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# Althea Hunt: Behind the Curtain

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**Althea Hunt: Behind the Curtain**

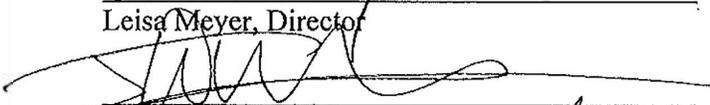
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from  
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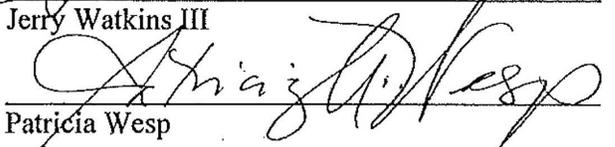
by

Samantha Jo Ryan

Accepted for High honors  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Leisa Meyer, Director

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jerry Watkins III

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patricia Wesp

Williamsburg, VA  
April 24, 2018

**Althea Hunt: Behind the Curtain**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
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To mimic one of Althea Hunt's grateful students, I would like to give a "22-gun salute" to my advisor, Professor Leisa Meyer. Her consistent patience and guidance throughout the writing process has been invaluable. She believed in me and this project even when the prognosis seemed bleak. She challenged me throughout the process and pushed me to perform to the best of my abilities. Without her help this thesis would not have existed and it certainly would not exist in its current form.

I owe the greatest debt, as always, to my parents Mark Ryan and Carol Mertensmeyer, who have always supported me. To my mom who will fly halfway across the country to watch me say two lines in a play and my dad who will wake up earlier than humans should just to be a second pair of eyes to my mediocre papers. Whether on the stage or in the classroom, they have given me full support in every endeavor I have embarked on. I truly couldn't have done it without them!

A huge thank you to my fiancé, Nick, who effectively functioned as my stress sponge throughout the whole writing process. As I type, he is cleaning my apartment so I can stay focused. Thanks for your unending support and love. I hope I can return the favor during your upcoming academic endeavors!

Finally, I want to thank Althea Hunt without whom my career at William and Mary would have been completely different. As a Theatre Major, I am indebted to her for the very department and for the institution she helped build. My capstone experience as a History Major has been in the culmination of this project. I would not have embarked on such a project had the inspiring Althea Hunt not come into my consciousness.

## PREFACE

I first encountered Althea Hunt in researching William and Mary Theatre's production history. I immediately found that Hunt had served as the director of the William and Mary Theatre from 1926-1954. As I read further of her involvement I became more impressed with both the quantity and quality of her work at William and Mary and more interested in Hunt herself. My research took me away from production history and deeper into Althea Hunt's personal history. It did not take long to discover that she never married or had children. Much of her life in Williamsburg was spent either living alone or living with her mother. Why did she choose to live alone? Why was she never married? Did she want kids? Did she want a marriage? I became obsessed with these questions, but my desire in asking them was less about finding those answers specifically and more in answering one question that I hoped they would all point to: was she a lesbian? I convinced myself very early on in the research process that she must have been because her lifestyle conflicted with my expectations of heterosexual women's lives in Hunt's era. Since Hunt's life did not match my biased expectations, I felt she must fit in a second category of woman that became more visible in the early twentieth century, particularly those working in professional careers; many of these "new women" have been discovered to be lesbian by scholars researching the period.<sup>1</sup> White, middle-to-upper-class, educated women, such as the peace activist and founder of Hull House Jane Addams and the prison reformer Miriam Van Waters, had professional careers, deviated from the traditional expectations of what it meant to be a woman, and were also lesbians. Based on these examples I imagined a binary to which Hunt

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *Unequal Sisters: A Multi-cultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, eds. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol Dubois, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

must belong.<sup>2</sup> From a limited perspective of women in history she must, I thought, fit in one of two categories: the homemaking heterosexual or the professional lesbian. However, my assumption and desire for Hunt to fall neatly into one of those sexuality and lifestyle binaries, shrouded my judgement and investigation into Hunt's life and success as a professor. In fact, Hunt's non-normative life does not fit neatly into any category.

As my research continued, I did not find any information that supported the answers I desired. The lack of direct evidence providing details on the intimate relationships in Hunt's life, of course, does not inherently discredit the hypothesis that Hunt may have been a lesbian. Many gay women and men during the aforementioned era were careful to hide their identity throughout their lives to prevent a legacy of "homosexuality" emerging posthumously. I had to keep asking myself, though, why I wanted Hunt to be a lesbian. How did her potential gayness serve me as a historian? As a biographical study, intimate knowledge of as many facets of Hunt's life as possible is vital and something as essential as an historical subject's sexual identity is critical to accurately framing their life experience. My ultimate interest in Hunt, however, was as a director and mentor/professor at the college of William and Mary. This focus emerged from both my subject position as a student, and because the primary resources available in Swem special collections that relate to Hunt's life are from student perspectives; her identity as a professor was the main focus of these materials. While her sexuality undoubtedly shaped her life experiences and as a director/professor, we can learn much about her from her students' correspondence and her selection of and approach to directing theatrical shows without knowing with certainty the answer to my initial question.

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<sup>2</sup> Estelle Friedman, *Maternal Justice: Miriam van Waters and the Female Reform Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Undoubtedly most choices Althea Hunt made in her life, as in all our lives, were shaped by her personal identities. In this case, we must work backward from what remains of her life to uncover that personal identity, and in doing so credit her with and celebrate the accolades she deserves for her accomplishments as a professor and director. However she understood her sexuality or sexual identity, Hunt lived a life outside what was normatively expected for a woman of her social, economic, and geographic context and as such this study will take into account how a lifestyle that deviated from the norm affected her role as a professor and director.

This study will also identify Althea Hunt as the “mother” of William and Mary Theatre. Dictionaries define “mother” in biological terms. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines “mother” first as “a female parent.” Its fifth definition for “mother” is “something that is an extreme or ultimate example of its kind especially in terms of scale.” Althea Hunt was never a parent, but she was an “ultimate example of her kind” as a teacher and director.

My decision to attribute motherhood to Hunt was one of careful consideration. Adding mother to Hunt’s identity (an identity which she was unlikely to have given herself) is a choice I made not out of the desire to help Hunt fulfill a proper measure of womanhood, but rather because of the impact mothers have in shaping our lives and societies. There is a special power in creation. Althea Hunt utilized this power when she established theatre on William and Mary’s campus. My intent is not to trivialize women who would rather not identify themselves in such terms, nor is it to desecrate the bond between mother and child. When faced with the question “if Althea Hunt was a man would I call him the father of William and Mary theatre?” I paused. Ultimately, however, I came to the conclusion that I would—if a man had the same lasting impact on students’ lives during and after his tenure on a college campus. In that case, such a designation would be nothing less than appropriate.

## INTRODUCTION

The William and Mary Department of Theatre and Speech was formed in 1963 and combined with the Dance Program in 1999 to create The Department of Theatre, Speech, and Dance as it is today. The success and growth of theatre from a general student interest into a department can be largely attributed to Althea Hunt, director of William and Mary Theatre from 1926-1957. Under Hunt's tutelage, drama classes were offered for the first time through the English Department in 1926 and the Department of Fine Arts after its creation in 1935.<sup>3</sup>

It has been ninety-two years since the "formal inception of the William and Mary Theatre," but theatre existed previously in other forms.<sup>4</sup> Theatre at William and Mary before the Hunt era existed solely as student clubs passionate about dramatic arts. The clubs' inconsistency and lack of centralization prevented William and Mary Theatre from thriving. Any dramatic clubs that became established on campus lacked the support or stability necessary to survive longer than one or two academic years. However, some form of theatre was always present in the college until the latter years of the First World War, 1917 and 1918. The absence of theatrical clubs during this period created a vacuum that demanded to be filled and the opportunity for a transformation of theatre's role on campus. The return of male students at the end of WWI coincided with the admittance of women to the College. The influx of students and faculty during this period filled the vacuum that had been created; theatre returned and planted a seed that would become under Althea Hunt's nurturing care, a fully established theatre program.

The aim of this thesis is, first, to firmly establish Althea Hunt as a non-conforming woman intent on establishing and continuing the legacy of welcoming theatrical spaces; second,

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<sup>3</sup> "History," William and Mary Theatre, <https://www.wm.edu/as/tsd/theatre/history/index.php>.

<sup>4</sup> "Elizabethans Present 'The Rivals,' Are Received Enthusiastically." *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 23 Apr. 1912: 1. Print.

to contribute to the minimally existing history of theatre in higher education and women's role therein; and, lastly to highlight the successes of Althea Hunt, the woman to whom the William and Mary Theatre owes its existence. Hunt was a non-conformist, never marrying nor having children. Her life was spent in dedication to students at the College and the theatrical arts. She cultivated relationships with her students serving as a mentor, friend, and caretaker. She built a theatre program dedicated to examining contemporary social issues and crises and that consistently provided opportunities for students' unlikely to have had them otherwise.

