THREE AGAINST TIME: EDITH AND GRACE ABBOTT AND SOPHONISBA P. BRECKINRIDGE

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"Three against time" is not a title for which I am responsible, but it is one that I was very glad to accept. I do not know what it says to you. To me it speaks of almost boundless energy, of broad vision, and of a desire to accomplish, which constantly pressed against the limits imposed by time. Certainly, these qualities characterized the three about whom I am to speak, Edith and Grace Abbott and Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge. They are epitomized for me by something Miss Breckinridge once told me. A nephew of hers, a student at the university, complained to her that he found it hard to get sufficient time for his studying because about eleven o'clock at night he got sleepy. "You must remember, Lyman," said Miss Breckinridge, "that the work of the world is not done by going to bed when you get sleepy."

In many respects the three about whom I am talking were very different. The one came from the older civilization of the blue-grass country of Kentucky; the Abbotts came from the plains of Nebraska, when to live there was to be a pioneer. The names of Miss Breckinridge's forebears are writ large in the pages of American history; those of the Abbots are found only in local chronicles. Miss Breckinridge had the manner of the southern aristocrat, although she records that she was not able to attain her mother's standard of a lady who was known by her fine buttonholes. Grace Abbott's manner is described as "breezy"; Edith's is harder to characterize; it was less abrupt than that of her sister but lacked something of the graciousness of Miss Breckinridge's. Nor were the contrasts all between the two sisters and Miss Breckinridge. Edith Abbott and Miss Breckinridge for as long as I knew them looked frail, as if a breath of wind might blow them away. Grace Abbott looked hardy and robust. You felt some need to protect the first two; you expected Grace Abbott to protect you.

Their relations to Chicago, too, were different. Edith Abbott and Miss Breckinridge lived their professional lives here; Chicago was always the base of their operations. Grace Abbott started in Chicago and her last work was from this base, but she is probably better known for her work in Washington than for her work here.

Finally, their minds were cast in different molds. Grace Abbott's was direct and forthright to an extreme degree, seeing always the main issues, at times almost to the point of oversimplification. Edith Abbott's was also direct, but she saw more nuances, more relations, than her sister perceived. Directness and simplicity are not words by which to characterize Miss Breckinridge's mind. It was more like quicksilver, ever active, amazingly fluid. Her thoughts seemed to dart now here, now there, so that the more pedestrian-minded had difficulty in following and were wont sometimes to believe that her thoughts were disconnected. One who made the effort and followed through at his own plodding pace discovered that

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the connections were there, that the darting was not aimless but purposive. It was only that her mind moved so much more quickly than others, that she saw so many more things in heaven and earth than were dreamed of in most of our philosophies, that we did not see the connections which to her were obvious. What she once said of a particular student explains the dilemma of many: "He wants me to go from A through B, through C, to D. Probably I should, but I don't want to." When she did want to or find it necessary, however, she could do it as incisively and clearly as the Abbotts themselves. You never had to ask either of the Abbott sisters what they meant or what they wanted if they asked you to do something. You were extraordinarily brilliant or extraordinarily stupid if you did not find it necessary to ask that of Miss Breckinridge.

The differences could be further elaborated, but they are far less important than the fundamental likenesses. It was not only that the three worked always against time. It was that they were animated by the same spirit, cherished the same values, sought the same basic objectives. They all were "gifted with a passion for service," they all "revolted against injustice and inequality." They were alike in the range and breadth of their interests. Their minds, too, with all their differences, were alike in being disciplined and creative.

