI, she returned to New York and to create the Mensendieck Central Institute in 1923. She taught in

the modern dance department at the New School for Social Research in New York and at Boston University. By 1937 her system was taught at Yale and other elite institutions across the U.S. with over 200,000 practitioners (Veder 2011, 829). She maintained Stebbins' idea that the nerves were 'circuit wires' directing muscles to act in accord with will-power. Her exercises focused on proprioceptive movement and bodily consciousness. Time Magazine called her the 'Posture Lady' (April 5, 1937). The Mensendieck System has been traced to the evolution of physiotherapeutic practices in Norway.⁶¹⁵ In the 1960's the term 'medical gymnastics' (therapeutic movements) was replaced with 'physiotherapist' and the Mensendieck school received state recognition in Norway, and her methods in Holland were designated as Remedial Therapy in 1972 (<https://www.mensendieckmoves.nl>).

In Conclusion

Stebbins came from an 'established family' heritage that ultimately allowed her access to certain privileges and benefits. Her relations were cultured, progressive, and they supported women's education. Stebbins participated in social networks within society women clubs and her accomplishments were reported by newspaper journalists who supported her career. Although scholarship on women's involvement in the performing arts in the late 19th century is limited, women across class divides enjoyed aesthetic dance. Gilded Age and Progressive Era scholarship (GAPE) has widely explored manifest destiny and national expansion, societal strife, union organization and protests, governmental initiatives and failures, industrial barons who made their riches on the backs of disenfranchised labourers, racial violence, gender and emancipation, capitalism and the growth of modernism– but there is little on the performing arts. Issues in the

⁶¹⁵ Dahl-Michelsen, T., Nicholls, D. A., Messel, J., & Groven, K. S. "Boundary work: the Mensendieck system and physiotherapy education in Norway." *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice*, 37 no. 3 (2021): 420–431.

Reconstruction era are intensely debated by GAPE scholars (Beeby and Ingrassia, 2022, 21) who indicate that there is a need for further research in this area.⁶¹⁶ While these topics are valuable, Art for Art's sake— for expression, self-development and personal empowerment— is often left out of the picture.

Scholar Alan Lessof argues that some Gilded Age historians are biased against the era's 'high art' forms by perceiving elite society as an oppressive cultural hegemonic force. Lessof mentions the text *High Brow/Low Brow* by Lawrence Levine (1988) who presented the idea that 'high art' entertainments were classist and bourgeois. Lessof asserts that Levine unfairly depicts wealthy patrons' support of artists as stifling creation, despite artists benefitting from upper-class collectors and philanthropists, especially those involved with design, architecture, and urban planning. Wealthy benefactors enabled important institutions to be built, like Carnegie Hall (or Carnegie's 200 libraries) the Metropolitan Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, etc., and philanthropists supported art societies, clubs, kindergartens, 'new education' in schools, literacy efforts, parks and recreational facilities, and environmental conservation. Appreciation for the "hope, purpose and aspiration" ascribed to the arts, as Lessof finds, does not mean the cultural memories of economic, racial, and gender inequality that haunts the Gilded Age era are to be disregarded. One does not necessarily negate the other. David Hammack argues that historical attention to Gilded Age philanthropy reveals how certain initiatives benefitted the shaping of civil society. Wealthy patrons invested in scientific associations, medical schools, arts and culture (for the rich and as well as the poor and the emerging middle class), and training

⁶¹⁶ James M. Beeby and Brian M. Ingrassia, "Precursors to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era Reforms," in *A Companion to Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Christopher McKnight Nichols, ed., and Nancy C. Unger. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).

programs for those in need of developing new skills. Progressive thought and financial investment improved opportunity for capable creators.⁶¹⁷

Women as philanthropists of the arts, and as supporters of the evolution of aesthetic dance were essential to the progress of the art form as it developed in private and public institutions and gymnasium programs. Much of the realm of woman's expressive and aesthetic work from the Gilded Age has gone unrecognized, disappearing into the winds of time and ghostly wisps of the past. Clearly, at the apex of her career, Stebbins was widely admired for her performance work. She was an extraordinary scholar and visionary who demonstrated *as a soloist* that dancing could illustrate the whole range of human emotion and be seen as a legitimate form of high art. Her performances and writings served as models for the next generation of early modern dancers who were inspired by her work. Most importantly, Stebbins established a philosophy for dance upon which the foundation of modern dance was built. She educated audiences in her dance/lecture presentations, and they came to understand and appreciate the premise for her creative efforts at a time in which she was entirely unique in doing so. Exploring Stebbins' life and career, paying attention to the minutiae of her artistic life, marking her meteoric rise and charting her web of influence, provides a rich and impressive portrait of a singular woman whose legacy can still be felt in the fields of expressive arts, somatics, and contemporary dance today.