Hunt was one of many female directors entering the world of professional theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first American female directors were actresses. They would usually work with a non-cast member—a producer, theatre manager or playwright—who was more often than not the woman's husband.<sup>5</sup> The most prominent female director of the early twentieth century was Hallie Flanagan, the director of the Federal Theatre Project, a program of the Works Progress Administration. Flanagan was chosen to lead the project created to generate theatre jobs and provide entertainment in the midst of the Depression. Charles Walton, a New York stage manager, accused Flanagan of having Communist ties after suspicion from “those in Washington” and testified accordingly to the House Un-American Activities Committee.<sup>6</sup> The accusations overshadowed her achievements in the theatre world and the project was consequently shut down after four years.<sup>7</sup> Women in the realm of professional theatre utilized

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<sup>5</sup> Shirlee Hennigan, “Women Directors—The Early Years,” *Women in American Theatre*, eds. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> “House Un-American Activities Committee,” The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, <https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/huac.cfm>. The House Un-American Activities Committee was formed in 1938 to investigate individuals and organizations suspected of having communist ties.

<sup>7</sup> “Hallie Flanagan Davis,” Vassar Encyclopedia, last modified 2010, <http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/hallie-flanagan-davis.html>.; Pauline

their positions to employ other women as in the case of Eva Le Gallienne who directed herself and used female designers.<sup>8</sup> Other female directors of the first half of the twentieth century directed for colleges or little theatres and thus did not receive critical recognition contemporaneously, nor have they received much in the way of historical acknowledgement.<sup>9</sup> The study of Althea Hunt as one of these women is an important contribution to the little studied women involved in theatre across America at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Section one, “Althea Hunt and Ideal Womanhood, Late Nineteenth Century to 1926,” examines Hunt’s life before her arrival at William and Mary and the historical context from which she emerged. As I have identified Hunt as a non-conforming woman, this section will define what conforming to ideal womanhood looked like during Hunt’s formative years and in what ways she deviated from those norms. The first non-conforming characteristic of Hunt was her pursuit of an education, yet white women increasingly had access to education in the nineteenth century. As a result of her education, she was able to pursue a career in higher education, a career in which she would maintain her non-conformist status. I argue that because of her non-conformity, the theatre was a natural environment for Hunt. Because of the legacy that theatre is an inclusive “haven,” Hunt’s non-conformity was welcome in such an environment.

Section two, “William and Mary before Hunt,” will investigate the campus environment in regards to its relationship with women as well as campus theatre’s existence prior to her

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Hahn, “Hallie Flanagan: Practical Visionary,” *Women in American Theatre*, ed. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 193

<sup>9</sup> “Introduction,” in *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* eds. Anne Flitsos and Wendy Vierow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 9.

organizing influence. By Hunt's arrival at the College in 1926, white women had been allowed to attend for eight years. The President of the College, Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, and his successor, J. A. C. Chandler, both supported the admittance of white women and helped create a welcoming campus atmosphere in which inviting more white female faculty members was acceptable and desirable. Not only was campus primed for new female faculty, they were also ready for a better organized campus theatre program. Theatre had existed in many forms since the college's inception, but increased enrollment and desire for steady theatrical performances created the need for a faculty person dedicated to the theatre-arts.

The third section, "The Mother of William and Mary Theatre," discusses why "mother" is an appropriate moniker for Althea Hunt. As the creator of the theatre program and a nurturing presence on campus, such a term is fitting. Hunt's relationship with her students was founded on the theatrical legacy—creating a welcoming environment for her students, regardless of gender. She not only provided academic support, but engaged with her student's lives, caring for their theatrical and personal development. Her nurturance of the theatre program was expressed most clearly in her selection of plays that engaged the greater campus community, filling the demand for dramatic entertainment. William and Mary Theatre would not have survived so successfully had Hunt not carefully curated each theatrical season and engaged the Williamsburg community positively and consistently.

## I. ALTHEA HUNT AND IDEAL WOMANHOOD

### *The Ideal Woman of the Nineteenth Century*

The “ideal woman” of the nineteenth century was a title limited to the white, middle-to-upper class, native-born, protestant American woman. In the nineteenth century, even the woman who was lucky enough to fit the exhaustive criteria, was subject to even more prescriptive expectations. Nineteenth-century “ideal” womanhood was further judged according to each woman’s “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” all of which were contingent on her remaining within the home.<sup>10</sup> This prescriptive model was implicitly (and explicitly) entwined with the emergent and long-standing racial, ethnic, class, and religious hierarchies that were developing during this period. Inherent in the definition of true womanhood were racial factors, favoring the “true woman” as inherently white. Whereas women of color were also expected to conform to such levels of femininity, they were seen as lacking inherent qualities that prevented attaining levels of “true womanhood.”

In part because of the belief that only *some* white women could attain “true womanhood,” deviation from the traits that defined this ideal was the public’s greatest fear in allowing women’s access to higher education.<sup>11</sup> Intellectual women were considered anomalies and “suspect in all but the rarest of social circles.”<sup>12</sup> Because school is a means to instruct outsiders in “values and behaviors of the dominant culture,” education has long been regarded as “the key to

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," in *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, No. 2. 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Woody, *A History of Women’s Education in the United States*. (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 204.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Seymour Eschbach, *The Higher Education of Women in England and America 1865-1920* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), xi.

upward social and economic mobility.”<sup>13</sup> From 1870-1920, American college women were overwhelmingly white, Protestant, and from middle-class homes. The small numbers of Jewish, Catholic, and black women in higher education did not increase appreciably until the 1920s.<sup>14</sup> As Euroamericans measured all other cultures by their own, the greatest hope for (and indeed path to) upward mobility was in conforming to the norms prescribed for white middle-class women.<sup>15</sup> Just as white, middle-class women sought access to education, so did women of color. For women of color, especially African-American women, the pursuit of education was never a choice. Education was understood by black families and black leaders during the period as necessary for black children, youth, women, and men to survive in America. As such, community concerns about black women becoming “less womanly” through education were rare. While white, middle-class women were discouraged from attending college in many periods, education for black men AND women in general was seen as a critical way for them to “claim” their rights as full citizens in this country.<sup>16</sup>

In the century preceding Althea Hunt’s matriculation to the coeducational Allegheny College in 1911, intense public debates surrounded white women’s rights to education on an equal basis with men. Despite debates, coeducation was the fastest growing segment of higher education during the Progressive Era.<sup>17</sup> The basis for much of the public concern regarding white middle class women’s access to colleges was the presumption that higher education would

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<sup>13</sup> Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart, “Zitkala-Sa, ... This semblance of civilization,” in *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, eds. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 265.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 7.

adversely affect “family life.”<sup>18</sup> Professionals’ fear of falling marriage and birth rates among the white middle and upper class population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dominated opponents’ perspectives on the “consequences” of access to higher education for white women. Those seeking to limit white women’s access to higher education argued that the responsibilities inherent in women’s normative roles (cooking, cleaning, general housewifery, and mothering itself) would be interrupted by further schooling. Such opponents feared that the influence of this experience would, as medical experts warned, “leave young female graduates incapable of performing their normal reproductive functions.”<sup>19</sup> Some early twentieth century scholars agreed with these fears and held that the decrease in marriage and birth rates among white middle-class, native born women was a consequence of their greater independence, that “educated women [were] not shunning marriage or maternity; but they [were] declining to view matrimony as a profession, as their sole vocation, or to become merely childbearing animals.”<sup>20</sup> While marriage ages increased and birth rates dropped for white middle and upper class women as enrollment in institutions for higher learning increased, these shifts were not a result of the “physical” effects of college life, but a consequence of these women’s growing independence and agency as college created more possibilities and opportunities for them.

In contrast, most proponents argued that education was necessary for women to become *more* effective wives, mothers, and teachers and that education would ultimately allow them to *better* fulfill normative expectations for nineteenth-century womanhood and the responsibilities

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>19</sup> Kerber and Hart, “M. Carey Thomas, ‘The passionate desire of women... for higher education...’” in *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, eds. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 273.

<sup>20</sup> David S. Jordan, “Question of Coeducation,” *Munsey’s Mag.* June, 1905, 683-8. **quoted in** Thomas Woody, *A History of Women’s Education in the United States*. (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 210.

therein. A few radical supporters of white women's higher education viewed college beyond a means to enhance prescribed "womanhood." These supporters contended that education was a means for women to improve their lives professionally, psychologically, and socially; an opportunity that would insure that they might "reach their potential as full individuals, regardless of their sex."<sup>21</sup>

This "first generation" of white female college students grew up in a Victorian culture that had prescriptively defined "separate spheres" for the sexes—domesticity for women and public life for men. This same culture was characterized by intensely intimate homosocial networks for both white men and women—networks that enforced community ties among female friends and relatives. Out of these networks the first stirrings of a group consciousness among some women were born. During the nineteenth century in the U.S., some women began to argue that the assigned prescriptive values and morals that some embraced would benefit the larger society; from a rationale for educating "mothers" of "citizens" in the early part of the century to an argument against prostitution in the postbellum period, Victorian separatism became a vehicle for white middle-class women's entrance into public life.<sup>22</sup> Whereas co-educated women would continue to struggle to establish and maintain their campus positions, female students at single sex colleges enjoyed the advantages of sisterhood and community that were more similar to the homosocial networks that characterized the Victorian period.