It was Chicago that made these three social workers. It was the University of Chicago that brought them to the city. Miss Breckinridge was the first to come, in 1895. In a sense her coming was almost an accident. She was somewhat adrift, not very well, and not at all happy when she went to visit a college classmate in Oak Park. She had heard of the University on the Midway, then only five years old, and went with her friend to visit it. She was introduced to Marion Talbot, dean of women, who became interested in her and obtained for her a small fellowship in political science. Her studies were not without interruption, but she received her Master's degree in 1897, her Ph.D. in 1901, and her J.D. in 1904. It was in 1902, while Miss Breckinridge was studying law, that Edith Abbott first enrolled in the University, for a summer session only. What led her to this university can be only a matter of speculation; very possibly it was the fact that it was the nearest university with a graduate school. Evidently she liked what she found, and her instructors were impressed with her, for she was back in the autumn of 1903 with a fellowship in economics, and she remained in residence until September, 1905, when she received her Ph.D. degree. That Grace Abbott should follow her here calls for no explanation; she, too, was a good student, interested in further study, and the relation between the sisters was such that the younger would expect to profit from what the elder had deemed good. She, too, entered first for a summer only in 1904, returning two years later for a period of consecutive study leading to the Master's degree in 1908.

An examination of the records makes it clear that the university studies of the three did little to turn their minds toward social work or the social reforms to which they gave so much at a later date. Miss Breckinridge's Master's thesis was concerned with a judicial system of Kentucky, her doctoral dissertation with legal tender. Edith Abbott's dissertation was closer to the field, as it related to wages of unskilled labor; Grace Abbott's was concerned with legislation affecting the status of married women. Their course registrations were almost exclu-
sively in political science, economics, and law. This was not because the university offered no opportunity for study of subjects that have been the traditional concern of social workers. In the sociology department Charles R. Henderson was giving courses entitled "Social Treatment of Crime," "Contemporary Charities," and "Philanthropy in Its Historic Forms." In the extension division, too (University College), lecture courses were being given by Graham Taylor and Jane Addams from 1903 to 1905; in 1905 the announcements of the sociology department called attention to the courses offered by the Institute of Social Science and Arts, designed as preparation for "philanthropy and social work." In view of the later activities of all three of these future social workers, it is hard to account for their failure to show some interest in these courses. Clearly, it was not the university that made any one of the three a social worker. This is not to say that their university work was not preparing them for their later work. Quite the contrary. All three made excellent use of what they studied, and perhaps it was because of these studies that they became their own special kind of social workers.

Just when or through what channels their attention turned to social work I have not been able to find out. I do know that in the years immediately after Miss Breckinridge began her teaching in the university, in 1905, she got about the city to an increasing extent; that she met Mrs. Raymond Robbins, who interested her in the newly formed Women's Trade Union League; and undoubtedly she had some contact with the Hull House group. The first definite date that connects any of them with social work is 1907. In that year two things happened. Miss Breckinridge became a resident of Hull House during her quarter out of residence at the university, and she also became associated with Graham Taylor and Julia Lathrop at the Institute of Social Science, which was soon to become the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, the predecessor of the School of Social Service Administration. The connection with the school came through Julia Lathrop, who had been interested in the old institute and who was instrumental in getting for it a grant from the Russell Sage Foundation to be used for research and training in research. Miss Lathrop asked Miss Breckinridge to become the director of a research department at this new school.

These two moves of Miss Breckinridge—to Hull House and to the School of Civics and Philanthropy—so closely related as to be almost one, proved fateful. The first tangible result was that Edith Abbott returned to Chicago. She had left in 1905, had carried on her research on women in industry, had studied at the London School of Economics, and in 1907 had gone to teach at Wellesley. Miss Breckinridge had not forgotten the student "with the big brown eyes" whom she had first known at Green Hall, who had sat in her class and challenged her with such questions as "Do you really think that is so?"—the student with whom she had co-operated in a study of women's earnings, whom she had encouraged to pursue the study beyond the point where their joint efforts had taken it. Indeed, it is probable, although I have no direct evidence for this statement, that her mind had been active through these years in trying to find ways and means to get Edith Abbott back. It might be noted in passing that the university at this time was not hospitable to women as members of its faculty. In all events, before the academic year 1907–8
had come to its end, Miss Breckinridge and Miss Lathrop had gone to Wellesley and persuaded Edith Abbott to come to the new School of Civics and Philanthropy as assistant director of the research department and to live at Hull House. Miss Abbott has recorded that her Wellesley friends were astonished at her acceptance of the offer; and well they might have been. She was leaving the security of Wellesley to go to a new venture whose financing was assured for only a limited period of time; she was leaving a college well recognized in the academic world to go to something not connected with a college or university and with the horrible word "philanthropy" attached to it. It was not for nothing that the blood of the pioneers was in Edith Abbott's veins, so that she saw in this offer new doors to freedom.

