A School for Utopia: Marietta Johnson and the Organic Idea.

Janet Ruie Mcgrath
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/6205

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
A SCHOOL FOR UTOPIA:
MARIETTA JOHNSON AND THE ORGANIC IDEA
VOLUME I

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by
Janet Ruie McGrath
B.S., Lamar University, 1978
May 1996
to Bob and Robbin
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Projects of this magnitude are rarely possible without the cooperation of family, friends and colleagues. My own thanks are due the Marietta Johnson Museum staff, including Sherrold "Doc" Pope and, especially, Dorothy Beiser Cain who made it all possible. The museum archives along with "Dot's" invaluable assistance, guidance and hospitality not only urged me on but instilled in me and in this project the essence of the Fairhope spirit.

It was also my great good fortune to be able to interview many of the Organic School alumni: Sam and Helen Dyson; Jacquelin, Elsie, Grace, Claude and Dian of the Arnold family; Helene Beiser Hunter; Dorothy Beiser Cain; Gladys Hedden Hayes; Frances Perkins West; Joseph Johnston; Dr. Pierce Frederick; Joyce Totten Bishop and Mary Lois Adshead. Their enthusiasm was contagious.

Finally, my gratitude to my Doctoral Committee, Bill Pinar, Ann Trousdale, Petra Munro, Patrick McGee and especially David England. Dr. England not only took a genuine interest in my project but he helped me to see what I was unable to see in my own writing.

Special thanks to my friend Marjorie Smith for her encouragement and Ann Evans for her expert assistance.

But most of all, I'm deeply grateful for my dear husband Bob who acted as cook, housekeeper and secretary for over a year while I pursued a feminist dream.

iv
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION** ........................................... iii  
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ............................... iv  
**ABSTRACT** ........................................... viii

### VOLUME I

#### CHAPTER

1 **INTRODUCTION** .................................... 1  
   The Study ...................................... 1  
   Background - Then and Now ..................... 9  
   The School .................................. 16

2 **THE PROGRESSIVE ERA** ............................ 27

3 **TRANSFORMING EDUCATION** ........................ 33

4 **FOUNDING A UTOPIA** .............................. 68  
   Overview ...................................... 68  
   The Founding and Founders .................... 70  
   Issues of Gender in Utopia .................... 97  
   Issues of Color in Utopia .................... 119

5 **MARIETTA JOHNSON - THE YEARS OF PROMISE** .... 130  
   Overview ...................................... 130  
   The Woman - Marietta Pierce Johnson .......... 131  
   Beginnings and a Chance Discovery ............ 140  
   The Organic Trio - Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey .................. 156

6 **THE YEARS OF DISCOVERY** .......................... 194

### VOLUME II

7 **A SCHOOL FOR UTOPIA** ............................ 227  
   Introduction - Voices from Utopia ............ 227  
   Part One - Shaping a Practice ................ 230  
      Overview .................................... 230  
      Context and a Perspective .................. 230  
      The Dewey View ................................ 235  
      The Curriculum Canvas ...................... 243  
      The Artists .................................. 266  
   Part Two - Tensions as Theory Meets Practice 282  
      Overview .................................... 282  
      The Organic View: Learners and Learning ... 283  
      Socialization ................................ 296  
      Family and Community ....................... 303
ABSTRACT

This history, written from a feminist perspective, uses historical materials which trace unusual social and educational experiments in Fairhope, Alabama, in the early twentieth century. The early development of the utopian Fairhope community, founded by E. B. Gaston and a group of like-minded midwestern social reformers, is reviewed. Gaston's resolve to alleviate the worst inequities of monopolistic capitalism through practicing the single tax principles of Henry George is placed in historical context. Both the social experiment and its ideologically complementary Organic School are situated within the period known as the progressive era which followed closely upon the industrial revolution. The period was marked by crisis, confrontation and contradiction as an industrial economy replaced an agrarian economy, as an urban world of impersonal bureaucracies replaced rural villages and farms--the small, personal social units which had heretofore defined the American landscape.

Marietta Johnson, the Minnesota teacher who would found the Organic School, is central to this study. Her school would come to be known as one of the most radically child-centered schools of the progressive era and the only such school in the south. The study explores Johnson's life and examines the philosophy upon which her school was based, a philosophy influenced by the writings of Nathan Oppenheim,
C. Hanford Henderson, and John Dewey. Johnson’s organic idea, synthesized from the three, is presented and critiqued, and the practices of her school defined. The study reveals the bases of her organic theory—the monistic nature of the child, the inseparability of body, mind and spirit—and Johnson’s conviction and that all three must be considered in the pedagogical process. The voices of Marietta Johnson’s own students speak for the school throughout the history.

The study chronicles the further unfolding of Johnson’s organic idea as it came to embrace relationships between individuals and between the school and the Fairhope community. The spirit of cooperation and community which evolved is explored and stands revealed in sharp relief against the mechanistic backdrop of "Gilded Age" industrialism.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Study

The objectives of this historical study are several. The primary objectives are to document the life of Marietta Johnson and to define and analyze her organic idea while tracing it from its inception through its evolutionary stages. Secondary objectives are: 1) to organize a conceptual framework for Marietta Johnson's theory and practice of organic education within the national phenomenon known as the progressive era and within the microcosm of the Fairhope community, 2) to identify the influences undergirding the formation of Johnson's organic theory.

The study is significant for several reasons. First, it recovers the history of a woman thereby contributing to a genre that has been neglected until recent years. Relatively little historical scholarship has been devoted to the lives of women and only within the last fifteen years has serious attention been given to the recuperation of women's histories. Adding to the relevance of the study is that it historicizes an educational experiment which was conceived and founded by a woman and remained subject to her sole control and influence throughout her lifetime. The Organic School was a singularly clear and pure expression of one woman's philosophy unfolding.
throughout her lifetime. Therefore, this study affords a glimpse into what was an exclusively matriarchal institution in direction and purpose. The study will also contribute valuable insights into a dynamic and unique period of history, a period when women emerged from the domestic sphere into public life. Finally, it will gather into one comprehensive document what are presently a fragmentary, and often historically inconsistent, collection of anecdotes, brief accounts, monographs, news items and journal articles which pertain to Marietta Johnson and her Fairhope school. The legacy of Marietta Johnson, Fairhope and the Organic School is part of a rich national heritage which we do well to remember.

The intent of this inquiry is to review and analyze Marietta Johnson's experiment in organic education within the context of the Fairhope community and the larger context of the progressive era. The parameters of the study will be confined to the events that took place from the inception of the Fairhope, Alabama, community in 1894 until Marietta Johnson’s death in 1938, a period of time that is roughly coterminous with the progressive era. A brief discussion of the progressive era and an analysis of progressive education within the era will precede the main body of the narrative. Progressivism was a phenomenon manifesting itself as a reaction to the American
industrial revolution, an era unparalleled for economic and social unrest.

The founding and early development of the Fairhope colony, an anachronism within the industrial revolution, will be situated within the context of the industrial revolution. The colony was a semi-socialistic utopian experiment conceived and founded by E. B. Gaston and a group of Iowa populists who deplored the excesses of "Gilded Age" industrial capitalism. The founders sought to redress social and economic inequities through founding a model community of "true cooperative individualism" based upon the single tax principles of the political economist and visionary, Henry George. George's theory, that land belonged by natural right to the people in common while labor and its products belonged to the individual, will be described and discussed.

Johnson's organic idea, the centerpiece of her philosophy, will be set out and analyzed throughout the history of its development. Her philosophy, and later, her practice, rejected the rigid and formulaic standards that were conventional education and constructed an innovative, liberatory and egalitarian educational model based upon the observations of physician Nathan Oppenheim, as well as the educational theories of C. Hanford Henderson and John Dewey. The term "organic education" originated with Henderson and described a program which
would meet the needs of the whole child. The organic idea posited mind, body and spirit as a monism, incapable of functioning separately within the individual organism. Organic education, as interpreted and practiced by Johnson, became one of the more radical versions of child-centered pedagogy, a pedagogy which placed the child rather than the subject matter at the center of concern.

The evolution of Johnson's organic idea will also be explored as it expanded to include the organic relations between individuals as well as within individuals. The curriculum and activities which evolved as an expression of Johnson's unique philosophy will be described in detail. Activities included those designed to meet the creative needs of the individual child. Others were specifically designed to foster social relationships among the students and between the school and community. Thus, Johnson's school, like the Fairhope community, became an experiment in "true cooperative individualism." The socio-educational theories of John Dewey intersected with those of Johnson and the two will be compared.

A lesser purpose of the study is that of defining and evaluating women's roles in the progressive era. The transitional social role of women in the period will be explored in the chapter "Transforming Education." The roles and activities of women in the Fairhope community will be described and discussed later, in the chapter
"Founding a Utopia." Women's roles shifted dramatically during the progressive era as their sphere of influence grew to encompass the public domain as well as the domestic. The community-building qualities of women and the implications of the phenomenon as a feminist construct are analyzed. The community/relationship theme forms a unifying link between progressive women, Fairhope women and Marietta Johnson's organic idea. The relational thrust of women's activities in the progressive period as well as the organic philosophy will be posited as antithetical to the mechanistic world-view which came to dominate the post-industrial American experience.