The second generation of white women college students (those who matriculated into colleges post-1890) demanded more access to leisure activities and more contact with men than had the "first generation." This second generation, to which Althea Hunt belonged, was the first

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<sup>21</sup> Eschbach, xii-xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 4.

to link gender consciousness to campus life and “to exhibit a growing commitment to egalitarian rather than separatist feminism,” all the while holding interest in marriage.<sup>23</sup> In spite of opportunities for gender mixing outside the classroom during the Progressive Era, male and female student lives continued to proceed along separate (albeit parallel) paths. Opportunities for men and women became very similar, yet homosocial interactions remained prevalent. Any lifestyle combining public with private life was still uncommon, requiring most white, upper-middle class women to choose between work and careers outside their homes and marriage at graduation. For many women of this generation making such a decision was “full of anguish” as they had spent their undergraduate years pursuing both. Some women were lucky enough to find a balance of working outside their homes and marriage.

Although some women may have still anguished over the choice between salaried work and career or marriage, their ability to make such a choice was increasing as a result of higher educational opportunities. Colleges and universities were special places for women at the turn of the century, providing “a liberal and nurturing environment, raising expectations that society did not fulfill.”<sup>24</sup> Such environments were freer from prescriptive expectations allowing women to exist in a realm not readily available outside the college setting. Young women were gaining confidence in their abilities to survive in coeducational settings so much so that “optimism and self-confidence characterized the campus lives of women college students during the Progressive Era” as they “planned to make their mark on society.”<sup>25</sup>

Those women who managed marriage and salaried work in post-graduate life often became teachers. As more female students began attending secondary institutions, more

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 9-10.

positions for female faculty became available.<sup>26</sup> Female students and faculty recognized the value in having women faculty and administrators serving as advocates and representatives for their needs and desires.<sup>27</sup> Like many first-generation, female college students, Althea Hunt returned to academia in a professional capacity. In the 1890s, newly hired female faculty and administrators (who generally tended to be graduates from earlier years), helped co-educated women students set up their own campus communities with organizations and activities similar to the men's.<sup>28</sup>

### *Hunt's Education*

Hunt's experience in a coeducational setting made it easier for her to work with male peers in academia, which she would do later at William and Mary. Later in life Althea Hunt would become a minority as a woman in the professional world; however, her educational experiences in coed settings created a familiarity which would later enable her to perform confidently. Hunt entered the coeducational Allegheny College as a freshman in 1911, surrounded by both male and female students.<sup>29</sup> Because of this experience, her familiarity with being one of few women among peers during her tenure at William and Mary was not a new one.

Hunt's experiences in homosocial environments were also beneficial to her later success as a faculty member. At Allegheny, Hunt was a member of the Alpha Chi Omega sorority.

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<sup>26</sup> Patsy Parker, "The Historical Role of Women in Higher Education," *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice and Research* 5, No. 1 (May 2015): 3-15.

<sup>27</sup> Lynn D. Gordon, "From Seminary to University: An Overview of Women's Higher Education, 1820-1920," in *The History of Higher Education*. (Old Tappan: Pearson Custom Publishing, 1997), 473-498.; Kerber and Hart, *Women's America*, 273.; Of course, female administrators were tasked with ensuring young women adhere to normative expectations. Tasked with enforcing curfews and closely monitoring young women's sexual behavior, relationships between administrators and their students were not always ones of positive advocacy. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> "Coeducation." *New World Encyclopedia*. June 3, 2013.

Sororities were founded in the late nineteenth century as a response to the “predominantly male, and sometimes hostile” campuses to which women were recently admitted. The organizations were intended to be support networks for women, both during and after college.<sup>30</sup> Alpha Chi provided another supportive homosocial environment in which Hunt could develop the personal skills and self-confidence that contributed to her successful career as a director. She was initiated in 1912 and maintained connections to the chapter after her graduation. While Hunt’s time at a coeducational school gave her confidence and experience working with men, the years spent in a sorority as well as her later years at the all-female Radcliffe College for her Master’s degree in Dramatic Art, were just as important in contributing to her ability to function independently from men.

### *Finding the Theatre*

The pursuit of theatre was not always in Hunt’s plans. Following her years at Allegheny she spent time “finding herself — disciplining her decisions and gaining courage and belief in her capacities.”<sup>31</sup> Hunt spent the first few years after she graduated from college teaching high school in Meadville, PA and then moved to Richmond, VA in 1921.<sup>32</sup> Her years away from school helped Hunt realize that she had a love for theatre (especially directing) and she enrolled in Radcliffe College to pursue a Master’s degree in Dramatic Art in .<sup>33</sup> Hunt decided to pursue a career in drama after her graduation from Allegheny. She coached actors at John Marshall High

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<sup>30</sup> Claudia A. Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. “Sororities.” *Girl Culture* (Westport), 2008, 545.

<sup>31</sup> Ginny Sleight. “Allegheny Alummates.” *The Campus*, October 7, 1960, 3.

<sup>32</sup> *The Campus* (Meadville), September 28, 1915, 1.; “Alumni.” *The Campus* (Meadville), January 12, 1921, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ginny Sleight. “Allegheny Alummates.” *The Campus*, October 7, 1960, 3.

School in Richmond the same year she was hired as a professor in the English department at William and Mary, where her talent for theatre continued to develop.<sup>34</sup> Although her late discovery of theatre deterred her from becoming a professional, she was not bothered; she often said that “my love of teaching and directing have combined perfectly for me” in her chosen career.<sup>35</sup>

Theatre’s status as a refuge from the world drew in the nonconformist Althea Hunt. Her interest in theatre was not initially based in an appetite for theatricality. Hunt’s undergraduate interest in literature was the closest link to her later career until she declared a Major in the dramatic arts at Radcliffe College. Rather, theatre was an avenue that attracted Hunt, as well as many of her students throughout the years, because of its reputation for becoming a welcome haven.<sup>36</sup> The perception of theatre as such an inclusive, welcoming environment is little studied, yet often cited and discussed in theatrical theory and histories.

The legacy of inclusivity could be traced to the origins of actors and acting troupe’s humble beginnings. Although enjoyed by all classes in various ways, theatrical performers were generally of lower-class origins. Roman actors tended to come from lower social ranks and although some were able to climb the social ladder, most did not. There is historical debate as to whether most Roman actors were owned by company managers, in effect being slaves. Although this arrangement was likely a reality for some cases, it did not represent every Roman actor’s experience. Whether enslaved or not, the majority of Roman actors were considered inferior in Roman society.<sup>37</sup> A majority of European actors in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries were from

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<sup>34</sup> Marshallite Yearbook. 1926, 225.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “Introduction,” in *The Gay and Lesbian Theatrical Legacy*, Eds. Billy J. Harbin, Kim Marra, and Robert A. Schanke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Oscar G. Brokcett, *History of the Theatre* (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1995). 67.

the merchant or working classes although the occasional clergy member or nobleman would appear.<sup>38</sup> In English Theatre of the middle ages, illegal companies performing unlicensed work were full of “vagabond[s] and rogue[s]” or those not employed by a “gentleman.” Queen Elizabeth imposed new restrictions on the theatre to suppress presentation of unlicensed work in an effort to prevent staging of plays on religious or political subjects. The threat of unregulated theatre to the English throne was evidently powerful for the precedent of governmental regulation was continued by the Stuart monarchs following the Tudors.

The long-held perception in the Western world that theatre was immoral was a common reason for excluding women from theatre. In Ancient Greek and Roman theatre, men played all roles including female parts. The first professional female entertainers emerged in Greece and Rome not as actors, but as mimes. In Rome, mimes were selected for physical beauty or comic ugliness to aid plots that revolved around sexual desirability (or lack thereof). Performers in the Byzantine Empire were considered unwholesome and the entire profession was denounced. In 692, there was an attempt to ban all mimes and theatrical performances in consequence. Byzantium ecclesiastical rules expelled professional actors and their spouses from the church and denied performers civil rights in order to regulate the perceived immorality of the profession. One notable exception to church enforced restrictions was the emperor Justinian’s marriage to the mime actress, Theodora.<sup>39</sup> Though the marriage was allowed by ecclesiastical authority, Theodora’s profession contributed to legends depicting her as an overly sexual woman—she was not able to escape the stigma of being a female performer despite being an emperor’s wife.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>40</sup> Procopius, Procopius, G. A. Williamson, and Peter Sarris, eds., *The Secret History*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2007).

