



One of the modernizations in curriculum at Ward emphasized "physical culture." Students participated in gym or outdoor sports such as tennis, croquet, and field hockey. (The Harpeth Hall School Archives)

tion—it was in a growing southern city, but remained "within walking distance of churches, concert halls, libraries, and other places of interest."⁶¹

Emphasis was also placed on the school's Physical Culture and Domestic Science departments. Students participated in two hours a week of gymnasium activity, or three hours a week in outdoor sports such as tennis, croquet, and field hockey. The school also maintained bowling alleys, and in 1897 organized the first women's basketball team to compete publicly.⁶² At the same time, the seminary introduced into its curriculum a two year program in domestic science to teach "scientific housekeeping." It included courses

in cookery, sewing, finances, and labs in nutrition.⁶³ These new subjects reflect a changing curriculum that added to a developing, and more well-defined, liberal arts study.

By the early 1900s, Ward Seminary maintained a School of Expression, School of Elocution, Conservatory of Music, Collegiate Preparatory Department, and Collegiate Department. The School of Expression and Conservatory of Music maintained national reputations of excellence. Such "schools" increased the public visibility of students through public fine arts performances, and also featured women faculty who served as role models of female professionalism. The School of

Expression was led by French-Canadian Edith Margaret Smaill. Smaill came to Ward Seminary in 1910 and remained through the merger with Belmont. She was a vocal supporter of women's suffrage, and came to the school with an impressive performance history throughout North America and Europe. After one performance by Smaill, an audience member wrote, "I should like to express the very great pleasure you gave by your rendering of [Drummond's poems]... I do not wish to plunge into superlatives to describe your work, though I might in all conscience do so."⁶⁴

Smaill infused the Ward School of Expression with a new sense of purpose and enthusiasm. Her resume and influence demonstrated to the women of Ward Seminary that professional opportunities existed for them in the American South and beyond. She stated her mission in 1911:

[T]o help the student to 'find herself,' and realize her powers and possibilities; to give such training as will develop her individuality; to train the voice and body to act in co-ordination with the mind; to learn to how to think and what to do to become self-centered and strong.⁶⁵

Smaill represented precisely the minority group of college graduates that changed the perception of collegiate women. She was well-educated and well-traveled. She

did not directly challenge the patriarchy, but was profoundly visible as her students acted and sang under her direction. Smaill continued to lead by example when she left Nashville in 1915 to take a position at Wellesley College, where she remained until the 1930s.⁶⁶

Other faculty also helped to make the seminary's final years memorable. Catherine E. Morrison (physical education) and Theodora Scruggs (English, Latin) joined the faculty in 1911. Both women spent nearly four decades at Ward Seminary and Ward-Belmont College. Smaill, Scruggs, and Morrison represented models of females in the public sphere who operated independently and earned a professional reputation. Historians should give such women even more credit. They were women of the Progressive Era who challenged gender roles through their life choices, while influencing and instructing the hearts and minds of a new generation of New South women.



Ward Seminary reveals how higher education provided a window for women to glimpse a wider world previously denied them. The supervision and restrictions of the nineteenth century gave way to student empowerment and autonomy in the early twentieth century. Women participated in student government, school clubs, and athletics, and published literary magazines and yearbooks. While most graduates did