The historical method of research was employed to collect material. The data used to describe and interpret the development of Marietta Johnson's theory and the founding of the Organic School were gathered primarily from original sources and documents and are thus adjudged to be authentic. Primary sources of historical data included Johnson's *Youth in a World of Men* (1929) which elaborates Johnson's philosophy; her semi-autobiographical *Thirty Years With an Idea*, published posthumously, and various newspaper and journal articles written by and about Johnson during her lifetime. The Fairhope *Courier*, having faithfully recorded Johnson's activities and those of her school throughout from 1901 until 1938, was thoroughly researched and supplied an invaluable fund of
first-hand accounts. Interviews with Marietta Johnson's own students and contemporaries were conducted in Fairhope. These oral recollections elucidate and verify the activities of the Organic School and illuminate to some degree the personal dimensions of its founder.

Historical research by the writer also included a study of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and the works which were cited by Johnson as having influenced her philosophy: Nathan Oppenheim's *The Development of the Child* and C. Hanford Henderson's *Education and the Larger Life*. John Dewey visited the Organic School in 1913, and, together with his daughter Evelyn, carefully documented its activities in a chapter titled "An Experiment" in their *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915). Marietta Johnson's personal *Scrap Book*, housed in the Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education was also reviewed. It contains letters, programs, clippings, newspaper items and other documents gathered from cities throughout the country and Europe. Dorothy and Kenneth Cain have unearthed a wealth of original photographs, papers, monographs, videotapes, publications and artifacts from the Organic School. The Cains subsequently founded the Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope and their collection is now located in its archives. Original documents from the period found in the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation archives and at the Fairhope Library were also consulted by the author.
Important secondary sources included University of Virginia historian Paul Gaston’s chapter on Johnson in *Women of Fair Hope*. Gaston, the grandson of Fairhope’s founder, E. B. Gaston, attended the Organic School from kindergarten through high school. His recently published *Man and Mission* also yielded useful data on the origins of the Fairhope Single Tax Colony and the history its founder, E. B. Gaston. Paul and Blanche Alyea’s *Fairhope 1894-1954*, a meticulous account of the Fairhope colony from its inception, was another major source of Fairhope history. Other notable secondary sources included Lawrence Cremin’s comprehensive history of progressive education *The Transformation of the School* and Patricia Albjerg Graham’s history of the Progressive Education Association *From Arcady to Academe*. Cremin and Graham include Marietta Johnson in their discussion of progressive education and the Progressive Education Association.

Having defined its objectives, significance and intent along with the materials used, the limitations of this history will now be addressed. It will be a history written from a feminist perspective, not a social history of the progressive era, of education or of women. It will be a social history only inasmuch as it endeavors to set the narrative within the context of the progressive era. Furthermore, a reading of the woman Marietta Johnson,
rather than an in-depth discussion and critique of her writing, is the purpose of this study. However, quotations from her writings will be used liberally throughout to document and verify the researcher's thesis.

Finally, the scope of this history as a feminist project will be limited in that it is neither contextualized nor analyzed within the framework of contemporary feminist theory. Nonetheless, it is a study written by a woman about a woman. Moreover, it is written by a woman who is aware of feminist concerns and currents of thought and sensitive to these issues. Inasmuch as this history will be written from the feminist perspective, feminist literary critic Patrocinio P. Schweickert's "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" has provided its feminist framework.¹

In "Reading Ourselves," Schweickert analyzes Adrienne Rich's "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" in which Rich describes her visit to Emily Dickinson's home in Amherst, Massachusetts.² In Rich's essay, Dickinson herself, rather than her poetry, becomes the subject of the "reading," a subject whose heart and mind Rich is

¹ "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" won the 1984 Florence Howe Award for Outstanding Feminist Scholarship.

² Rich's essay discussed here can be found in her volume of selected prose entitled On Lies, Secrets, and Silence published in 1979.
endeavoring to enter. This placing of the woman subject within her own social, historical and cultural context is the first of three principal tenets of criticism favored by Schweickert (46-7). Her second tenet proposes that the feminist writer should speak as a "witness in defense" of her woman subject. And, above all, one must understand that however one may try to enter the heart and mind of the woman, the reading of a life or a text is, in the end, only a subjective exercise and one can never really know the heart and mind of the subject. Thus Schweickert suggests an empathetic reading of women's lives and texts by other women, a constructive rather than deconstructive approach. The writer has endeavored to observe Schweickert's three tenets in this history of Marietta Johnson.

Background - Then and Now

I am speeding down a four-lane highway, heading toward the small town called Fairhope, located deep in the heart of rural Alabama. I am going there to learn about the life of a woman called Marietta Johnson. It will soon be 90 years since she established a school on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay and it was there that she wrought out an educational philosophy, an idea which she eventually named "organic."

It now seems eons ago when, as a newly-born feminist in a curriculum theory course, the seeds of this project
were planted all because Herbert Kliebard dedicated two paragraphs on Marietta Johnson in his history of modern curriculum from 1893-1958, the only woman granted such an honor. However, what piqued my interest even more were two sentences in his preface where he admitted being "bothered by the imbalance in historical studies in education. . . . [because] A great deal of attention has been lavished on the question of who went to school but relatively little on the question of what happened once all those children and youth walked inside the schoolhouse doors" (x). In other words, what happened to children and teachers behind those schoolroom doors? But Kliebard did little to resolve his bothersome dilemma in a history that covered a time span of 65 years, dismissing it shortly as "a formidable task."

But I couldn't dismiss it from my own thinking, and there it hovered through several years and until my course work had been finished. Why, I kept wondering, does one hear so much about curriculum theorists and so little about "all those children," not to mention all of those teachers "inside the schoolhouse doors." What did happen once all of those children and youth walked inside the schoolhouse doors? How was a child in Iowa affected by the movement called "Child Study" or one called "Social Darwinism" with its "survival of the fittest" implications? And how was it possible for a teacher to
weave the ever-emerging and ubiquitous curriculum theories into her days and through her lesson plans and into the textuality of school as each theory passed into, through and out of the curriculum? And I thought about it a good deal more when several trips to the library yielded almost no information or histories of women teachers, with the possible exception of women college administrators. What happened to all of the children was an even greater mystery though data indicated how many there were, what age group and where they attended, their test scores and other measurement statistics.

Later on, discussing Marietta Johnson with a fellow graduate student, I learned that the Fairhope school might still exist. That was in the beginning. Now I am traveling down this highway and wondering what I will find at my destination. Woods and farmlands fringe the roadway but there are flashy billboards pointing the direction to gambling casinos. Not far beyond the state line crossing from Mississippi into Alabama is the city of Mobile, only a short distance from Fairhope. A six lane highway takes me through the urban sprawl, its industry, smokestacks and slums, and leads me down into a long, dark tunnel under Mobile Bay. In a few minutes I am up onto the causeway over the bay where city and slum disappear in a bright expanse of sky and sparkling water.
Soon I am directed to turn right on Alternate Route 98, a two-lane road that continues for several miles. It is neatly mown, lined on either side with rows of young live oaks and crape myrtles surrounded by flower beds. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, unheralded by the familiar golden arches or "We Sell for Less" signs, the village of Fairhope appears. Sculptured pear trees line the streets of the business district and spring flowers are clustered everywhere up and down the sidewalks and in pots and hanging over the sidewalks. There are art shops and gift shops, book stores and boutiques with fashionable clothing in the windows.

Fairhope Avenue, the main thoroughfare, slopes steeply to the west, slashing through bluffs on either side down to Mobile Bay where a large, sculpted fountain cascades and a wharf juts far out into the bay, a restaurant at its mid-point. Roomy, pleasant parks extend for many blocks on either side of Fairhope Avenue both on the beach itself and the bluffs. The bluffs provide an unobstructed and tranquil vista of beach and bay below. The leader and founder of the Fairhope Colony, writing in one of the early issues of the Courier, described the lushness of the scenery with a rhetorical flourish:

Here we have a short strip of sandy beach, then a narrow park ranging in width from 100 to 250 feet and covered with almost every variety of shrub and tree which flourishes in this locality--pine, live oak, magnolia, cedar, juniper, cypress, gum, holly, bay, beech, youpon
and myrtle. On the east side of this "lower park," as we call it, a red clay bluff rises up almost perpendicularly to a height of nearly 40 feet. Along its serried edge tall, arrowly pines stand like sentinels looking out to the sea. (1 Jan. 1895)

Looking across the bay one can make out the city of Mobile, a hazy blur of architectural shapes in the distance. It seems light years away.

Dotted here and everywhere around the center of this "city set on a hill" above Mobile Bay are dozens of homes bearing plaques announcing their places on the National Historic Register. The elegant and the humble, the columned, embellished southern mansion and the homely cottage sit side by side blending comfortably and suggesting a certain homogeneity as well as eclecticism in their early tenants.

There is nothing about this placid, graceful, supremely satisfied setting which belies its utopian heritage. Yet this is the same city where an early citizen complained angrily that "The presence of goats and swine in our streets, especially the latter, with their attendant fleas and filth, is repugnant to all sense of decency and propriety" (Courier 21 July 1905). And this is the county where a citizen of African-American descent, supposedly a freeman, could be hunted down, tarred and
feathered, or hung without benefit of trial. And this is the state where an unobtrusive little woman started the civil rights movement by refusing to give up her seat at the front of a bus to a white man. Many stark incidents, including lynchings and church bombings, took place in this state in the early years of the civil rights movement. So it seems somehow paradoxical that this tranquil Alabama city overlooking Mobile Bay is where a man from Des Moines, Iowa, and later a woman from St. Paul, Minnesota, came to carve out their utopian dreams for a more just and humane world.