In late seventh century Byzantium, ecclesiastical authorities often created limitations on theatre because of a belief that it was inherently immoral. In Spain and France in the sixteenth centuries, theatre was stigmatized by the general populace as not respectable. The Spanish response was a royal decree in 1596 banning actresses from the stage. The decree was assuaged in 1599, allowing women in companies as long as their husbands or fathers were also members. Such measures were put in place to protect women from the “dangers” of performance and the indecency of the stage.<sup>41</sup>

The welcoming haven so often described may be a result of theatres’ catering to the “less-desirables” of society. Theatre’s perceived “immorality” may have been generated by the progressive (sometimes even radical) leanings of some theatre troupes. At any rate, the lower-class, “inferior,” actors were anything but representative of prescriptive norms before the eighteenth century. As such, theatre was a place for societal outcasts from its very origins. Although fame for actors and actresses made the acting profession more desirable in the nineteenth century, theatre maintained its legacy of a “haven.” Theatre has long been welcoming to non-normative people, those who do not ascribe to prescriptive norms of the dominant culture.

As a woman who did not conform to the norms of “ideal womanhood” Hunt was well suited to the theatre haven. In her position as Director of William and Mary Theatre, Hunt continued the century-old inclusive theatrical legacy by ensuring all enrolled students were welcomed into the William and Mary theatrical community and had equal chances for success. Because of Hunt’s experience as a woman in a patriarchal world, but also as a woman who refused to conform to normative expectations of womanhood, she was especially intent on ensuring that theatre maintained its inclusive legacy.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 196; Ibid., 212

## II. SETTING THE STAGE: WILLIAM AND MARY BEFORE HUNT

### *Women and William and Mary, 1900-1926*

By the time Hunt started her career at William and Mary, the campus had established a healthy relationship with women contributing to the ease with which Hunt was able to matriculate. White women were admitted to the College of William and Mary in 1918 under the presidency of Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, a strong advocate for women's rights. In his farewell address and annual report, Tyler commented on the admission of women to the college: "The experiment of admitting women to the College has been fully vindicated by the results of this year. The young ladies were models of decorum and stood among the first in their classes. I [...] hope soon to see women fully accorded all the rights of the law and suffrage, which justly belong to them."<sup>42</sup> Tyler set an important precedent at the college, by voicing his support for women and establishing a space in which a community of women could thrive.

Dr. Tyler's successor, J. A. C. Chandler, was also a proponent for women's right to education and the vote. Before accepting the role as the college president, Chandler published a book entitled *The History of Suffrage in Virginia* in 1901. He observed the history of advocacy for universal suffrage at William and Mary, citing two incidents of students advocating for universal suffrage at separate commencements in the early nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> He observed that at the time, "universal suffrage was a favorite theme for the young orators of the country" and

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<sup>42</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, "Farewell Address" (speech, Williamsburg, VA, June 10, 1919), Women at William and Mary, <http://womenatwiliamandmary.blogspot.com/2009/06/june-10-1919-commencement-activities.html>.; Whittenburg argues that Tyler used admission of women to the college to take advantage of much needed revenue see Carolyn Lamb Sparks Whittenburg, "President J. A. C. Chandler and the First Women Faculty at the College of William and Mary," (Ed. D, William and Mary, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Enquirer, July 15, 1808 in Julian A.C. Chandler, *The History of Suffrage in Virginia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1901).; Enquirer, July 15, 1812 in Julian A.C. Chandler, *The History of Suffrage in Virginia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1901).

that students had a tendency to “appeal for liberty and democracy.”<sup>44</sup> Chandler was optimistic in the success women would have on such an open-minded campus. However, there is very little evidence of the explicit student support for universal suffrage from 1910-1920 that Chandler claimed existed in the previous century. Before women even attended the College, men at the university were generally supportive of the American women’s suffrage movement. Chandler’s assertion that students advocated for liberty and democracy is supported by *Flat Hat* articles that discuss or reference suffrage in the early twentieth century, yet after women matriculated, the attitude towards the “coeds” changed.

Men and women of the Williamsburg community were supportive of the suffragist movement. In 1915, students of the Williamsburg Female Institute produced a musical comedy, *The Suffragettes*.<sup>45</sup> The *Flat Hat* enthusiastically advertised the comedy and reported, “This play will doubtless add spice to the equal suffrage spirit which is already tenderly nourished by some of our best citizens in Williamsburg.”<sup>46</sup> The subject matter of the play clearly represented the sentiment of the female students at the Institute. The choice for a student-run paper to advertise and positively reference a suffragist play, was reflective of a highly supportive atmosphere of the men at William and Mary.

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<sup>44</sup> Julian A. C. Chandler, *The History of Suffrage in Virginia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1901), 26.

<sup>45</sup> Also known as the Presbyterian Institute, the Williamsburg Female Institute was a school for women established in 1908. The Institute offered four years of high school plus freshman level of college studies. It was located on Scotland Street, just blocks away from the William and Mary campus. The school closed in 1916 due to lack of funds. “Presbyterian Institute,” Special Collections Research Center Wiki, [http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Presbyterian\\_Institute.](http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Presbyterian_Institute.;); Parke Rouse, “Education Opportunity for Women,” *Daily Press*, Nov. 26, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 09. Mar. 1915. 4. Print.

Although no outwardly antisuffragist sentiments were evident in any *Flat Hat* articles, a condescending tone toward women and the suffrage movement was much more common than the positive support offered by the advertisement following women's matriculation to the College. Support for women's admission was clear, yet resentment and questions of their capabilities were evident as well. A 1919 article assessed the welcome of the second class of women to William and Mary, when a reporter wrote, "The feeling runs high among the Marys to help build up William and Mary, to put her on a footing with the best colleges, and keep her from ever feeling that has lost anything by the admission of women to her sacred walls."<sup>47</sup> Written from the perspective of a male student, the implication that these women were worried that their admission had worsened the "sacred walls" of William and Mary, feels false and contrived as the writer clearly injects his bias towards the presence of women on campus. The male perspective on suffrage was similarly forced. The most critical view of suffragists published in the *Flat Hat* was an article originally written for the *Times Dispatch* in early 1919. The article maintained a supportive position of the general suffrage movement while attacking a specific group of suffragists for burning an effigy of President Woodrow Wilson. This article was by far the most critical essay published by the *Flat Hat*.

Although the Nineteenth amendment was passed in June while the *Flat Hat* was out of print for summer vacation, there were no anticipatory or celebratory articles published regarding the amendment. Instead, as the newspaper started up again during the school year, women's enfranchisement was mentioned passively and with slightly derogatory undertones. In October of 1920, the *Flat Hat* reported that the college was selected for the "establishment of 'a pioneer

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<sup>47</sup> "Concerning Mary," *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 16. Oct. 1919. 4. Print

school for preserving the Constitution...<sup>48</sup> The reporter further wrote that educating the newly admitted and newly enfranchised women to responsibly vote would be a major role of the school. He reported, “William and Mary recently became co-educational, and the new school will also aide to prepare women to use the ballot intelligently, aiming to give them sane views of the form of American government.”<sup>49</sup> While a school of government and citizenship certainly should play a role in the responsibility of voting, it should not be relegated to women exclusively. This article implies women alone need additional education to make responsible choices at the polls and further critiques women’s intelligence by implying the do not possess “sane views” of the government.

Although the women’s suffrage movement faced many obstacles in the seventy-one years it took from Seneca Falls to the passing of the Nineteenth amendment, both male and female allies for the movement were present. The publications at William and Mary represented how some educated young men supported the suffrage movement and women’s rights in general. Condescension towards women and their ability to responsibly take the privilege to vote is clear, yet there is no doubt the male population on campus was supportive of women’s right to vote. It was into such an environment that Althea Hunt joined William and Mary’s faculty. A school generally supportive of women both by the administration and student-body would have held appeal. The appeal of “liberty and democracy” to male and female students created an atmosphere of support for a non-conformist professor like Hunt.

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<sup>48</sup> “Eyes of Whole Country on William and Mary.” *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 22. Oct. 1920. 1. Print.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*.

*William and Mary Theatre 1900-1926*

The absence of an established theatre program did not prevent student clubs from staging dramatic performances for fellow students. These clubs were often composed of William and Mary students and members of the broader Williamsburg community. The two most visible and long-lasting of these types of clubs, The Elizabethans and the Dramatic Club, existed in varying forms and sizes in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Dramatic Club was established in 1902. With an initial membership consisting of twenty-two students, only twelve were students of the college. The remaining members were women from the Williamsburg community, likely a mixture of residents and students from the Female Institute. Women's presence in dramatic clubs was common, even before the admittance of women to the College in 1918. Extant records do not make clear what role these women had in the clubs, but it seems reasonable to assume that the women were Williamsburg residents or students at the Institute brought in to play female roles in productions.