With Miss Abbott at Hull House, Miss Breckinridge there three months of the year, with the two of them on the faculty of the School of Civics and Philanthropy, their careers as social workers were really beginning. At Hull House not only did they have an opportunity to see the seamy side of Chicago, but they were part of a group for whom to see a need was to start immediately to try to find a way to meet it. They were in a center to which others turned when they wanted help with the problems of the day. There is ample evidence that their creative minds were welcomed by the Hull House group, and it is equally certain that the group helped them develop their capacities.

At the School of Civics and Philanthropy they had the opportunity to study the operations of social agencies and social conditions in Chicago, and they were also inevitably drawn into consideration of the total problem of preparing people for social work. I wonder if either of them realized that they were setting their hands to a plow which they would never drop, to a task which would be in the forefront of their many endeavors throughout their working lives. I wonder if they foresaw that they were starting a life partnership that would enrich their personal lives and make their professional careers so intertwined that they would always be thought of together.

Grace Abbott's life and work were also affected. At Hull House it was inevitable that her sister and Miss Breckinridge should become concerned with the problems of the immigrant. The "neighbors" at Hull House were, many of them, new arrivals in this country; they brought their problems, their tales of exploitation, to the sympathetic and indignant ears of the Hull House residents. One of the first efforts of these two new residents was concerned with the formation of an agency, the Immigrants' Protective League, to study their problems but, above all, to offer what the name implies, protection from exploitation. Whether the idea emanated from them or from others I do not know. I do know that the suggestion of Grace Abbott as its director came from them. She was a student at the university at the time, untried in administrative tasks, with her abilities unknown. But Miss Breckinridge—I am quite sure it was Miss Breckinridge and not Edith Abbott—saw in her the fire and the drive, the courage and the intelligence, needed to make the work of the agency a success. Thus Grace Abbott, too, became a social worker and got her chance to show the stuff of which she was made.

1 Edith Abbott did not underestimate her sister, but it is inconceivable that she would have been the one to push her at this time.
GRACE ABBOTT

Because her work is more easily separated from that of the other two, her contribution more easy to isolate, I am going to consider Grace Abbott first. Although her work can be identified as hers and although her name was associated with endeavors with which theirs was not and not connected with efforts known to be theirs, it would be a mistake to think that either she or the others worked in complete independence or that the contributions of any one of the three would have been quite what they were without the help of the other two. Although for many years Grace Abbott was separated from them by a thousand miles of space, the flood of letters that went back and forth, the long-distance telephone calls, the frequent trips to Chicago from Washington or to Washington from Chicago, attest the close contact that was maintained and the extent to which advice was both sought and given on her problems and on theirs. "My sister thinks" was a phrase which we at Chicago heard over and over again. Perhaps it is worth noting here that what the younger sister thought frequently was cited to explain a modification in the thinking of the elder sister.

Grace Abbott's positions outline her career: director of the Immigrants' Protective League from its founding in 1908 until 1917; executive secretary of the Massachusetts Commission on Immigration in 1913–14 (on leave from IPL); director of the child-labor division of the United States Children's Bureau, 1917–18, and responsible for enforcing the federal child-labor law, which was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 1918; executive secretary of the Illinois Immigration Commission, 1919–21; chief of the United States Children's Bureau, 1921–34; professor of public welfare, University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration, 1934 until her death in 1939. This mere statement of the positions she held shows a steady movement in the responsibilities she was called on to assume.