⁶¹⁷ David Hammack, "Non-Profit Organizations, Philanthropy, and Civil Society," in *A Companion to Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Christopher McKnight Nichols, ed., and Nancy C. Unger (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).

POEM.

BY EDITH M. THOMAS.

Written as a tribute to the Greek dance and pantomime of Genevieve Stebbins.

TO GENEVIEVE STEBBINS.

*Carve me that Music featly
Each flowing form that resides in it,
Each Protean beauty that hides in it,
Fashion them forth completely—
Carve them out sweetly.*

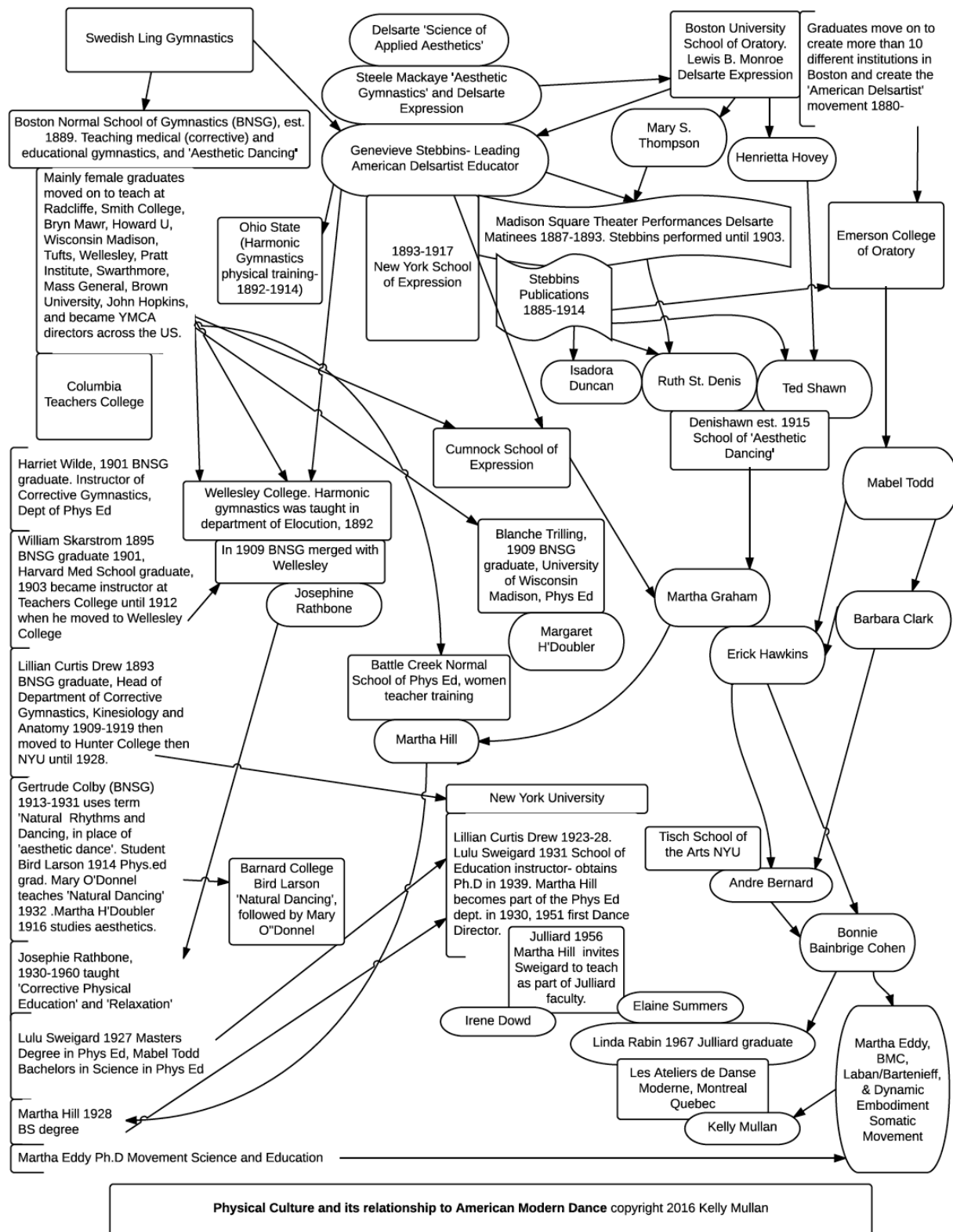
*Paint me that Music divinely
Every opulent tint of it,
Every fugitive glint of it,
To whiteness fading out finely—
Paint them benignly.*