The Elizabethans came into existence in 1908, during a hiatus year for the Dramatic Club. The Elizabethans existed for three years: 1908, 1909 and 1912. In their first year on campus, the Elizabethans staged *Twelfth Night* and *Candida*, then *Much Ado About Nothing* the following season with a larger cast and increasing the number of managers from one to three to support the productions. Despite the potential success of the club's endeavors signaled by this expansion, the Elizabethans were not listed as a club the following year (1910) in the *Colonial Echo*. The Dramatic Society, (possibly an iteration of the previous Dramatic Club) and the Minstrel Club were the only theatrical clubs that year, but The Dramatic Society did not return the following year and the Minstrel Club only survived through 1911. The Elizabethans would

return again in 1912 with the staging of *The Rivals*, a play originally produced in 1775 about the romantic difficulties of young woman determined to marry for love and into poverty.<sup>50</sup>

The November 7, 1911 issue of *The Flat Hat*, urged the college to “erect a Greek theatre in the Players’ Dell.”<sup>51</sup> The author argued that the dell was the perfect shape for an amphitheater and that the Elizabethans’ quality of work justified its erection as well as encouraging future “and better” dramatic efforts. The author also held that there was a great deal of theatrical interest at William and Mary writing, “and certainly there is enough interest latent to cause its building if some leader will come forward as champion.”<sup>52</sup> The next issue continued with another editorial lauding the Elizabethan’s work and lamented the absence of any dramatic production the previous year.<sup>53</sup> The author of this article gave high praise to the club and enthusiastically reported rumors of an imminent return by the Elizabethans:

At William and Mary for a good many years there existed one of the best representations of the college dramatic club in the South—the Elizabethans... We are glad. In fact we are almost ecstatically happy, and are making this avowal publicly, hoping that it may reach their timid eyes and thus assure them of an old fashioned welcome... If it be assistance they need we shall give it (unless the trouble savour of short funds), and if it be applause they crave, why then allow us to suggest with the proper amount of deference that they only give us the opportunity.<sup>54</sup>

In the November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1911 issue, the Elizabethan’s return was confirmed and the rise of the Minstrel Club acknowledged: “minstrels have usurped its place, but as minstrels do not make

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<sup>50</sup> “The Rivals,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Rivals-play-by-Sheridan>.

<sup>51</sup> “A Greek Theatre.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 70 Nov. 1911: 2. Print.

<sup>52</sup> “A Greek Theatre,” 2.

<sup>53</sup> “College Plays.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 14 Nov. 1911: 2. Print.

<sup>54</sup> “College Plays.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 14 Nov. 1911: 2. Print.

for the display of histrionic talent the Elizabethans will be reorganized.”<sup>55</sup> This staffer’s observation critiqued the Minstrel Club and predicted their future demise.<sup>56</sup> The Elizabethan’s staging of *The Rivals* was marked by daily afternoon rehearsals in the Chapel with direction from Dr. James S. Wilson. The cast consisted of men from the college and three women from Williamsburg.<sup>57</sup> This new Elizabethan performance was mentioned in almost every *The Flat Hat* issue leading up to the performance and this publicity engendered excitement and broad support for the Elizabethans on campus. Reviews for the Elizabethans production of *The Rivals* were quite positive.<sup>58</sup> The show met such great success that the club was invited by students to restage the production during finals.<sup>59</sup>

*The Flat Hat* writer who championed the return of the Elizabethans was representative of a generally positive campus attitude toward theatre, evidence of which was apparent in campus support for a professional theatre troupe, the Coburn Players. Sponsored by the Department of English, the Coburn Players presented two shows to packed houses on April 22, 1912.<sup>60</sup> *The Flat Hat* reporter described the audience as “large” and “marked for intelligence and appreciation.”<sup>61</sup> One positive review noted, “The College was fortunate in having this troupe here and it is the

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<sup>55</sup> “Elizabethans Will Return.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 21 Nov. 1911: 1. Print.

<sup>56</sup> “Elizabethans Present ‘The Rivals’” 1.; The Minstrel Club had existed previously in 1910. Though rarely discussed by campus media in its brief two-year existence, the *Colonial Echo* illustration depicting black-face caricatures and the listed club positions (interlocutor and end men) made clear the organization’s involvement in minstrelsy, a comedic theatrical form founded on enacting racial stereotypes. College of William and Mary, *Colonial Echo 1910*, William and Mary Digital Archives.; “Minstrel Show,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/minstrel-show>.

<sup>57</sup> “The Caste is Picked for ‘The Rivals’ Elizabethans to Give Play Easter.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 5 Mar. 1912: 1. Print.

<sup>58</sup> “Elizabethans Present ‘The Rivals,’ Are Received Enthusiastically,” 1.

<sup>59</sup> “Elizabethans Will Reappear.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 30 Apr. 1912: 3. Print.

<sup>60</sup> “Coburn Players in April.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 13 Feb. 1912: 1. Print.

<sup>61</sup> “Two Beautiful Plays” 1

general hope that an early return may be realized.”<sup>62</sup> Despite a successful 1912 season from the Elizabethans, the group was unable to use this momentum to maintain a permanent presence on campus.

The years from 1913 to 1918 do not show any evidence of a dramatic club. The trend of decreasing student involvement in the theatre continued in 1915. The campus was used to community plays being staged on campus, but there seems to have been little support for any type of entertainment that year. In response, students from the “town, college, and high school” staged two plays on campus in January, 1915.<sup>63</sup> Articles in the 1917 and 1918 editions of *The Flat Hat* did not mention theatre productions of any kind. With the United States entering the First World War many students enlisted to fight in the allied efforts against Germany. With the departure of many young men from the College, not only were students mentally preoccupied with events outside their insulated world, but also the number of bodies that could participate in any club decreased substantially. On March 20, 1918, *The Flat Hat* reported that, “literary Societies are hit hard by lack of interest.”<sup>64</sup> Given that literary societies maintained much more stable membership numbers compared to dramatic clubs and that the English Department was not only established on campus, but one of the largest departments on campus, this report on the dwindling interest in literary societies suggests the nature of student involvement at William and Mary at the time.

The community was not wholly without theatrical activity, however during these years. In the February 27, 1918 issue of *The Flat Hat* reported on the possibility of (white) women’s

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<sup>62</sup> “Taming of the Shrew.” *The Flat Hat* [Williamsburg] 23 Apr. 1912: 4. Print.

<sup>63</sup> “Entertainments.” *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 19. Jan. 1915. 2. Print.

<sup>64</sup> “Literary Societies.” *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 20. Mar. 1918. 1. Print.

admission to the college.<sup>65</sup> This possibility was confirmed and the March 13, 1918 issue of *The Flat Hat* reported that William and Mary would indeed be opened to women.<sup>66</sup> Less than a year later, WWI ended. The campus population expanded enormously as male students returning from the war joined the new cohort of female students. The campus population grew from 149 students in 1917-1918 to 333 by the end of the 1919 academic year. It would almost triple to 948 students by the time Althea Hunt came to campus in the 1926-1927 year.<sup>67</sup> The growth of campus enrollment over the short time frame was essential to the growth of William and Mary Theatre in the next few years, as demand continued to grow for a formal drama program.

The increase in the numbers of students at the College led to a corresponding expansion of the faculty and in 1920, Dr. Cary F. Jacob, a well-known playwright, author, and teacher was instated as a professor in the Department of English.<sup>68</sup> Jacob's presence at the college ensured that at least a portion of the large student population of the college would be channeled to a dramatic club that could now have the faculty support necessary for long-term existence. In the February 5, 1920 issue, one editorial of *The Flat Hat* mirrored the sentiment offered in the nine years prior when the Elizabethan's return was anticipated. The enthusiasm for theatrical arts seemed to have returned, as the author explained, "It is sincerely hoped that such a movement may become a college movement and representative talent chosen... It is sincerely hoped that the question of college dramatics will be placed before the students and some action taken to insure such activity."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "Co-Education." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 27. Feb. 1918. 1. Print.

<sup>66</sup> "Pass Co-Education." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 13. Mar. 1918. 1. Print.

<sup>67</sup> Carolyn Lamb Sparks Whittenburg, "President J. A. C. Chandler and the First Women Faculty at the College of William and Mary," (Ed. D, William and Mary, 2004).; College of William and Mary, *Colonial Echo 197*, William and Mary Digital Archives.

<sup>68</sup> "W. and M. Faculty Increased." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 01. Jan. 1920. 2. Print.

<sup>69</sup> "College Dramatics." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 05. Feb. 1920. 2. Print.