The moving spirit behind the establishment of the community of free thinkers which emerged in the final decade of the 1800's was Ernest B. Gaston, a young Iowa newspaperman "indignant over the excesses of the Gilded Age industrialism" (P. Gaston, *Women*, Fwd.). He was a social and political reformer of keen intelligence, broad-minded, tolerant and capable. From its conception in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1894, through its infancy as a rugged little community with twenty-eight settlers including women and children, and indeed until his death in 1937, he was the father-figure who presided over the Fairhope colony, encouraging, guiding and scolding. But utopian experiments such as Gaston's were not unusual in the

---

3 The Fairhope Courier reported one such incident, a lynching, in May of 1904 which act was assailed by the editor as a disgrace to Baldwin county.
period. It was an era alive with optimism and rich with grand schemes to save humanity when Gaston, together with the tiny band of idealists from several corners of the country, came to Baldwin county. And here they founded their unique vision of utopia upon the single tax principles of Henry George and dedicated it to the idea that "Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided that he infringes not on the equal freedom of every other man" (Courier 1 Jan. 1896).

In an era of proliferating experimental socialist communities, the Fairhopers had in mind what seemed a rather curious blend of cooperation and individualism. In their utopia the land would be held in common, but a single tax equal to its full rental value would be paid by the user once annually, which tax would provide municipal services. All labor and its products would belong to the individual free of taxation. The same seemingly contradictory themes of cooperation and individualism would also permeate the school that Marietta Johnson established in Fairhope in 1907, a school which became what some called the most radically child-centered of the

4 Robert S. Fogarty's research places the number of colonies established between 1861 and 1919 at 142 as compared with the 137 founded from 1787 to 1860 (Dictionary of American and Communal History xxiv). Moreover, he contends that "instead of weakness and irrelevance there was strong social purpose and a serious intent to respond directly to emerging social conditions by both spiritual and secular leaders" (All Things New 2).
progressive era schools in the United States (Cremin 152; Beck, American 114). Likewise, it was fitting that Henry George's philosophy was the only dogma expounded in Utopia's school, a school otherwise benignly tolerant of all diversity.

Just as E. B. Gaston was the guiding spirit behind political reform, Johnson was the charismatic moving spirit behind educational reform. Paul Gaston, a grandson of E. B. Gaston who also attended Marietta Johnson's Organic School offers the following insight:

My grandfather was the chief architect and principal leader of the community, but it was Mrs. Johnson who widened the scope and raised the sights of his experiment. Because of her it had a dimension and a destiny he did not dream of when he drew up the plans for his "model community"; and much of its fame radiated from what she created there. (Women 66)

Her school would become the centerpiece--both physically and psychically--the fulcrum around which the community came to revolve. She would become the maternal figure who not only nurtured its children but drew the whole community under her school's wing.

The School

Located in the center of Fairhope and within two blocks of city hall, on the site of what is now a community college campus, one finds a long white building with green shutters, perfectly symmetrical and faintly classical in style. A large bell tower crowns its summit and a wide, gabled porch extends invitingly along the
center front. The building bears an historic plaque claiming its early origins as "The Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education established in 1907." At the rear of the T-shaped building, down a wide hall and through three sets of tall, narrow wooden doors, is a high-ceilinged, one-room museum where have been gathered the artifacts and the memories of a school that stood in stark contrast to others of its time.

Looking out from portraits and photos on the wall, Marietta Johnson herself seems to preside over this room. Her back is straight. Her hair is dark brown and naturally wavy, parted in the middle and pulled softly back from a squarish face. Her mouth, firm but not set, curves slightly upward at the corners. The deep brown eyes are rather penetrating below dark eyebrows slightly arched. Hers is a serene face, strong but not stern, this woman who was entrusted with the care of many children not only from Fairhope but from every corner of the country and even a fair number from abroad. It was not the least uncommon for her to return from a lecture tour with a handful of children gathered from around the country. Nor was it uncommon for parents, having heard Mrs. Johnson lecture, to move to Fairhope just to enroll their children in her school. As her story unfolds, it will be seen that her community was not confined to Fairhope but included the world. And in doing so, E. B. Gaston's little village
did achieve a fame it could never have realized without her.

In this very room named the "Bell Building" for the 170 pound bell once housed in a tower at the very center of its lofty peak, Marietta Johnson taught children over eight decades ago. The light, airy room with high ceilings, wooden floors and wainscoting is now girded about with a profusion of photos and handmade objects such as pottery, metal jewelry, loomed fabrics, sculpture, hand-carved wood pieces and furniture. All were made in Marietta Johnson’s school where manual training and arts and crafts were required subjects for boys and girls. The focal point of the room is a piano and a display of folk dance costumes. And massed around the walls are many photos of young people dancing around wooden swords, Maypoles and each other. Folk dancing, one learns, was also a requirement at Mrs. Johnson’s school, so everyone danced and often the townspeople participated too, little children as well as the aged.

A long, low table, surrounded by small chairs sits in front of a blackboard across the end of the room. The table is now covered with scrapbooks cataloguing Marietta Johnson’s career; but in the early years of this century children sat around this very table helping each other with lessons and projects at a time when children in most schools were sitting at screwed-down desks, peering over
heads and down aisles at the teacher and the blackboard reciting their lessons. But Mrs. Johnson advocated cooperative study instead: "When children work, play, study together, reacting to one another, not merely to the teacher, there develops the most desirable interdependent spirit" (Thirty Years 92).

Not only were desks not fixed, but there was little that was fixed in utopia's most singular school. There were no report cards or grades and hence no academic prizes or punishments because its founder insisted that

If the school constantly makes external demands, the children come to believe that education is attained when demands are met. They should realize that education is growth—a gradual unfolding through happy, interested, wholesome activity. (Thirty Years 93)

There were no report cards; no C's or A's were attached to any student's name or record to be passed from teacher to teacher and grade to grade. Neither was there any pressure to "pass" since children were automatically grouped by chronological age not only to protect the not-so-brilliant from the fate of an inferiority complex, but in the now heterodoxical belief that the brilliant child needs "broadening by retarding" (Thirty Years 99). It seemed a pedagogical system fit indeed for Utopia!

Educators, feminist historians and other curious questors still make their way to Fairhope, their interest piqued by references in histories and papers to its most prominent early citizen. Marietta Johnson's name surfaces
frequently, if briefly, in progressive histories. Kliebard, as already noted, allowed her two paragraphs in *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958*. Lawrence Cremin was more generous in his *Transformation of the School 1876-1957* (189-90). She is the only woman included in his "Pedagogical Pioneers" chapter (147-53). But her school is excluded, and oddly so, from his "Scientists, Sentimentalists, and Radicals" chapter which summarizes the post World War I activities of prominent progressive schools. The schools he discussed in that chapter were more conveniently located in the New York area rather than in south Alabama, however. Patricia Albjerg Graham's *Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe 1919-1955* refers to Johnson several times in connection with the establishment of the Progressive Education Association. Graham's history is, in fact, a history of the Progressive Education Association (commonly referred to as the PEA). Yet she seems more preoccupied with what she refers to as Johnson's "messianic fervor" than with the woman who was the co-founder of the PEA.

Less known and read are several dissertations and theses about the Organic School and its founder. The school was the subject of a 1984 Auburn University dissertation by Phyllis Marie Lobdell. Another dissertation by Robert Beck (Yale University, 1942) titled *American Progressive Education, 1875-1930* favored Johnson
with a very substantial thirteen pages. Beck cites her as "One of the real pioneers; in courage, wisdom, and spiritual quality she led the way" (114). One of the lesser known but most enthusiastic promoters of both Johnson and her school is the University of Virginia Historian, Paul Gaston. Gaston is the grandson of Fairhope's founder E. B. Gaston and a graduate of the Organic School. He includes a chapter on Marietta Johnson in a slim volume called *Women of Fair Hope*. Though brief, his is the most definitive work on her life to date. And, as might be expected, it is also the most appreciative. Other present day academics who have found Marietta Johnson's life of some interest include Rocco Eugene Zappone of the University of Virginia. Zappone's master's thesis "Progressive Education Reconsidered: The Intellectual Milieu of Marietta Johnson," seems more interested in the triad of philosophers that contributed to her organic theory than in Johnson herself. Makota Ogura, another Yale University student, wrote sympathetically of Fairhope and the Organic School in her senior essay, and Laura Elizabeth Smith's Harvard senior honors thesis, "A Woman and Her Idea," has researched Marietta Johnson and her school in some detail. An assortment of other minor contemporary papers and monographs deal with Marietta Johnson, her school and Fairhope.
The subject of scholarship devoted to her in her own time will be considered throughout this writing. For the most part, however, historical scholarship has passed Marietta Johnson by. The major part of historical attention given to women educators in the progressive era, when any is given at all, has been to women such as Margaret Naumburg and Carolyn Pratt who founded schools in New York City. It is a puzzling enigma in the light of comments such as that made by Robert Beck quoted above and similar comments from others who consistently speak of Johnson as one of the earliest, most innovative and most radical of the pioneers in progressive education. This was a woman who not only co-founded the PEA but may have traveled more miles and given more speeches in support of educational reform than anyone, man or woman, in the progressive movement (Zappone 1). Her school was prominently featured in John and Evelyn Dewey's *Schools of Tomorrow* and received frequent and celebratory reviews in the *New York Times* as well as a wide variety of other newspapers and magazines all during her lifetime. And many women who founded progressive era schools acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Marietta Johnson.