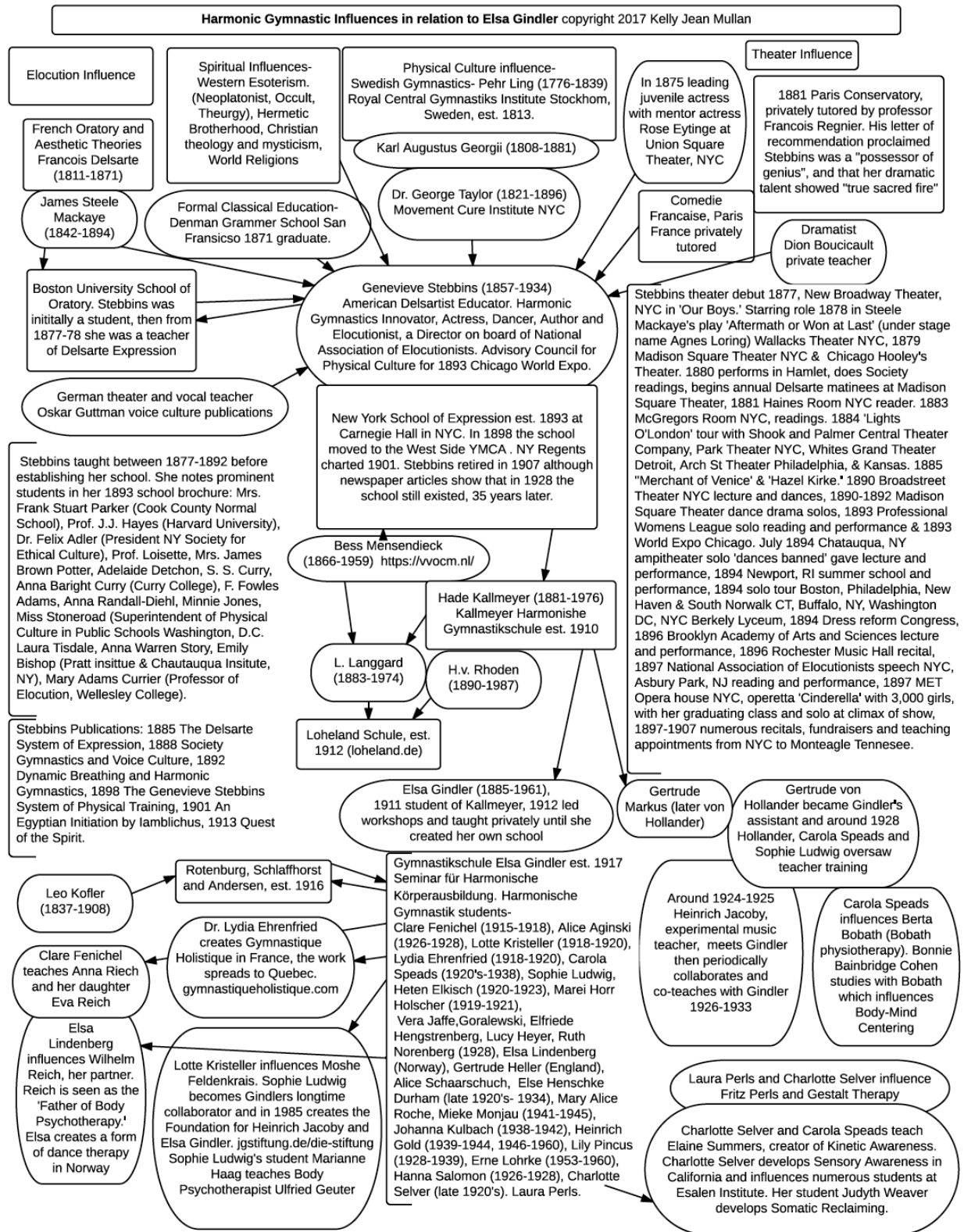
*Benignly the old Time advancing
Every Muse and Grace of it,
Each Arcadian face of it,
Evoked by this Art entrancing
Lives in your DANCING.*

Fig. 201. New York School of Expression Prospectus, 1893, 4.

Appendix

On the following page are maps I created linking various schools in which physical culture and aesthetic dance overlapped. There are ‘holes’ in the map, and several relevant figures are no doubt missing. (*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*— philosophically speaking— the Map is not the Territory, and it can be expanded upon by additional insights and further research).





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