Having a leading playwright on campus drew those interested in theatre together under his tutelage. In March 1920, Jacob began leading collegiate dramatics at the college and Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windemere's Fan* was announced as being staged after Lent.<sup>70</sup> After the production's positive debut (according to *The Flat Hat*), the Dramatics Club was described by campus media as finally "fully established." Although *The Flat Hat* review of the play noted the small audience on the play's first night, the reviewer suggested this low attendance could be attributed to the fact that the play's opening was in the middle of the week and because it was the first major college production in eight years. Subsequent productions of the same play were so successful on campus that the William and Mary players took the play to Newport News and Portsmouth. The *Flat Hat* attributed the triumph of the play "to the expert training and direction given by Dr. Jacob." Subsequently, the Dramatics Club would become "regularly and permanently organized" and officers would be elected to establish a permanent "form of association for the purpose of continuing the cultivation and expression of dramatic art among the students of William and Mary."<sup>71</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the absence of a centralizing influence on students interested in drama prevented the stabilization of a dramatic outlet on campus, especially when outside events decreased the size of the student population. Any drama clubs that became established on campus lacked the support or stability necessary to thrive longer than one or two academic years. In contrast, after World War I, with an expanded student population and a visible leader for dramatic arts, The Dramatic Club, under the direction of Jacob, quickly

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<sup>70</sup> "College Dramatics." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 25. Mar. 1920. 6. Print.

<sup>71</sup> "Play A Success; To Be Given in Newport News and Portsmouth." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 29. Apr. 1920. 1. Print.

became fully established.<sup>72</sup> Jacob was able to plant the seed that would become under Althea Hunt's nurturing care, a fully established theatre program.

### III. THE MOTHER OF WILLIAM AND MARY THEATRE

I use the term nurturing intentionally in regards to the influence Althea Hunt had on her students and what would become the Theatre Department as it was through her careful and expert guidance that she mothered the theatre program. While dictionaries, and possibly many average western citizens, would describe a mother in biological terms, as adoption, surrogacy, and other variations on the conventional path to motherhood and mothering have become more common, the definition of motherhood has shifted. As it pertains to this paper, I am adopting historians Evelyn Nakano Glenn's eloquent working definition of "mother" as my standard for characterizing Althea Hunt as a "mother" of the William and Mary Theatre. As Glenn explains:

As a working definition, I propose looking at mothering as a historically and culturally variable relationship 'in which one individual nurtures and cares for another.' Mothering occurs within specific social contexts that vary in terms of material and cultural resources and constraints. How mothering is conceived, organized, and carried out is not simply determined by these conditions, however. Mothering is constructed through men's and women's actions within specific historical circumstances. Thus agency is central to an understanding of mothering as a social, rather than biological, construct.<sup>73</sup>

Althea Hunt's first priority was always her students. She constantly created opportunities for the success of her students, particularly those who had not been given chances to succeed before. According to Glenn, definition of motherhood is as follows: "in which one individual nurtures and cares for another." The records left of Hunt and her students leave overwhelming

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<sup>72</sup> "Dramatic Club." *The Flat Hat*. [Williamsburg] 15. Oct. 1920. 4. Print.

<sup>73</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn. "Social Construction of Mothering: A Thematic Overview." *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, 1994.

evidence of her nurturance and care not only for each of her students, but also William and Mary Theatre. She was instrumental in creating the theatre family on campus and cared for it as it faced the challenges brought by depression and another world war. Despite these trials, Althea Hunt was dedicated to creating quality productions, offering commentary through her play selection, providing the best experience for her students, and ensuring that they were well cared for.

### *Hunt and her Students*

Hunt was appointed a director-teacher by President J.A.C. Chandler in 1926 and joined William and Mary's English Department beginning what Hunt's student, William H. Morrow, called "the Golden Age" of William and Mary Theatre.<sup>74</sup> Central to Morrow's reference to the period as a Golden Age were his references to Hunt's talent as a director and the success of the productions she mounted. Hunt was not only successful as a director, but she also excelled as a teacher in relating to her students and creating a theatre culture in which students could thrive. She expressed love for her students in a variety of ways throughout her career at William and Mary. The "friendly, energetic lady with reddish blonde hair" had several systems in place to ensure the opportunity for growth and development of all students, even those outside the theatre department.<sup>75</sup> A policy of placing newcomers in her cast by holding open auditions for anyone on campus opened the theater to more students and not just those with experience or intentions to

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<sup>74</sup> Carolyn Lamb Sparks Whittenburg, "President J. A. C. Chandler and the First Women Faculty at the College of William and Mary," (Ed. D, William and Mary, 2004).; Althea Hunt, "Introduction," in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), xiii.

<sup>75</sup> Carl Buffington, "1934-1939," in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 55.

pursue a career in the dramatic arts. Buffington wrote that he could not remember a play in which at least one cast member was not making his or her acting debut.<sup>76</sup>

Hunt also ensured students who were already involved in the department were continually exposed to new facets of theater. Alma Mae Clarke Fontaine, one of Hunt's first students, described Hunt's avoidance of a "star system" in which actors were rotated so that "one might have the lead in one play and be making paper flowers in the next."<sup>77</sup> Anne Helms Irons, a later student of Hunt's observed a similar trend in Hunt's casting philosophy: "Parts were spread around with surprising equality, and we were all given enough minor roles to keep our heads small enough for our hats."<sup>78</sup>

Althea Hunt's insistence on bringing newcomers into her shows, did not prevent the success of her shows. She was well regarded as a director, helping both inexperienced and veteran performers cultivate success on the stage. Buffington's review of *Death Takes a Holiday*, credits Hunt's cast, seven of whom were making their debut, for their distinction in acting. Christian Hollis Moe (class of 1951) recalls the cast of *The Skin of Our Teeth* being filled with seven freshman and Anne Helms Irons (class of 1953) remembered that numerous newcomers filled the cast of *First Lady*. The persistence of Althea Hunt's casting philosophy is a testament to her consistency and reliability as well as her commitment to developing young people.

Althea Hunt had an uncanny ability to develop new actors and actresses into wonderful players who blossomed in William and Mary theatre and beyond. An exchange student, Henry Woolf, spent a year in Williamsburg and during that time was set on a path that would lead him

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Alma Mae Clarke, "1927-1931," in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 28.

<sup>78</sup> Ann Helm Irons, "1949-1953," in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 150.

to a professional acting career, most notably with the Royal Shakespeare Company. He had never acted, nor considered drama prior to meeting Althea Hunt. Upon asking if he could attend drama courses despite being a novice, Hunt replied by urging him to audition for the next production: *Dial M for Murder*.<sup>79</sup>

Althea Hunt was demanding of her students and pushed them to be their best with spectacular results. In doing so she ensured that her students would not become, as Christian Hollis Moe put it, “lax from overconfidence.”<sup>80</sup> She avoided praising actors in her productions, opting instead to encourage their creative choices and pursuits over compliments. A woman of discipline, Hunt garnered respect from her students, while ensuring their growth. Edward Fales Jr. recalled her saying, “I will give people in my class exactly the grades they deserve, like me or not. But I am determined to like them!”<sup>81</sup> Many students from varying periods of Hunt’s career at William and Mary agreed that her rehearsals were the most professional theatrical setting they had been exposed to.<sup>82</sup> Christian Hollis Moe describes Hunt’s policies and rules in the theatre as requiring that “Little rehearsal time” be “wasted with superfluous instruction or digressive chatter.” “Rules and requirements” were enforced and firmly stated “for attendance at rehearsals, for the learning of lines, for onstage and backstage behavior” and “[m]issing one evening’s rehearsal without prior explanation for example, meant expulsion from the cast.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Henry Woolf, “1955-1956,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 183.

<sup>80</sup> Christian Hollis Moe, “1947-1951,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968),

<sup>81</sup> Edward Fales Jr., “1926-1930,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 11.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Shepard Weisz, “1951-1955,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 176.

<sup>83</sup> Christian Hollis Moe, “1947-1951,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968),

If Hunt was a formidable presence in the theater, she was certainly a warm presence in her home, which she extended to her students. A pair of students, separated by almost two decades, Alma Mae Clarke Fontaine (class of 1931) and Ronald King (class of 1948), described the welcome Hunt gave students to her home. Both students fondly remember informal get-togethers and dinner invitations in her “bright, cheerful apartment.”<sup>84</sup>

### *Director and Social Commentator*

Althea Hunt remained at the epicenter of William and Mary Theatre before, during, and after the World War II. She engaged students and the campus in the political realities of life outside campus and served students’ needs whether by creating relief from anxieties of war, encouragement to students abroad, or being a stable presence on campus. Hunt’s selection of plays addressed relevant social issues of the era and introduced her students to class struggles that were especially relevant to national events. Hunt promoted women's personal and professional development by selecting plays that provided compelling opportunities for women and choosing material challenging contemporary gender norms and their limitations. The plays selected by Hunt were educational, challenging the social status-quo and reflecting the mood of the nation. When national crises affected the campus, Hunt paid close attention and chose plays that she felt spoke to these crises and created opportunities for critical conversations about them. During World War II shows were chosen to both explore deeper themes of war and also to offer lighter comedy to take a break from the mentally exhausting wartime environment. Hunt’s

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<sup>84</sup> Ronald King, “1942-194 — 1946-1949,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 109.

selections of plays in the post war period reflected the much lighter climate of the campus after the war.