Her extracurricular activities, if one may call them that, must also be taken into account. It would be tedious to name them all, even all the important ones. A sample tells the story. In 1916 she was chairman of the committee to organize a conference on oppressed nationalities, to be held in Washington; in 1919 she was the representative of the United States Department of Labor in planning the first International Labour Conference and chairman of the children's committee of that conference; from 1923 to 1927 she served as the United States representative on the League of Nations Committee on Traffic in Women and Children; in 1934–35 she was a member of the advisory council on the Committee on Economic Security which drew up the plans for the Social Security Act; in 1935 and again in 1937 she was chairman of the United States delegation to the International Labour Conference in Geneva.

Thus even the formal record has a story to tell. It tells of a woman who made the kind of contributions in everything she undertook that led to ever widening fields of activity. It tells of a breadth of interests, with at the same time a concentration that shows their underlying unity. If we had no more than the record, we should know that Grace Abbott was an unusual woman and that Chicago could well be proud that it had given her her first opportunities. We could surmise that she had learned things in Chicago that served her well.

Our concern here, however, is to look
behind the record. What did she bring to her various tasks that won the approval shown by the recorded movement? What was the nature of her contribution? At the time of her death many people paid their tributes, and I have been able to draw on these, as well as my own knowledge from many associations with her, in attempting to analyze her qualities and contribution.

Her special qualities can be easily stated. They include her clear thinking that went directly to the heart of an issue; her ability to arrive at a decision quickly; her dauntless courage; her amazing qualities as a fighter for the things in which she believed. She was the kind of fighter who hit hard and at the vulnerable spots but showed no personal rancor as she hit, who sensed approaching danger and prepared for it, who was a master of strategy, so that she marshaled the forces needed and used them appropriately. These abilities were shown many times, perhaps never more dramatically than in 1930. At that time there was a movement initiated by a committee planning the White House Conference, looking toward the dismemberment of the Children's Bureau and the transfer of some of its important tasks to the United States Public Health Service. Grace Abbott learned of the proposal and succeeded in forestalling it. Only her sister could tell the tale of the means by which this was done. I remember from Edith Abbott's accounts that they included a visit to the President, a direct challenge in a committee in which she was a minority of one, an organization of support from leading pediatricians and women's organizations of many types, support which was so overwhelming that the enemy was routed. This was probably one of the most important victories of her career. It not only settled the particular issue at least for many years; it also demonstrated the wide support for the Children's Bureau that could be marshaled if the bureau were attacked. It set a pattern of fighting that could not be forgotten and made politicians wary of attacking that organization.

I wish to give one other illustration of Grace Abbott in action. In her early work on the Massachusetts Immigration Commission she uncovered some pretty unsavory practices of the steamship companies. She reported these to the heads of the companies before her published report was written. They offered to change these practices if she would not mention them in her report. Her answer was given immediately. She could not conceal the facts which she had been charged with finding and reporting. She would be glad, however, to report that these practices had been discontinued if the companies would give her evidence that this had been done. To a young worker on her staff this was a lesson in integrity and strategy that made a deep impression.

It is not enough to know her qualities. We are concerned also with her special contributions. In what way was the world different because Grace Abbott worked in it? An adequate answer to this question is far beyond my power. That would demand a knowledge of the whole history of social welfare in this country, with a nice appraisal of the contributions of a large number of individuals. From my limited knowledge I should venture to predict that the historian of American social welfare will pick out as Grace Abbott's most significant contribution the pattern she set in federal-state co-operation. In her administration of the first federal child-labor law she worked out a distribution of federal and state responsibilities in enforcement of a federal law that has been carried over to the enforce-
ment of the Fair Labor Standards Act of today. In her administration of the Mat-
ternity and Infancy Act (the Sheppard-
Towner Act) she had an opportunity to
show for the first time how the states and
the federal government could work to-
gether under a grant-in-aid program of
social welfare. I think it is not making
extravagant claims for Grace Abbott’s
work to state that the demonstration she
given in this relatively small grant-
in-aid program influenced the form of the
social security program upon which we
embarked in 1935.

EDITH ABBOTT AND SOPHONISBA
BRECKINRIDGE

The list of positions held by Edith
Abbott and Miss Breckinridge is far less
impressive than that of Grace Abbott.
After they entered social work, they
worked for only two organizations, the
School of Civics and Philanthropy until
it was dissolved in 1920 and the Univer-
sity of Chicago. Thus their positions give
little indication of the magnitude of their
achievements. One may indeed trace
their rise up the academic ladder, but
many have climbed that who have no
real claim to distinction. Certainly, it is
not for this that we honor them.