Nevertheless, and in spite of it all, this radically innovative, reforming woman remains only a curious sideline in history at best, a fanatic at worst. On the whole, her unprecedented experiment in progressive
education has gone unrecognized among contemporary educators. Scholarly academics, such as those named above, who do recognize her place as one of the early pioneers in progressive education often do so with many reservations, most expressing their doubts about her intellectual powers. In support of their doubts, they point to her books, *Youth in a World of Men* and *Thirty Years with an Idea*. Among the intelligentsia of the present generation, Robert Beck of the University of Minnesota, condescends that Marietta Johnson "was not at home in theory construction," adding that her "penchant for illustration, for anecdote, abetted the impression that Mrs. Johnson was not an intellectual" (Beck, "Marietta Johnson" 11, 26). Laura Elizabeth Smith also concludes that Johnson's "personal intellectual limitations" were revealed in her writings (L. Smith 46). Indeed, almost all recent biographers and historians lament this shortcoming and lack of intellectualism, a quality which they clearly believe to be essential yet lacking not only in Johnson's writing, but apparently in her character. Perhaps the most unexpected of the lamenters is Paul Gaston who otherwise writes most appreciatively and insightfully of her in his book *Women of Fair Hope*, only regretting that "Mrs. Johnson was not an intellectual" and confessing his consternation that her book "lacked historical perspective, scholarly context,
and even the texture of experience" (Women 108). Many of Johnson’s own friends and contemporaries beyond the limits of Fairhope also worried about her intellectual depth. Her friend Agnes DeLima, reviewing Youth in a World of Men for a journal called The Survey, was openly vexed, criticizing Johnson’s "loosely slung together notes" and pronouncing the book "quite naive and entirely innocent of expert or studied thinking." The same book caused Grace Rotzel, another of Johnson’s students and a close friend, to fret that her friend simply "wasn’t an intellectual" (P. Gaston, Women, 107).

To be sure, stout disciples of Mrs. Johnson and her school are plentiful in Fairhope among those who knew her and attended her school and even those who attended years after her death. But others maintain that somehow hers was a failed dream. Some loyal supporters regret that supporting organization and a "Johnson Method" similar to the "Montessori Method" was not developed (Thirty Years

5 DeLima’s comments here are from a book review in a section entitled "For the New Schools" (The Survey 615). She was a disciple of Johnson and in her own book, The Little Red School House, Delima acknowledged a debt of gratitude to Johnson whom she called a "great educational pioneer" (5).

6 Rotzel taught at Organic under Marietta Johnson’s tutelage for five years beginning in 1921 and later became the founder of a successful progressive school known as The School in Rose Valley. In her book by the same name, she acknowledged that "It was in my years of working with her that I became convinced of the need for change in education and gained there the confidence to work toward this end" (ix).
Those staunch supporters of the organic idea ardently wish and devoutly believe that it could have been made available to future generations and to a far larger public if it had only been systematized by its founder. The mere suggestion of systematization reveals a profound misunderstanding of Marietta Johnson to whom systems were wholly antithetical.

Then there are those who saw a failure of a different kind, not simply a flaw in ability or intellect, but a flawed experiment and even a failed life, perhaps the most cutting criticism of all. Stanwood Cobb, an early admirer of Mrs. Johnson’s work and the colleague with whom she founded the Progressive Education Association, described her in a 1962 interview as being "on the radical edge, the fanatic fringe," further disparaging her memory with the comment that she finally "just lapsed into one of the also-rans" (Graham, Arcady 19n). And Laura Elizabeth Smith of Harvard adds her own mournful dirge to the refrain, declaring that Marietta Johnson died a sad woman whose dream died with her, forgotten except for the few "dogged disciples" who remain loyal to her memory (119-20).

Do these criticism, coming as they do from Mrs. Johnson’s friends, contemporaries and biographers, have validity? How, one wonders, could such a daring and exuberant educational pioneer, one whose school once set
an example for the world and has remained viable for almost 90 years, have been a failure? And what about her books and her writing? Did they have nothing at all to contribute to the teaching of children then or now? If she was "not at home in theory construction," why not? And what of the "dogged disciples," the students, teachers and the Fairhopers who tested and observed the Organic School in action? What do they, other than Gaston, have to say of Marietta Johnson and of their school? These are a few of the questions that will be explored in the following pages.

This history began by traveling through space for an introductory glimpse of Fairhope and Marietta Johnson's Organic School in the late twentieth century. The scholarship devoted to Marietta Johnson as well as the critiques of her contemporaries, biographers and historians have also been reviewed. The narrative now travels through time, revisiting the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, a period when culture, literature, art, science, the social sciences and education, virtually every facet of American life, were undergoing a leavening process unlike any in previous history. This perspective is offered in the belief that a life cannot be understood apart from the social, historical and cultural context in which it was lived.
CHAPTER 2

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the Spring of hope, it was the Winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received for some good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

A Tale of Two Cities
Charles Dickens

The Dickensian description of eighteenth century Europe could hardly have been more appropriate to describe the waning years of the nineteenth century and the dawning years of the twentieth in America when E. B. Gaston, the young newspaperman, and Marietta Johnson, the seasoned school marm, came to the shores of Mobile Bay. The industrialization of a country that Americans had considered an unmixed blessing in 1876, as it celebrated its 100th birthday, was now being viewed with a sense of unease. Paintings and lithographs of the period had euphorically expressed what seemed a modern miracle—steam locomotives snaking their way gracefully and benignly through the green and yellow checkerboard landscapes of field and farm. But in the last decade of the century the euphoria was fast giving way to a troubling new reality.
The steam locomotive was becoming a metaphor for all of the evil and excesses of the industrial revolution, a behemoth serpent belching out interminable noise, grit and grime, its ubiquitous steel tracks disfiguring nearly every city in the land, dividing the fields and farms and invidiously undermining the pattern of small town life in America.

The word "crisis" appears frequently in histories of the period. Historian Robert Wiebe, in his lively and fluent synthesis of the period, The Search for Order, depicts the period as one afflicted by a "general splintering process," facing the multiple crises of urbanization, industrialization and immigration, when a nation of "loosely connected islands," small-towns, ever romanticized in the American tradition, clashed with big city, big industry, and even bigger government (Wiebe 4). Cold, impersonal and heartless organizations were gaining control of business, politics and almost every aspect of life. It was a period of almost continuous clash, crisis and anomie resulting from a breakdown of traditions and existing American standards and values.

Small towns had been the bastions of pre-industrial America, the nucleus around which life in America orbited: "With farms generally fanning around them, these communities moved by the rhythms of agriculture: the pace of the sun's day, the working and watching of the crop
months, the cycle of the seasons. . . . The continuity was scarcely disturbed" (Wiebe 2). By the end of the century, the community islands had become mere connecting points in the map of a colossus industry. Furthermore, railroads were owned and operated by large, impersonal trusts which permitted citizens to make no decisions on rates or services to their own communities. Citizens were bewildered by this loss of control over their own economic life.

Fabulous fortunes and vast financial empires were amassed, concentrating wealth and power in only a handful of people. While fewer than ten per cent of America's families earned more than $380 a year in 1890, railroad magnate Jay Gould left an astounding fortune of $77 million at his death in 1892 (Wiebe 8-9). As wealth accumulated in the few hands, millions of immigrants and poor accumulated in the tenements of city slums. The population of the United States more than doubled between 1890 and 1920, and by 1920, more than half of the American people lived in urban places (Church 253). Burgeoning cities, unprepared for such an onslaught, were hardly able to provide minimal services and slums proliferated. The child labor problem was particularly acute. In 1900, about 1.7 million children under the age of 16 were working full time in factories and mills (Garraty 645). Neighborhoods and indigenous groups that had once
sustained and regulated the stability of community collapsed under the burden of a constant influx of dislocated people eking out an existence in factories and sweatshops while living in congested tenements in dismal neighborhoods reeking with garbage. In addition to all of the other crises, war and reconstruction had seriously dislocated and disrupted the black community. A sense of desolation and hopelessness permeated nineteenth century industrial society. D. H. Lawrence saw it as something more than an effect; it was a condition of mind:

It was ugliness which betrayed the spirit of man in the nineteenth century. . . . the condemning of the workers to ugliness, ugliness, ugliness: meanness and formless and ugly surroundings and ugly ideals, ugly religion, ugly hope, ugly love, ugly clothes, ugly furniture, ugly houses, ugly relationships between workers and employers. The human soul needs actual beauty even more than bread. (620)

Though Lawrence was speaking here of England, it was under the same conditions that what is known as the progressive era of history was born in America. Historians, wont to see history in terms of one war or another, usually designate the progressive era as that period between the end of the Spanish-American war and the beginning of World War I.

Except for its inherent passion for reform, progressivism as it applied to the era cannot be easily or simply defined. Its most unifying hallmark was reform, reform and more reform. It was a divided, amorphous,
clumsy, and sometimes contradictory movement which was oriented toward freedom, individuality and flexibility at one moment, obsessed with efficiency and bureaucracy at the next. Women such as Jane Addams, complaining of the indifference of public authorities, worked unremittingly to improve conditions in the teeming and filthy slums of Chicago. The Chicago situation was so grim as to cause Addams' friend John Dewey to describe it to his wife Alice as "hell turned loose" (qtd. in Westbrook 84). Other reformers, many of whom were women, attacked child labor and sweat shop conditions with such vigor that between 1904 and 1914, they obtained child labor laws in nearly every state. There would be reform in government, reform in education, as well as social and economic reform of every sort from Jane Addams' work among the tenement poor in Chicago to Henry George's philosophically complex theory for reforming the capitalist system of land holding to the birth control propagandizing of feisty feminist Margaret Sanger.