During the Great Depression, Hunt mounted many plays that reflected national economic struggles. William and Mary Theatre staged elaborate productions like *Dear Brutus* (1934) and *Berkeley Square* (1931), which had impressive, expensive-looking sets with detailed architecture and immense draperies. Although, the William and Mary Theatre itself was not faced with economic strife, the plays they performed engaged subjects that were relevant to the struggles of the nation. At least one play selected by Hunt each year from 1930-1934 critically explored themes such as social stratification, class differences, and social norms—especially concerning the role of women. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, staged in 1930, offered a critique of the Victorian era characterizing the aristocracy as arrogant and hypocritical. It also challenged prescriptive norms of the period, depicting Jack and Algernon as irresponsible and non-trustworthy while featuring women like Lady Bracknell in positions of power.<sup>85</sup>

Hunt's non-conformity in relation to the prescriptive gender norms of the period was joined by her identity as a feminist intent on providing opportunities for William and Mary's female theatre students. Althea Hunt's non-conformism was apparent in many of the plays she selected to direct for William and Mary Theatre. *The Swan*, staged at William and Mary in the 1933-34 season, features a female main character, Dora Hand, who has had three husbands and is a mistress outside her marriage.<sup>86</sup> She, like Hunt, does not bow to dominant cultural norms for women of the era. Hunt selected plays concerning women challenging extant gender norms

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<sup>85</sup> Christina Flatt, "Feminism in *The Importance of Being Earnest*," Diss. Ball State U.

<sup>86</sup> "The Swan," Chester Theatre Company, web.

ensured the training of “a great number of leading ladies”.<sup>87</sup> Hunt’s views on the status of white women and belief in women’s equality with men were evident in her selection of plays and casting. From 1930-1934 many plays staged by the William and Mary Players featured almost equal numbers of male and female actors or, in some cases, more women than men. *Enter Madame*, staged in 1931, featured 8 women and only 5 men. The few plays with an unequal gender representation staged from 1930-1934 were Shakespearean. *Much Ado About Nothing*, featured only 4 women, but 17 men. However, even in this production 16 more women were doing backstage work for the production.

World War II rescued America from the economic depths of the Great Depression, but for William and Mary, the war caused stress and tension. Limited resources for the theatre and student and faculty absences on campus caused campus anxiety and fear born from the uncertainty of the times. In 1936, the William and Mary Theatre addressed these themes in *Squaring the Circle*. The staging of the play reflected growing political tensions in the world as students returned to Williamsburg for the fall semester and European conflict was increasingly mounting toward what would become World War II. Student Carl Buffington remembered, “there were many new political ideologies in the news when the student body of the College returned to Williamsburg,” and that “*Squaring the Circle* seemed a timely play.”<sup>88</sup> *Squaring the Circle*, Valentine Kataev’s spoof of communism, was a wise and timely choice for a campus (and indeed nation) amused with “[s]oviet efforts to convert their improbable ideology into a way of living.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Edward Fales Jr., “1926-1930,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 21.

<sup>88</sup> Carl E. Buffington, “1934-1939,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 60-1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Hunt not only tried to raise students' political consciousness through the plays she selected, but also took up the role of comforting and protecting students during the war. The Varsity Show (a student run variety production) was advertised by releasing flyers from a low flying plane—not an uncommon sight pre-World War II. The night of the Pearl Harbor attacks, William and Mary actors and actresses were in rehearsal for *Family Portrait* which was to open four days later. The news of the attack shook students and many “theatre regulars” crowded into the familiarity of Phi Beta Kappa Hall, even those not working on the show. Sarah Jane Vermilye reflected on this particular rehearsal remembering, “one member of the cast chose to take his mixed emotions to Chowning’s Tavern, and as a result we learned from Miss Hunt that until such time as our efforts were called elsewhere, our duty lay in ‘carrying on.’”<sup>90</sup> The theme of “carrying on” continued for William and Mary Theatre, much as it did for the country as the war continued. Students returned from Christmas vacation in 1942 to many changes within the theatre because of the war’s escalation. The theatre’s technician, ‘Doc’ Ross, had entered service and a new technician (this time a woman), Betty Harris, had taken over.<sup>91</sup>

William and Mary Theatre staged its last elaborate production during the war in 1942. A cast of nearly fifty, ballet, student orchestra, handsome sets and costumes made *The School for Husbands* what Sarah Jane Vermilye called an “unforgettable production as close to an all-college artistic effort as any we remember while at William and Mary.”<sup>92</sup> Theatre following this production was still exciting, but necessarily limited in resources. The government mandated rationing of materials during the war took its toll on William and Mary Theatre. Opening night

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<sup>90</sup> Sarah Jane Snyder Vermilye, “1939-1944,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 86.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-7.

of the 1942 production *The Male Animal* was delayed as air raid sirens blared. Soon thereafter, the enlisted reserve corps was called, leaving few students in the Department of Fine-Arts. The result was “a critical shortage of men” and an unfortunate “general apathy among students in supporting dramatic productions” accompanying.<sup>93</sup> A quote from the February 21, 1945 issue of *The Flat Hat* reported, “the William and Mary Theatre is in actual danger of suspending its activity.”<sup>94</sup> Despite campus concern, Hunt was able to continue in her position before, during, and after the war. In the face of adversity and a predominantly female campus, Hunt faced the challenge of maintaining a thriving theatre despite demographic inequality. She chose to stage *The Patriots* in 1943, a play in which the characters were majority male.

Plays staged during the World War II era, not only engaged the national climate and mood, but more importantly the needs of students on campus. Hunt selected *Thunder Rock* (1942) to explicitly reflect and comment on the American experience of war. The play focuses on Charleston, who has taken a job as keeper of a lighthouse to escape a world he deems detestable. His friend, Streeter, opposes his pessimism and returns to society to become an aviator believing the world can only be brought out of chaos if people do something about it. Charleston on the other hand believes, “mankind’s got one future—in the past.”<sup>95</sup> Charleston eventually comes to the realization that there is no escape from life, and becomes determined to create order out of a chaotic civilization. Robert Ardrey wrote the play in 1939, when conflict in Europe was rising and war seemed certain.<sup>96</sup> Hunt’s choice to stage *Thunder Rock* during World

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<sup>93</sup> James Bray, “1944-1945 — 1946-1948,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 113.

<sup>94</sup> *Flat Hat*, Feb 21, 1945.

<sup>95</sup> Find citation

<sup>96</sup> Sarah Jane Snyder Vermilye, “1939-1944,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 88.

War II was a clear effort to relate the theatre to the world outside. By producing *Thunder Rock*, Hunt passed on a message of patriotism and endorsed the theme of military service, supporting her students fighting the war abroad. *The Male Animal* (1942) was also chosen by Hunt for its relevance to the period and the global conflict. It was “just light enough and at the same time had sufficiently serious overtones to please almost everyone.”<sup>97</sup> The play combined themes of asserting one's right to free speech with a lighter subplot involving a love triangle, maintaining Hunt's precedent to provide for both intellectual and political consciousness, while caring for the mental well-being of students and faculty at home and abroad.<sup>98</sup>

Althea Hunt's consciousness of the needs of students remaining on campus extended beyond her choices for play selections and into her individual interactions with students. The tough-love style of teaching and directing established by Hunt early in her William and Mary career was not altered by a world war. For those “left behind,” Hunt continued to admonish students to “PROJECT.”<sup>99</sup> Sarah Jane Vermilye records and praises Hunt's leadership style during the time: “...Miss Hunt channeled our enthusiasm toward productivity, and her gentle discipline was a great stabilizer for us all.”<sup>100</sup>

Hunt's “the show must go on” attitude was consistent and intentional and directed toward students who stayed on campus, but her consciousness of students' needs extended to those off campus as well. Hunt corresponded with dozens of students who were abroad during the war and especially maintained “a steady morale-building correspondence with students in uniform.” Hunt sent campus and theatre news, reports on other students in service, and William and Mary

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 88-9.

<sup>98</sup> “The Male Animal,” *Samuel French*, <https://www.samuel french.com/p/2307/the-male-animal>.

<sup>99</sup> Sarah Jane Snyder Vermilye, “1939-1944,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 92.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.,

Theatre production programs to student Ronald King for which he returned “a 22-gun salute,” saying, “Lady, we salute you!”<sup>101</sup> She went to New York to visit two of her students, twins Benjamin and James Bray, who were stationed there during the conflict. Ben reflected on the night she visited recalling, “at that stage you and I were just about ready to give up any plan for returning to college after our hitch in the Navy. We thought the professional theatre should be our new goal. Remember what Althea advised when we told her that night?” To which his brother Jim replied, “her exact words were ‘Go back and finish college.’”<sup>102</sup> Hunt’s priority always was the best interest of her students, whether that meant the encouragement of further education, the steadfast support of those serving abroad, or the welcome students received in her home. Although always a priority for Hunt, her students became that much more important in the years of and directly following the war.