Their contributions to social welfare
may be summarized under three main
headings: the contributions to profes-
sional education, the direct contribu-
tions to the social services in Chicago and el-
sewhere, and their research into social
problems. These were not separate and
distinct lines of activity. They all served
one purpose, the improvement of the wel-
fare program so that the disadvantaged
in our community might have richer
lives. Miss Abbott and Miss Breckin-
ridge had little use for the idea that those
interested in social welfare should be di-
vided into the doers and the thinkers or
the doers and the teachers. Rather they
saw each activity, participation in the
welfare services, research, and teaching,
as enriching both of the others. They
practiced what they believed and demo-
strated as perhaps no one else in our
field has done the value of this threefold
approach.

They are probably best known for
their contributions to professional edu-
cation, but it is worthy of note that in the
material they furnished to Who’s Who
they always listed their occupations as
social worker, not as professor or educa-
tor. I believe, therefore, that they would
not be offended if I discussed first their
contributions to the welfare services. The
story of what they did to improve these
services in Chicago has never been writ-
ten. Much of it cannot be found in rec-
ords, but only in the memories of indi-
viduals who worked with them or saw
their activities in relation to some spe-
cific program. Certainly the story cannot
be told here. A few illustrations will have
to suffice. They were instrumental in the
creation of new services where they saw
a need. The Immigrants’ Protective
League has already been mentioned; the
Cook County Bureau of Public Welfare,
now the Department of Welfare, and the
Children’s Division of the Chicago Wel-
fare Department are other striking in-
stances. They helped to refashion and
transform agencies whose programs were
outmoded. The change in the Chicago
Orphan Asylum to the Chicago Child
Care Society, a change which long pre-
ceded the change in name, is one that im-
mediately comes to mind in this con-
nection. They helped the young agencies
to grow strong; they helped the agencies of
good standards to maintain and improve
what they had, for they were never satis-
fied with the good; they wanted the best.

Their methods varied, but one illus-
traction shows an approach that was almost a pattern repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, many times. The Chicago Orphan Asylum back in the 1920's was an old institution whose program had been little affected by the newer ideas of what children needed. A new board member, recently arrived in Chicago, learned that C. C. Carstens, whom she had known in the East, was giving a lecture in Miss Breckinridge's class in child welfare. She went to hear him and after the lecture asked him if his organization, the Child Welfare League of America, ever made studies of institutions such as the COA. Miss Breckinridge immediately spoke up: "But, Mrs. H., you don't need to go to the East to have your study made, when the University of Chicago is right here. We could make the study for you." And "we" did. At the time Ethel Verry was a student at the university, working on her doctorate. She had started her dissertation, but Miss Breckinridge got hold of her and told her that it would be much better for her to make this study of the COA, and that this would serve quite as well for her Doctor's thesis. Those who knew Miss Breckinridge do not need to be told that Miss Verry had no time to think it over before she found herself embarked on the study.

As the study progressed, Miss Breckinridge kept in close touch with it. In fact, Miss Verry recalls that she often was not given time to write down her findings but had to report them orally. Whenever Miss Breckinridge learned of something that she thought should be changed, she invited a few of the board members to have lunch with her and Miss Verry at the Quadrangle Club, where Miss Verry would discuss some of her findings and Miss Breckinridge would start her guests planning to make changes. Minor changes were made in this way, but Miss Breckinridge thought something more was needed. Miss Verry says that before anyone—least of all herself—quite knew what was happening, she was installed on the staff of COA and given the responsibility of transforming its program. She did not have to carry the responsibility alone, however. In fact, she might have found difficulty in doing so if she had wanted to. Miss Breckinridge stood behind her, both willing and eager to advise her on any problem, large or small.