Christopher Lasch, in The True and Only Heaven, defines the period as one of expectation for indefinite and open-ended improvement (48). The next chapter will attempt to show that these expectations were even more pronounced in the liberal wing of progressivism as William Stanley has suggested (Stanley 7). In the Christian version of progress, heaven had been seen as a final
destination whereas in the new view there was no final
destination, only infinite progress as science revealed
the secrets of the universe. The messiah had come and it
was science, the new god whose effulgence would light the
way to a perfect social order. The genetics of Charles
Darwin and the psychology of Sigmund Freud were making
their way into mainstream thinking and Karl Marx's
revolutionary sociology was not far behind. Einstein's
epochal quest for the equations which would explain the
relationship between energy and mass was also well
underway in the earliest decade of the 1900's. In 1903
the Wright brothers addressed the energy/mass dilemma more
directly with the first air flight. Under the
circumstances, it is no surprise that progressive
reformers lost their memory of human history with its
cycles of growth and decay while finding an almost
unlimited and happy faith in the ability of science.
Science, they were sure, could overcome all of the ills
peculiar to the human race. The term progressive itself
assumes movement in a direction toward an end, and
progressives generally expected that end to be desirable.
CHAPTER 3
TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

As the industrial revolution shifted into high gear and thousands of immigrants from foreign countries and migrants from the farms crowded into the cities to find work, Americans were becoming alarmed. Chaos and confusion, loss of control and even anarchy threatened as cities burgeoned with the poor and the poorly educated. After due consideration, bureaucrats devised a solution. The best antidote for the threat of violence was human labor. Hard work would certainly tire the masses and leave them little time or energy for agitating violence and, by a happy coincidence, it would also provide the raw material for industries in desperate need of laborers. But laborers in industrial America must have skills. Farm migrants needed to be re-educated for industry while immigrants must learn the English language and the American traditions. So educated, they were certain to provide skilled, hardworking laborers for industry and, most of all, they would be less dangerous. So the nation began to focus its attention on educating the masses, and progressives began what was destined to become an endless squabble over pedagogical priorities which continues to this very day and perhaps on into posterity.

One gratifying early consequence of this struggle was that schools became one of America's most populous
institutions, and education became one of the most prominent sub-movements within the larger context of progressive reforms. But like the progressive era itself, this extremely protean and contradictory movement readily assumed various forms and shapes throughout a period of at least six decades. It had a liberal wing and it had a conservative wing; it tended towards bureaucratic control at one minute and celebrated the autonomy of the individual at the next; it longed for social justice on the one hand and social efficiency on the other. And, like the progressive era in general, educational progressivism was also deeply rooted in the explosive social and political climate of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. Furthermore, like the progressive era in general, educational progressivism was underpinned and given momentum by the same happy faith and uncritical belief in the human capacity for applying scientific principles to solve all human problems be they social, economic or purely academic. Educational reformers, like other progressive reformers, faced grim issues but they usually managed to face them in a buoyant mood.

Histories are ambivalent about the duration and extent of progressivism in education as well as just how to define it. Cremin's comprehensive history covers the whole array of experiments and reforms that began with the
vocationalism of the 1870's and ended with the demise of the journal appropriately named Progressive Education in 1957. Other historical accounts, however, reach even more deeply into the past while also seeking to determine the forefathers of the movement. They see educational progressivism as beginning with Horace Mann and the common school movement that dates back as far as the mid-1800's. Some can even trace its paternity to Plato and still others to Thomas More and Francis Bacon and the sixteenth century utopian tradition that man can redeem the loss of the fall by founding a new society. References to Jean Jacques Rosseau's Emile are also plenteous in progressive education literature and still others look to the nineteenth century and the ideas of Pestalozzi and the German educational thinkers such as Friedrich Froebel and Johann Friedrich Herbart. At present, no one would think to talk of progressive education without invoking the name of John Dewey whose activities spanned the whole era of American progressive educational reform. Dewey himself named Colonel Francis Parker, a reformer from Quincy, Massachusetts, and later the principal of Chicago's Cook County Normal school, the "father of progressive education" (Westbrook 95; Cremin 21). But uncertainty about its paternity and its roots does not obscure the fact that educational reform, whether grandiloquent theory or innovative practice, was at one of its most fertile
periods of growth from about 1890 to 1920. In the years prior to 1920, the focus was upon the educational problems facing lower class children in the public schools. In those years, liberal progressive reformers were especially militant. And it was during those years that progressivism in general sowed the seeds that would result in its numerous and remarkably pluralistic offspring.7

The ubiquitous strains of the progressive education movement are described and categorized in various ways by historians. Herbert Kliebard’s chronicle brings some order to the historical confusion by sorting and dividing them into four main interest groups as represented by certain male academics and curriculum theorists: the humanists as represented by Charles W. Eliot who were the guardians of traditional curriculum emphasizing the classical studies for all students; the developmentalists, 

7 Information about the evolution of progressive schooling was gathered from numerous sources. The following were the most helpful: Lawrence Cremin’s Transformation of the School; Patricia Albjerg Graham’s, Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe; Robert Holmes Beck’s 1983 Yale University dissertation entitled American Progressive Education and David Tyack’s The One Best System. Other helpful sources include: Christopher Lasch, The True and Only Heaven; Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak, Education in the United States 251-342; Michael Katz, The Irony of Early School Reform 1-17, 213-218. Cremin and Graham are the most comprehensive. Graham’s book is a history of the Progressive Education Association and thus covers the period coterminous with that association’s life from 1919 to 1955. All of the above confine their discussions mainly to urban area schooling but Tyack also provides an excellent general perspective on rural schools wherein he has amassed an abundance of statistics as well as interesting anecdotes.
most closely associated with G. Stanley Hall of child-study fame, who proceeded on the assumption that the natural order of development in the child was the only determinant of what should be taught; the social meliorists or reconstructionists as represented by Lester Frank Ward who saw the schools mainly as a field for egalitarian reform; and, finally, the social efficiency school which trumpeted the power of scientific tests and measurements and came eventually to be associated with the name of early reformer Joseph Mayer Rice.®

But the whole plethora of movements was shaped, however inchoately, in the early 1890’s and grew together like the proverbial wheat and tares through at least the 1920’s. Most reform movements, with the possible exception of the humanists, claimed science as their rationale. Some looked directly to the method of scientific empiricism, some to a new science of testing and measurements, some to Darwin’s theories, and still others to the new psychology of Freud and Jung exported from Europe in the early 1900’s.

® John Dewey, the generally acknowledged prophet and elder Statesman of Progressive Education is not named in any of these movements. Most historians seem to find it hard to categorize him and instead choose to see him as hovering over the entire spectrum of progressive era reforms. His ideas were so broad and ambiguous as to accommodate almost all categories, according to most accounts. See, for example, Graham’s Progressive Education, Arcady to Academe, page 15 and Kliebard, xii.
The names of male theorists are monotonously familiar in the histories leading one to believe that curriculum reform was a male version of the immaculate conception. Yet not only had the profession of teaching in the public schools become an overwhelmingly female occupation by the 1900’s, but there were women working everywhere in progressive education. They founded, worked and taught in settlement houses. Many taught in schools or worked as secretaries and social workers. Very often women organized into groups to raise funds for worthy educational causes. Philanthropists and women of means underwrote experiments in schooling, supplied financial resources for organizations and publications such as the journal Progressive Education. Women also edited publications and others served on editorial staffs.\(^9\)

It was the influence of women throughout the era that undoubtedly gave emphasis to the needs of children but also gave the movement its rare quality of compassion for the underprivileged and disenfranchised. And one of the central themes of women’s involvement was that of community. Not only did they organize and unify to solve

---

\(^9\) The list of women who worked behind the scenes in progressive education, most notably in the Progressive Education Association, is too long to enumerate here. It is sufficient to say there were many capable, public-spirited and charitable women who gave unstintingly of their talents, time and resources. Their names and activities are recorded, if briefly, in some histories. For a sampling, see Cremin 240-8 and Graham, Arcady 17-59.
problems but they worked to improve their communities. Women were emerging *en masse* from their cloistered environment of home, becoming vigorous activists in the community. They joined women's clubs and parent's organizations. They organized to do battle for other women, children and immigrants in schools, slums, and factories everywhere.

Women such as Jane Addams, complaining of the indifference of public authorities, worked unremittingly to improve conditions in the teeming and filthy slums of Chicago.\(^{10}\) William Reese writes of this exceptional circumstance and in doing so addresses a theme that many writers seem to have missed:

> They [women] were often the leaders in local settlement houses, civic organizations, and parent teacher clubs. However, these activist women—even those who joined the all-female women's clubs—usually identified themselves not simply as women but as mothers and parents, an identification from which . . . they gained great ideological strength for their growing involvement in public life. (School Review 5)

---

\(^{10}\) Jane Addams', a tireless social reformer of good family, chronicles the activities of her Chicago settlement house in *Twenty Years at Hull House*. Addams describes Chicago slum conditions graphically and poignantly, giving first-hand accounts of women and children laboring in the sweat shops. See, for example, page 98-9, 199. Addams' Hull House was probably the most well-known of all radical experiments in community-centered education and is sometimes viewed as symbolic of the sweeping early reforms. She sought to mobilize the entire community, teaching citizens to work together on social issues, providing such services as a nursery school and kindergarten and a cooking school for young women, training young men in trades, and holding adult education classes for the community (Church 251-87).
As never before women were pushing aside boundaries and claiming a new space for themselves within the broad and deep patriarchal tradition. Indeed, historian Robert Wiebe calls the progressive era an age of women (169). But for most women it was a gentle revolution that did not venture far beyond women's delineated role as wife, mother and homemaker. Women's roles remained bound up in human relationships as they always had.