As the war ended, the campus bustled with a mix of returning and new students. The presence of men in their twenties and thirties dedicated to obtaining an education (some of whom came back with wives and children) created a new mixture of ages and experiences among students.<sup>103</sup> As Jim Bray remembered, “the major change was a male population of men instead of boys.”<sup>104</sup> The opening production of William and Mary Theatre after World War II ended was *Arsenic and Old Lace*, a blockbuster comedy reflecting the relief and euphoria of the post-war nation.<sup>105</sup> The concomitant influx of students to the theatre offered a much more diverse population from which Hunt could select actors for a show. Older students who had returned

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<sup>101</sup> Ronald King, “1942-194 — 1946-1949,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 100.

<sup>102</sup> Benjamin Bray, “1944-1945 — 1946-1948,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 118.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

from the war joined with younger students to create an array of talent from which Hunt could choose. Shakespeare, a favorite of Hunt according to many of her students' comments (and evident in the sheer number of productions she staged throughout her tenure) finally returned to William and Mary after eleven years. After an attempt to present *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the 1944-45 season failed when not enough students turned out for auditions, Shakespeare was put on the backburner until *Comedy of Errors* made a return in 1947. The Varsity Show, too, returned that year after a hiatus from similar problems of "lack of talent and lack of interest."<sup>106</sup> Theatre productions were not the only things returning to William and Mary Theatre after time away. After a 14-year absence, Howard Scammon, a past student of Hunt's and the future director of William and Mary Theatre, returned to the college to teach in 1948. King reflected on the excitement Hunt had for Scammon's return and the positive partnership the two had. Scammon would succeed Hunt as the director of William and Mary theatre from her retirement in 1957 after Hunt sustained a heart-attack.<sup>107</sup> Scammon would serve as the director of William and Mary Theatre until 1976.<sup>108</sup>

A national celebratory mood was abundant in the years following the war. Hunt's hard work to acknowledge and serve students during the war was not without thanks. On the twenty-first anniversary of William and Mary theatre, the cast and crew of *Joan of Lorraine* organized a surprise party to honor Hunt. "We had never before seen Miss Hunt so deeply moved, as her eyes traversed the room and she noted the glowing faces of dozens of students and colleagues from the twenty-one years past and from the present."<sup>109</sup> More excitement came into the theatre

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>107</sup> Howard Scammon, *William and Mary Theatre: 50 Years*, (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1978).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 102.

department when auditions were held for Paul Green's symphonic drama *The Common Glory*. Although the production was not produced at William and Mary, many students were cast and Hunt was selected to direct. Because the show was set in the summer, the cast lived in temporary dormitories near the present Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall. Ronald King explains the excitement of summer living: "The excitement, gaiety, camaraderie, and sheer nonsense of life in the 'Coop' were unforgettable."<sup>110</sup>

Hunt's selections of plays and players continued to reflect and respond to national moods and events. The atmosphere of the William and Mary Theatre post-World War II paralleled the euphoria of a nation no longer at war. Even the language used by alums, in reflecting on their experiences at the time, shifted, reflecting the hopefulness of the time. King, a student who experienced Williamsburg before and after the war, wrote on his time at William and Mary with joy and positivity: "There are so many events and memories that have no chronological sequence, but were so much a part of the Theatre at William and Mary—the private talks and informal get-togethers with Miss Hunt at her bright, cheerful apartment... but most important of all, the warm embrace and look of satisfaction from Miss Hunt after a good performance."<sup>111</sup>

Hunt continued to stage plays that engaged world events, but the emotional weight of the productions was lesser than they had been during the war. A national election was the inspiration for *First Lady*, staged in 1952.<sup>112</sup> Noteworthy events in William and Mary Theatre were no longer low flying planes or the interruptions created by air raid drills, but the controversy of

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 103-4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>112</sup> Jeremy Clulow, "1951-1955," in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 156.

having two characters in a double bed together staged in *Here We Are (1950)*.<sup>113</sup> War with Korea seemed imminent by the Spring of 1951, but the prospect of another conflict did not bring the same concern as that occasioned by American participation in World War II.

During the 1950s and 60s, Hunt chose to produce plays that wrestled with themes of war and peace. An anti-war satire piece, *No More Peace*, was performed in 1950 and *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*, with similar themes of war and peace was presented in 1952.<sup>114</sup> Tragedy did strike, however, in late 1953 when a fire broke out in Phi Beta Kappa Hall. Students returned to campus after winter break to find their home destroyed. Among the wreckage was the Globe Theatre replica—intended for use in the upcoming production of *Hamlet*. As always, in spite of everything, the show went on. The season continued as it would have otherwise, although the quantity of work increased for students as they prepared to perform the play in the school gymnasium.<sup>115</sup> Despite the immense challenges of staging a show in an open gymnasium, *Hamlet* was a success.<sup>116</sup> The success of *Hamlet* despite the loss of a stage space, is yet another instance of Hunt jumping headfirst into the challenges set before her and using the very problem itself to create something successful. Jean Shepard Weisz recognized and appreciated this trait of Hunt: “We are grateful to Miss Hunt for seeking ever-new challenges and also to the many members of the audiences who appreciated this.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Christian Hollis Moe, “1947-1951,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 138.

<sup>114</sup> Christian Hollis Moe, “1947-1951,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 137.; Jean Shepard Weisz, “1951-1955,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 173.

<sup>115</sup> Jeremy Clulow, “1951-1955,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 160-1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>117</sup> Jean Shepard Weisz, “1951-1955,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 174.

## PART V: AFTERWORD

In 1968, Hunt published a chronicle of the William and Mary Theatre. She collected memoirs from past students and compiled and edited them into a book, many of which were used in this paper. She made clear to the students to whom she reached out, that the book would be “a chronicle of William and Mary Theatre and that there were to be no professorial accolades.”<sup>118</sup> Thankfully, however, many did not completely omit accolades to Hunt. The desire of Hunt to formulate such a chronicle and to assume her omission from her students’ recollections was a humble, yet total misevaluation of her own impact on William and Mary Theatre and the many students it fostered throughout her time. I hope this essay provides the accolades to Hunt that she attempted to remove from the accounts of William and Mary Theatre from 1926 to 1957. The clear impact one woman brought to so many students without fail for 31 years was an essential part of the development of the theatre to where it is today, almost 90 years later.

Hunt’s legacy lives on in the Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall, where the Theatre Department is housed today. Hunt officially retired in 1961 and was named Professor Emeritus of fine arts. She died at the age of 80 on April 1, 1971.<sup>119</sup> Legend says her ghost still haunts the building. Several current students have had experiences with her ghost and although I have yet to have a run-in with her, I don’t doubt her presence still looms large. Even Hunt’s ghost is a protector of William and Mary’s theatre students. Sofia Quinteiro (’20) was working on a production in 2017 when she began getting increasingly close to the dangerous “cyc” pit edge

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<sup>118</sup> James Bray, “1944-1945 — 1946-1948,” in *William and Mary Theatre: A Chronicle*, ed. Althea Hunt (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1968), 125.

<sup>119</sup> “Althea Hunt, 80, Taught Arts at William and Mary,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 1971.

without noticing.<sup>120</sup> She wrote, “Suddenly I heard a soft woman's voice near my head say "turn around" so I turned and my foot was hanging off of the edge when I wasn't even realizing it, one more step and I would've fallen in. Eliza, Barclay and I were the only ones in the space and there was no one near me.” Another student, Hayley Wenk ('18), shared the encounter of a retired faculty member's meeting with Hunt's ghost. Dave (William and Mary Theatre technical director, 1977-2017) was checking on the light booth to make sure students hadn't created a mess when he heard a female voice ask, “can I help you?” Wenk wrote, “Dave's [...] been the TD for years now, so anyone in the light lab should know who [Dave is], so he turns, and no one is there. And then feels a burst of cold air.”

Whether or not Hunt is still with us, her presence certainly is. The contribution of Althea Hunt to William and Mary Theatre is nearly incalculable, yet I hope the preceding has acknowledged her hard work. As a non-conforming woman of the early twentieth century, Althea Hunt created a professional and personal niche for herself. In doing so, she had a positive impact on other women (and men) of her time and has influenced student experiences at William and Mary to the current day.

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<sup>120</sup> The “cyc” or cyclorama is a vertical surface used as a backdrop. It sits into a several-foot deep pit below stage level. “Cyclorama, (‘cyc’),” *Illuminating Engineering Society*, <https://www.ies.org/definitions/cyclorama-cyc/>.

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