This illustration shows these two women in action. It shows them seizing an opportunity, however slight, getting the facts, using people in a strategic position, moving in gradually, getting a qualified worker in whom they had confidence, and staying to support and encourage as long as there was any occasion to do so. It shows their desire to have student research contribute to improvement of the welfare services; it shows, too, the means by which their interest in professional education made possible the services they rendered to the welfare program. Not only did the opportunity to serve often come, as in this instance, through their connection with a professional school; even more important, their ability to effect the changes they deemed necessary was dependent to a large extent on finding qualified workers who would undertake the task. Such workers would not have been available without a professional school of social work. Miss Breckinridge and Miss Abbott would not have known them if they themselves had not been a part of that school. They would not have had the opportunity to follow through with their counsel after the worker had assumed responsibility, had they not had the relations with students which inspired respect and confidence. Thus a consideration of what they
did for the welfare services leads inevitably to a consideration of their contribution to professional education.

What was education for social work when Miss Breckinridge and Edith Abbott came into it in 1908? Let us look first at what it was in Chicago. Since 1903 a group of social workers headed by Graham Taylor had been actively engaged in trying to prepare workers for this field, in the Institute of Social Science, first in the extension department of the university, then under the Chicago Commons Association, and in 1908 in the institute’s successor, the independently incorporated Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. Looking at the course offerings of either the institute or the school in its first years shows the nature of the educational program. The subjects covered varied somewhat from year to year, but they were all related to social problems, which we would recognize today as concerns of social workers. Usually one course, occasionally two, would be given by a single instructor; most of the courses were series of lectures on one subject, given by almost as many different people as there were sessions in the series. One looks in vain for any semblance of a curriculum or an integrated program of study. The catalogues give little indication of the academic standards that were maintained or even that were attempted. From my own experience, however, which began four years later, it seems that they were far below those of a recognized college. The lectures were usually informative; occasionally they were stimulating. They had the advantage of bringing before us well-known figures in the field who talked about subjects that they knew from experience; but the lectures all too often lacked structure and sounded as if they were given with hasty preparation or no preparation at all.

By 1912, when I knew the program, the influence of Miss Breckinridge and Miss Abbott was beginning to be felt. In the research department, their special province, real teaching was being done. Outside this, one could note more courses being given by a single instructor (Grace Abbott’s course on immigration was a notable example), more lectures in a series by a single individual, so that twenty lectures might be covered by six or eight lecturers. One could also note between 1908 and 1912 an increasing use of either Miss Breckinridge or Miss Abbott as one of the lecturers in various courses. One can see the entering wedge of a single lecture with Miss Abbott’s or Miss Breckinridge’s name listed toward the end and trace, even from the records, their increasing role in the course. One can surmise, although the records do not show this, that they also took increasing responsibility for the selection of other lecturers and for attempts to get some unity in the diversity. I know that they took responsibility for preparing examinations when examinations were given.

For twelve years Miss Breckinridge and Miss Abbott worked in the School of Civics and Philanthropy. They entered in the research department, but it was not long until Miss Breckinridge’s interest in the total program was recognized by her being given the position of dean. In these twelve years the program of the school was transformed. I do not mean to say that this transformation was entirely due to their efforts; others worked with them, supported them, and suggested changes. I believe, however, that without these two the changes that would have inevitably been made would have been very different. By 1920 Miss Breckinridge could write Miss Lathrop that the
school now had a "good curriculum in training for general social work, limited by limited resources, but on the whole fairly adequate." We can see in that curriculum, as we could not see in 1908, the essential elements of the professional curriculum of today.

The financing of the school, however, was difficult, as I have already suggested. After the Russell Sage grant came to an end, the existence of the school was always precarious. Even a student and later a research assistant knew a little of the trials that the staff were undergoing. I was permitted only an occasional glimpse, however. I still do not know the whole story. I do know, however, of budgets that were not assured beyond the current year, so that each year funds had to be obtained to enable the school to continue; I know of years when even the year's expenditures were not underwritten; I know of salaries unpaid for many months at a time; I can see from the little that I do know the tremendous courage that it took to maintain the school during these years. I cannot appraise the sacrifices that were made or tell whose courage carried them forward. I do know that Graham Taylor, too, assumed his full share of sacrifice and gave his full share of courage and faith.