Throughout her *Reproduction of Mothering*, feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow makes a convincing argument for the relational orientation of females. She argues that their relational nature can be attributed to cultural practices of child-rearing which, throughout the centuries, have been dissimilar for boys and girls. She theorizes, as Freud did before her, that the male identity is formed by the process of separating from the mother in the pre-oedipal period. Thus males, according to the theory, become preoccupied with differentiation and detachment. Females, on the other hand, form a relational sense of self through identification with their mothers during the pre-oedipal period:

Girls emerge from this period with a basis for "empathy" built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not. Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own (or of thinking that one is so experiencing another's needs and feelings) (*Chodorow, Reproduction of Mothering* 167).
Chodorow's analysis provides the psychological basis for claims that have been made by feminist theorists in the last decade—that women are relational beings. Chodorow's analysis may also be called upon to explain the strong sense of community that animated progressive women. They carried with them the knowledge of that first connection, the ability to identify with rather than differentiate from others. They continued doing the things they had been enculturated to do for generations; they continued to make the needs of others their business, placing themselves at the disposal of others serving others as wives, nurses, mothers, teachers, social workers and secretaries. Only now, they extended their practices to the public arena and became "‘municipal housekeepers’—social reformers who agitated for pure food, clean streets, and educational improvements," cleaning up schools and governments both literally and figuratively (Reese 7). Rheta Childe Dorr's *What Do Eight Million Women Want*, written in 1910—besides its obvious reference to Freud's famous query "What do women want?"—recollects something of how women sensed their roles:

> Home is not contained within the four walls of an individual home. Home is the community. The city full of people is the Family. The public school is the real Nursery. And badly do the Home and the Family and the nursery need their mother. (327)

So women led the fight for better sanitation and more homelike conditions in the schools. They wanted the
janitor to paint the classroom walls and scrub the dirty restrooms; they petitioned for everything from toilet paper to free medical care; they planted trees on playgrounds and agitated for libraries, kindergartens and moveable desks in classrooms (Reese 16).

The fact that women claimed to be community homemakers was a result of the public expectation that women should remain within their own sphere of activity as caretakers and should not threaten male territory. Yet Reese believes it was this very extension of the idea of home to include and encompass the community that gave women their power. They did not challenge male power, authority or professional roles. They never quarreled with the idea that woman’s place was in the home and; they generated no conflict and, therefore, no resistance.

Little has been written of the emergence of women into community life in the progressive period. Women themselves seemed more intent on reforming rather than writing about it and historians have not usually been attentive to women’s work. Reese, like Kliebard, notes the paucity of historical records from which to draw conclusions about what he calls the unusual "mass behavior" of organized women in the progressive era (5). Kliebard was quite right when he acknowledged that writing the histories of the women and children of the era offers
the researcher the "formidable task" of drawing from "grossly incomplete evidence" (x).

What evidences there are, however, reveal that not all women so neatly conformed to the stereotypical image of an industrious housewife cleaning up the community. Some women took radical positions in the vanguard of reform taking their ingrained sense of community with them. These women battled energetically for more sweeping, and less politically popular, reforms. They did not confine their activism to school improvements or parent-teacher associations, but they became leaders in local settlement houses and civic organizations where they agitated for educational reforms and political "house-cleaning" (5). This level of activism in progressive era social reform was especially true of the halcyon years prior to the First World War when revolutionary women such as Jane Addams and Margaret Sanger, along with Marietta Johnson herself, set out to re-educate and re-form the world.

It was in 1914 that Margaret Sanger was organizing her "Mother's Meetings" to educate women on birth control and exhorting her reform-minded sisters "to look the world in the face with a go-to-hell look in the eyes" (Sanger 110). Sanger ventured far beyond the motherly "angel of mercy" safety zone and into the dangerous territory of human sexuality and reproduction. She was the first woman
in the United States to openly advocate sexual freedom and to educate women on birth control devices (Gordon 179). Yet even in an era bursting with reforms the feisty female was greeted with outrage, arrested and jailed for disseminating her birth control information. The public apparently did not find all female reformers quite so offensive as Sanger and relatively few women seem to have been thrown in jail. But, after all, most women were proposing less inflammatory practices than limiting offspring to somewhat fewer than a dozen when women often had neither the means nor the health to care for them. Nonetheless, the evangelical fervor and urgent sense of mission that propelled Sanger into action was pervasive enough that institutions founded by women and devoted to reform sprang up throughout the entire country. Patricia Albjerg Graham views Jane Addams' Hull House as the generalized symbol of progressivism prior to the 1920's (Arcady 8).

Also caught up in the tide of reform was a large group of women who founded and administered schools. Their goal was to liberate children from the boring, repressive, routines that had become American schooling. Besides Marietta Johnson, who founded her Fairhope School in 1907, some of the prominent women who articulated the progressive idea through practical application in their schools include the following: Margaret Naumburg, founder
of Walden School (founded in 1915); Caroline Pratt of Play School, later named the City and Country Day School (1913); Patty Smith Hill of the Lincoln School kindergarten at Columbia University's Teacher's College (1917); Elisabeth Irwin of The Little Red School House (1921); Grace Rotzel, founder of The School in Rose Valley (1929); and Helen Parkhurst, founder of the Dalton School. There were many others.

Lucy Sprague Mitchell worked with several of the foremost New York City schools and founded The Bureau of Educational Experiments (1916) in New York in an attempt to build a science of education and unify the experimental schools. In New York City most of the important educational reformers in the second decade of the twentieth century were women but these women were rarely associated with the traditional schools. They included Naumburg, Pratt, Irwin, Hill and Mitchell (Graham, Community and Class 24). Graham notes, however, that "as the reformist zeal was vitiated, and as these institutions became academically and socially respectable, men took

11 Elisabeth Irwin's "Little Red School House" was first established as a public school in New York City but the city soon withdrew its support and the school continued as a private school (Graham, Arcady 45).

12 The information presented here was gathered from a variety of sources including Graham, Community and Class 24; Rugg, 48-53; DeLima, Our Enemy 263-271 and Cremin 179-215. Also, see Appendix One of this dissertation for a list of Marietta Johnson's satellite schools.
over the administration" (24). Implicit in Graham's quote also is the suggestion that with reform came women and when women went out, reform also went with them.

The spirit of reform was sweeping the country like a great tidal wave and even though the women were in the front lines, storming the beachheads and taking the heaviest fire, they rarely claimed intellectual equality with men. No woman in the progressive era achieved importance as an educational theorist if histories are to be believed. It has been the tradition in western civilization for men to receive the education and lead lives of contemplation while women were engaged in less "contemplative" and more menial occupations such as serving and waiting upon others. Our culture validates leisure and contemplation, luxuries not always available or attainable for women. Whether it was by exclusion or choice, women educators did not often conceive of themselves as theorists. While many of them were, in fact theorists, they also chose to situate their ideas within a practice rather than to confine them to intellectual exercises. They did not join the "procession of educated men" as that most quoted and quotable of feminists, Virginia Woolf, called it when reminding her fellow females with tongue-in-cheek that

[As] you know from your own experience, and there are facts to prove it, the daughters of educated men have always done their thinking from hand to mouth; not under green lamps at
study tables in the cloisters of secluded colleges. They have thought while they stirred the pot, while they rocked the cradle. (Three Guineas 62)

Women might not claim for themselves the dignity of being "educational theorists" but they were certainly permitted to labor over children. Marietta Johnson herself was determined to educate as many children as she could and even to do it free of charge. And she never imagined that her unique synthesis of Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey, worked out in a practice of many years, could be called a "theory," but steadfastly insisted that it was only "a point of view." To rephrase Woolf, had progressive women such as Johnson chose to think about education, "read about it, ponder it, analyze it, discuss it and pool their thinking and reading, and what they see and what they guess" their time might have been better spent (Three Guineas 62). And they also might have been better remembered.

It is equally true that no woman was admitted to the sacred canon of educational literature if histories of the era are any guide. Yet a surprising number of books were written by women who founded and taught in the early progressive schools. With a little effort, one can find them by searching the dusty corners of libraries and scrutinizing the footnotes of the literature. Together, these books offer new insights on progressive era schooling and make interesting reading for the researcher.
They are valuable writings that allow one to reconstruct the past from a new perspective, the perspective of the woman theorist/practitioner. As an admittedly limited effort to elevate them from the footnotes, a very few of them are listed here: Marietta Johnson's *Youth in a World of Men* (1929) and *Thirty Years With an Idea* (1974); Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910); Agnes De Lima's *Our Enemy the Child* (1969) and *The Little Red School House* (1942); Margaret Naumburg's *The Child and the World* (1928); Caroline Pratt's *I Learn From Children* (1948); Elisabeth Irwin's *Fitting the School to the Child* (1924); Grace Rotzel's *The School in Rose Valley*; Lillian Rifkin Blumenfeld's *Consider the Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers* (1978) and Lucy Sprague Mitchell's autobiographical *Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself* (1953).

Mitchell's work merits special attention. She was a progressive era teacher and researcher who worked closely with several prominent women educators, including Carolyn Pratt and Elisabeth Irwin, in their schools in the New York City area. Her husband was a well-known economist whose work is documented along with her own in the above biography/autobiography. She also established the Bureau of Educational Experiments (later known as the Bank Street Bureau and now known as the Bank Street College) to sponsor and encourage educational experiments. Mitchell
was an exceptionally well-educated woman and a close observer of children. She adhered to the "scientific method" so valued by progressives, kept careful records of her educational experiments and authored a number of books for children as well as her well-written biography/autobiography. Her writing was predicated on real experience with real children and what she learned about teaching from the children themselves. The title of Mitchell's memoir gives top billing to her eminent economist husband, Wesley Clair Mitchell. The first person pronoun "Myself" used in place of her own name in the title seems to indicate that even this intelligent woman denigrated the importance of her own work in deference to the work of her husband. Mitchell and her contemporaries took seriously Virginia Woolf's tongue-in-cheek advice to aspiring female writers that the "Angel in the House" must charm, conciliate, and, above all: "Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own" ("Professions for Women" 279).

Finally, one should not forget that two of the finest and most descriptive books about progressive era schools were co-authored by women: *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915) by John and Evelyn Dewey, and *The Child-Centered School* (1928) by Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker. It is not often remembered that John Dewey's daughter co-authored *Schools of Tomorrow*. In point of fact John Dewey himself writes
that it was Evelyn rather than himself who visited the "schools of tomorrow" with one exception (Middle Works 8: 108). The one exception must have been the Organic School since John Dewey’s Christmas season visit there is well documented. Furthermore Dewey attributes the "descriptive chapters" of the book to "Miss Dewey." Miss Dewey appears to have had a very major role in the work.

Marietta Johnson’s books have not received high marks from critics. The first, Youth in a World of Men, was greeted with a few plaudits and lukewarm praise when it was first published, but most critics as well as colleagues found it a disappointment. Her semi-autobiographical second and last book, Thirty Years With an Idea, was rejected by publishers and only published posthumously through the efforts of her students. Her books have lacked the proper credentials to recommend them to present-day academics while historians have, for the most part, ignored them. Robert Beck may have accounted for the failure of her books among academics by his patronizing comment that Marietta Johnson was "not at home in theory construction" (Beck, "Marietta Johnson" 11).

Historians might better ask for whom Marietta Johnson wrote than how comfortable she was in theory construction. Was it for academia or for parents and teachers? Her efforts may have been addressed to the latter group and may well have found a receptive audience there though no
critiques from such quarters have emerged as far as can be
determined. Johnson's book and those of the other women
who founded and taught in progressive schools, are just
the sort of thing which might be expected of educators
deeply immersed in all of the practical matters and daily
minutiae of teaching children and administering schools.
The body of literature written by these women could be
described as "how to" or "how I did it" manuals, something
similar, one might imagine, to Dr. Spock's present-day
guides for parents. Only they wrote about classrooms,
curriculum, and a variety of creative teaching techniques.
Their books were gratifyingly concise and came right to
the point, which, of course, was children. If they lacked
something in theoretical brilliance, they more than
compensated that lack by their sincere interest in
children. As educator Charlotte Winsor recalled, "There
was so much to be done . . . the children were
there to be educated, and they seemed more important than
logical niceties."13

In an effort to bring women's work into the
foreground, this section has pushed the subject of
educational progressivism and its factions rather far into
the background and must now, with some regret, return to

13 Charlotte Winsor's comment was made in a personal
corner with Cremin and quoted in his Transformation
of the Schools. The entire quote and Winsor's affiliation
with Lucy Sprague Mitchell's Bank Street College of
Education is discussed in Cremin (289).
that subject. Robert Church has simplified the project of defining progressive education considerably by categorizing Kliebard's factions under two more inclusive and fairly manageable headings: the liberals and the conservative progressives. Both categories included reform-minded citizens of optimistic temperament who were inclined to valorize the merits of science. Beyond these similarities, the two categories were sharply opposed in philosophy. Church's conservative progressives, the recipients of the legacy of Joseph Mayer Rice, made up by far the largest numbers and it was their brand of progressivism that would become twentieth century public schooling. But the second group, the liberals, could also claim a certain legacy from Joseph Mayer Rice and it may be useful here to understand how that came about before turning to the liberals, the smaller and more radical of the two groups. The liberals had the distinction of including Marietta Johnson and many, if not most, of the other women reformers, a fact usually overlooked by observers.

A new era of progressive reform in education was officially launched with a resounding shot aimed at exposing conditions in the public schools and through a series of articles published in a New York monthly called The Forum from October, 1892 to June, 1893. The series was written by Joseph Mayer Rice later of "scientific"
systems of measurement and social efficiency fame. The series exploded in the headlines like a bombshell exposing public apathy toward schools, political interference and corruption in hiring of teachers, gross negligence and incompetence in teaching, monotony and mindlessness in curriculum. Rice had toured 36 cities from the east to the mid-west, and interviewed 1200 teachers. He protested that "In New York City teachers are very rarely discharged, even for the grossest negligence and incompetency" (Rice 624). The Boston primary schools, he discovered, were "purely mechanical drudgery-schools" (754). And one report gathered in St. Louis found that children, like small soldiers, literally "toed the line":

The treatment of the children cannot be considered otherwise than barbarous. During several daily recitation periods, each of which is from twenty to twenty-five minutes in duration, the children are obliged to stand upon the line, perfectly motionless, their bodies erect, their knees and feet together, the tips of their shoes touching the edge of a board in the floor. (432)

Another in Baltimore described a physiology class:

In answer to the question, "What is the effect of alcohol on the system?" I heard a ten-year-old cry out at the top of his voice and at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, "It--dwarfs--the--body,--mind,--and--soul,--weakens--the--heart, and--enfeebles--the-memory." (155)

Rice's flagellation continued unabated throughout the series and only a few schools, including those in Marietta Johnson's home base of Minneapolis and St. Paul, escaped his outrage. Students were expected to sit motionless for
long periods of time at immovable desks. Rote memorization from textbooks and monotonous drill were the accepted routine but little or no conceptualization accompanied learning. Teachers commonly tolerated no disobedience and spared not the rod. Teaching methods were boring and lifeless at best and cruel at worst. Children’s own needs and interests were rarely considered important and creative expression was not encouraged.

Rice’s searing denunciation exposed the shortcomings of schools to public scrutiny, and public apathy turned to outrage. The public was aroused and eventually responded with a prolific variety of services including playgrounds by the thousands, meals, visiting social workers and nurses for the underprivileged. Added to that was a whole range of innovations from graded schools, vocational education and community-centered schools to a more flexible curriculum and educational research (most notably in testing and measurements). And reform movements also proliferated including everything from the outrageously permissive to the minutely managed, from child-study to social efficiency. And it was all labeled progressive reform.

What was it that drew these unlikely strands of conservatism and liberalism together to form one whole identified as "progressive?" It was, first of all, the same response to urbanization, immigration and
industrialization that mobilized reform movements in the progressive era itself. The cities were teeming with children as they were with immigrants and refugees from rural areas. Immigration as well as compulsory education laws had placed an incredible burden on public school systems. Not only were there more children in schools as a result of immigration and urbanization, but they were staying there longer. The immigrants especially needed instruction in English but everyone, children as well as adults, needed skills for survival in the new industrial society.

There were two different factions, both representing progressive education. The larger and more influential of the two groups were labeled conservatives by Church but they are sometimes referred to as the "administrative progressives." Conservatives were more concerned with efficiency than with the individual student. They advocated centralizing, consolidating, and standardizing schools and favored a corporate model of governance. They talked of efficiency and economy and they worried a great deal about order. Conservatives were convinced of the need to make public education universally available but,

14 Beginning with Massachusetts in 1852 and ending with Mississippi in 1918 all states had passed compulsory education laws of some description that resulted in enormous growth in school attendance. Statistics on school attendance and literacy in the period can be found in Patricia Albjerg Graham's Community and Class in American Education, 1865-1918.
economically speaking, it was a monumental undertaking which would require efficiency, and above all organization, if it were to be accomplished at all. The staggering number of students crowding into schools seemed in itself to call for desperate measures. In addition, conservatives were especially concerned with Americanizing immigrants and training an efficient work force for industry. The new technology offered an order and precision that could be applied effectively to the schools: "To many reformers it was clear that the way to run a school system was the way to run a railroad--or a bank, or U. S. Steel, or Sears Roebuck or the National Cash Register Company" (Tyack 142).

Then too, the usually more urban conservatives came face to face almost daily with the hordes of immigrants and crowded slums that promised to become social dynamite. In an increasingly complex world, one threatening to disintegrate any moment into chaos, they believed that fallible humans had to be controlled. Moreover, the most populous and universalized institution in America, public schools, offered a potentially unlimited source of young, plastic minds to mold, shape and control. So conservative reformers threw their net over the public schools, modeling them after factories and expecting to turn out finished products as efficiently as an assembly line. Efficiency was the corollary to economy in industrial
America. In consequence, the field of curriculum was born in what has been described as "a veritable orgy of efficiency" that has been felt throughout this whole century (Kliebard 94).

Graded schools were one example of the conservative effort to reduce confusion and uncertainty and more efficiently manage the curriculum. Arranging children in separate classes according to their demonstrated ability, each child doing what every other child was doing, would make the teacher's work much more efficient. Then, of course, each child would have to be measured against every other child to demonstrate ability, hence testing and measurements and their ultimate result, competition.