By 1920, however, the situation was getting worse instead of better, and it was this fact that led to the decision to attempt to get the university to establish a school of social work with a program founded on the program then in operation at the School of Civics and Philanthropy. Miss Breckinridge undertook the negotiations with the university; and in the autumn of 1920 she and Miss Abbott and some of the junior staff members of the old school were in the university to start professional education for social work as an integral part of the university.

This move to the university was of great significance. It was precipitated by the financial troubles of the independent School, but Miss Abbott wrote Miss Lathrop—and I am certain that she spoke for Miss Breckinridge as well—that she had believed for some years that education for social work should be incorporated into a university program. In 1915 Felix Frankfurter had expressed his belief that this was where it belonged. The social work world, however, and especially the schools of social work then in existence, had not agreed with him. It was a daring move in 1920 to give up the independent status of the old school and to agree to submit to university control. Most of the leading schools in the United States thought it dangerous, as they feared the program would become too "academic" and especially that field work would not be recognized or allowed its proper place in the curriculum. The demonstration that these fears were groundless could probably not have taken place, had not the University of Chicago been the kind of university that it is, not bound by academic tradition and not afraid to try the new. It was fortunate for the whole future of education for social work that the pattern was set in this particular university by two people whose academic standing was impeccable and whose faith in the importance of field work was unshakable.

This move to the university was important not only because it set a new pattern for social work education but also, and probably of greater importance, because it gave Edith Abbott and Miss Breckinridge the chance to develop their ideas of a curriculum and make their special contributions to education for social
work. It would take a volume to analyze in any detail what these contributions were. Here they can only be summarized. The special characteristics of their curriculum rested, I believe, on its reflection of their philosophy about the task of the social worker and about the role of the state and the law in the promotion of social welfare. Each of these calls for discussion.

The responsibilities of the social worker as they saw them included (1) helping individuals in trouble, (2) participating in all phases of the work of the agencies through which that help was given, (3) participating in social planning of new welfare services and of new social arrangements that would prevent people from needing help, and (4) engaging in research and utilizing the findings of research to improve the helping process, the administration of the welfare services, and the social planning in which they engaged.

This concept of the responsibilities of the social worker probably was not theirs alone. The program of the School of Civics and Philanthropy had reflected at least certain elements of it from its foundation. Other social workers in other parts of the country, too, showed by words or by deeds that they shared this concept. No one, however, as far as I can determine, succeeded as Miss Abbott and Miss Breckinridge did in building these ideas into a curriculum. Other enterprises engaged in the preparation of social workers either concentrated almost exclusively on the treatment courses or gave these little or no place and emphasized study of social problems. The contribution of Miss Abbott and Miss Breckinridge lay in their ability to fuse these two emphases into an educational program.

In their ideas about the role of the state and hence of law in promoting social welfare, they were definitely ahead of their time. In a period when most social workers, especially perhaps those engaged in social work education, feared state action and ignored the many welfare activities in which the states were engaged, in a period when the public services offered no employment opportunities for professionally trained social workers, Miss Breckinridge and Miss Abbott had a firm belief in what was later known as the “welfare state.” They saw, that is, that the state must be the most effective instrument for the promotion of human welfare. They saw the many state welfare services, the institutions for the insane, the feeble-minded, the delinquent, the dependent child, the relief given under the old poor law, as touching the lives of many more people than were reached by private philanthropy. They saw the deplorable condition of many of these services and believed that it was the responsibility of social workers to make them better. It would be fascinating to trace how they came by this belief, but that must wait. The point here is that these ideas were translated into the curriculum they devised for the school they directed. Thus courses in public welfare administration, on various phases of law, on the child and the state, were given at the University of Chicago when they were unknown in other schools. I well remember the criticisms, almost the derision, to which this school was subjected because of the place given to these courses. It is still true that a larger place is given to them at the University of Chicago than in many other schools; but no school today can ignore them, and I have heard no recent criticism of our program for emphasizing them.
The work done at Chicago affected education for social work throughout the country. Miss Abbott and Miss Breckinridge were not interested in making Chicago a school with a unique program. They were interested in improving professional education wherever it was carried on. They were active in expressing their ideas at the National Conference of Social Work and at other meetings where education was discussed; they helped to form an association of schools of social work and to make it an agency for setting standards; they worked through this association in sharing their ideas on curriculum and even in preparing syllabi to show how course content could be organized; perhaps most important of all, they sent their graduates, especially those who had obtained the doctoral degree, to other schools of social work, frequently to direct such schools. Thus their ideas spread and influenced the whole pattern of social work education. I do not mean to give you the impression that the transformation in social work education that took place between 1920 and 1940 was entirely due to the efforts of these two women. Others worked with them and shared their ideas. Furthermore, the depression and its aftermath brought vividly to everyone’s attention the importance of the state in social welfare. I am not certain that, without this, their ideas on public welfare courses would have won the acceptance they have today. I do mean to say, however, that Miss Abbott and Miss Breckinridge were among the most active and most influential in changing social work education. Their willingness to work and to take on onerous tasks, their clear thinking, their ability to express their ideas both in speech and in writing, won for them a position of recognized leadership which in my opinion no others attained. I well remember the first meeting of American Association of Schools of Social Work when neither of them thought they should participate. We felt like orphaned children and knew that the meeting would lack the sparkle to which we had become accustomed. Well, we have learned to carry on, but many a time we have longed for the deep voice of Miss Abbott booming out from a far corner of the room or the clear treble of Miss Breckinridge with the ideas that both expressed.

No doubt I have dealt inadequately with some phases of the work of all three of these pioneers and have left untouched many other phases of their work that should be considered if we were to know them for what they were. I cannot take time even to note them here. But I cannot close without calling your attention to the tremendous influence they had on the lives and opinions of others. That influence sprang in part from their willingness to give direct advice, sometimes even when it was not asked for. I have mentioned Ethel Verry’s giving up work for her doctorate when Miss Breckinridge told her she should go the CAO. I recall Phyllis Osborn working contentedly in school social work in Kalamazoo, Michigan, when she got a message from Edith Abbott that she should go to Nebraska to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Countless other instances could be cited of people whose whole professional lives were changed because they listened to the advice of one of the three. Far more important, however, was the influence that was exerted indirectly and unconsciously. “The going was hard,” said one former student. ‘I felt discouraged and ready to give up. Then I seemed to see Miss Breckinridge looking over my shoulder and hear her voice saying ‘The work of the world is
not done by giving up when you get tired.' Others would remember Edith Abbott’s messages from Pilgrim’s Progress or Grace Abbott’s farewell to the Children’s Bureau: “Will it be up hill all the way? Yes, all the way.” The source of their influence, whether exerted directly or indirectly, was the respect they inspired and the example they set of devotion to the common good, entirely divorced from the pursuit of personal ends. “You cannot get mad at Miss Abbott,” said a Chicago social worker who had crossed swords with her at a committee meeting and who had emerged somewhat bloody from the fray. “I think she is wrong in this case, but I always know that she has no personal ax to grind, no private interest to foster.” Some day I hope a biographer will be found who can tell the story of the lives of these three women, one by one or in some combination, a biographer with a gift for literary expression, the time and the patience for poring over records and listening to anecdotes, a keen insight into personality, an understanding of American social welfare in the first half of this century. Such a biographer should be able to record for future generations the achievements of three remarkable women. He should be able to make Chicagoans proud that this city had given them their opportunities and to give social workers of the future renewed pride in their profession. If the biographer has the skill that I wish him to have, he will show these three as vital, warm human beings, with weaknesses as well as strengths, so that his readers will get a sense of having met real people and will feel that they have been in the presence of greatness. Many things, however, that we the privileged have had cannot be given to future generations. They cannot be given, for example, the experience of listening to Edith Abbott in her beautiful voice read “The First Robin.”

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Received November 24, 1953