Intelligence Quotient tests had been constructed and popularized during World War I when they were mass-tested on soldiers as instruments to determine mental age in relationship to chronological age. Conservatives found the IQ tests a useful tool to measure and pass judgment upon children's intellectual ability, to pigeonhole them and then feed them an intellectual diet that their pigeonhole required and no more. All of this was done with the best of intentions and couched in the most reassuringly scientific terms. In a 1922 article for The New Republic, John Dewey darkly foreshadowed the future of an American education where IQ tests would tend to become self-fulfilling prophesies in tracking and channelling
pupils. He feared what the constant testing, categorizing, and competition was already creating in the name of science, that is a school system unaware of its own biases

which under the title of science sinks the individual in a numerical class; judges him with reference to capacity to fit into a limited number of vocations ranked according to present business standards; assigns him to a predestined niche and thereby does whatever education can do to perpetuate the present order. ("Individuality, Equality and Superiority" 61-63)

Detailed rules and regulations, administrative hierarchies and compartmentalized curriculum were essentials in conservative schooling. This came to mean trained, professional, and usually male, administrators in public schools controlling obedient and usually female teachers and the curriculum. Credit for what eventually became a "pedagogical harem" has been given to John Philbrick, a school principal of Quincy, Massachusetts. In Philbrick's school every teacher would

---

15 Teaching had become a predominantly female occupation late in the nineteenth century. Statistics are approximations, but it appears that by 1900, 70 percent of teachers were women and by 1910 that figure had increased to 86 percent by 1920 (Rothman 57; Tyack 61). Likewise, Nancy Hoffman reports that by 1920 there were 657,000 public school teachers, 86% of them were women and almost all elementary school teachers were women (xv). Statistics on administrative personnel are even more sparse but Rothman reports that in 1888, "an investigator reporting to the Association for the Advancement of Women declared that, whereas 67% of teachers in the country were women, only 4% of those with administrative responsibility were women" (59).
have a separate classroom for one, and only one, grade of scholars divided "according to their tested proficiency" (Tyack 45). In the words of principal Philbrick:

All in the same class [should] attend to precisely the same branches of study. Let the Principal or Superintendent have the general supervision and control of the whole, and let him have one male assistant or sub-principal, and ten female assistants, one for each room." (qtd. in Tyack 45)

Philbrick's graded, assembly-line model, eventually dubbed the "egg crate" school, with its hierarchical arrangement of "female assistants" at the bottom of the ladder is an all-too familiar American institution. And the complaints of one disgruntled teacher-come-feminist of the era also have a familiar ring. She grumbled that teachers were writing so many silly reports and gathering so many meaningless statistics that they hardly had time to teach; that superintendents were getting all of the money and credit and the women were doing all of the work for very little pay. Furthermore, superintendents were "taking to themselves the credit of whatever value is in the schools . . . hindering and bothering, discouraging and demoralizing the teachers by giving them so many useless things to do" (Hamilton, Our Common School System 99).

Separation and compartmentalization were the conservative credo: divide and specialize teaching assignments, separate children from each other according
to perceived intellectual ability and compartmentalize curriculum as much as possible for efficiency. The curriculum was systematized; the teacher was systematized; the child was systematized. Rigidity was the rule. The conservative one-size-fits-all approach to schooling and classrooms was custom-made to insure order and a uniform product. Systems minimized confusion and uncertainty and if there were anything that conservatives wanted to avoid, it was confusion and uncertainty.

On the other hand, liberal educators had a high tolerance for confusion and uncertainty and all of the vagaries of human nature. They even seemed to thrive on the flux and flow of human relationships. The smaller group of progressives which Church called the liberals included both the child-study proponents—or developmentalists—and also the social meliorists, later known as the social reconstructionists. The ideas of both liberal groups stood in sharp contrast to those of the conservative or social efficiency school. The child-study movement had grown from scientific research that focused upon observing children’s behavior at various stages of development, creating an entirely new view that curriculum concerns were secondary to the needs and interests of the individual child. Urging the self-expression of the child, the movement drew upon the new ideas of psychology and sociology as well as *avant garde* artistic and
intellectual thought. Developmentalists talked about the "natural" inclinations of the child and were characteristically imbued with the romantic notion that childhood represented the unblemished condition of primitive humans in the Garden of Eden.

Most of the child-study schools appeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century and most were situated in the urban northeast with some in the large university centers of Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. Marietta Johnson's Organic School in Fairhope, Alabama was one noteworthy exception. Women such as Johnson played a major role in the founding of the schools but some were founded by men as was Stanwood Cobb's Chevy Chase school and Eugene Randolph Smith's Park School. The child-study movement reached its apogee in a plethora of ultra-progressive private schools of the teens and twenties, such as Margaret Naumburg's psychoanalytically-oriented Walden and Caroline Pratt's Play School (later

---

16 Two of the most notable and earliest progressive era schools were established by men. One of the first somewhat prior to the era under consideration was established in 1878 by Felix Adler. It was called the "Workingman's School," later the "Ethical Culture School." It was a free school in the poor districts of New York. For a discussion, see Robert Beck's Yale University dissertation, American Progressive Education. John Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago existed from 1896 to 1904. For a discussion of the Dewey School, see especially Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards', The Dewey School and Robert Westbrook's John Dewey and American Democracy (983-113).
City and Country School) where expressionism and creative play were stressed.¹⁷

The free-wheeling Greenwich Village school of Auntie Mame satirizes progressive education at its most Freudian and outrageous extremes. Because of Auntie Mame-type caricatures—which were not entirely unwarranted—the child-study schools became the butt of ridicule in later years of the movement. But traditionalists did not always appreciate the joke. They fretted and worried about children getting the basics and accused liberals of over-indulging while under-disciplining children. Some of the child-centered schools were criticized for lacking organization and failing to objectively evaluate the results of their own methods and some for not evaluating at all. And there was always some evidence of over-emphasis in some subject areas and neglect of others. There were many schools with as many stories.

¹⁷ The 1920's child-centered schools were very diverse in origin and nature. For an evaluation of Pratt's City and Country Day School and Naumburg's Walden, see Robert Holmes Beck's 1942 Yale University Dissertation entitled American Progressive Education, 1875-1930. For comprehensive accounts of other major schools of the movement, see the following: Paul Avrich, The Modern School Movement; Lawrence Cremin, The Transformation of the School; Agnes Delima, Our Enemy the Child; Lloyd Marcus' 1948 Unpublished Honors Thesis from Harvard University entitled "The Founding of American Private Progressive Schools, 1912-1921"; Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker, The Child-Centered School. Individual experimental schools are discussed by those who founded and worked in them. Some of their books are listed on pages 40-1 of this text.
But the eclecticism that drew forth the criticisms of over-indulgence and under-discipline, curriculum drift and formlessness, is the same eclecticism that allowed progressive education its freedom to experiment and grow. And one of the needs most emphasized in the Rice reports was the urgent need for creative innovation in American education. Lawrence Cremin nicely evaluates some of the common strengths of schools that emerged from the child-study wing of liberal progressivism:

In general, the schools tended to organize subject matter in radically different ways, to take the life of the surrounding community more immediately into account in the business of instruction, and to enlist students more directly in the management and operation of school affairs. As a rule, classrooms were more cheerful and tended to be filled with a richer variety of equipment, books, teaching materials, artist supplies, and the like. (279)

Taking "the life of the surrounding community more immediately into account" was an especially prominent phenomenon that lasted well into the century according to Graham (Arcady 148). It would also prove to be one of the more salient features of Marietta Johnson's school. And another of the more momentous and lasting changes that finally came about, especially true of the lower grades, was the recognition that the child's own interests and stages of growth were vital considerations in the learning process.

By the thirties, a variety of reforms from all sides of the spectrum, conservative and liberal, had begun
working their way through the mainstream of public education altering the lives of school children for better or for worse. Some of the liberal innovations of the earlier era were captured by the conservative bureaucrats and became part of the public schools where they were systematized, routinized and professionalized. The reforms that had sought to preserve individualism and the creative spirit were swept aside in favor of the bureaucratic ideas that were peculiarly suited to the impersonality of an urban-industrial world. The indefatigable Rice went on to gather more data on schools, shifting his concern for the child to a concern for measurements, tests and fixed standards finally becoming the acknowledged father of comparative methodology. And in the end, the conservatives such as Rice, the promulgators of testing, measurements and efficiency, the professional experts, made of public schooling the meritocracy that it remains today. The conservatives were far larger in number than the liberals and also proved to be more powerful in local politics.

That which Kliebard collapsed into four all-male battles for control of the curriculum and Church further distilled into a conservative versus liberal conflict may be characterized another way. A fundamental conflict was underway in education, a conflict between the autonomous individual and the autocratic bureaucracy, between
human-centered and systems-centered schooling. It might fairly be said that the liberals had as their goal social justice while the conservatives sought social order. In schooling, the liberals would adjust the school to the child, the conservatives, the child to the school. Liberals were far more committed to the belief that a caring, concerned and socially responsible citizen would unfold quite naturally through contact with others in a free, caring and healthy educational environment. The great majority of women reformers were firmly located in the human-centered camp, but there were plenty of men who shared that distinction. On the other hand, there were few if any notable women reformers among the systems-centered group. Most of the liberals, along with their reforms, eventually found their way into private schools where innovators could experiment freely while the conservative reforms more commonly found their way into public schools.

As early as World War I, the period of radical progressive educational reforms, a period that had been largely dominated by women, was essentially at an end. By the 1920's, William Chandler Bagley, an emerging leader in the field of education, was heaping discredit on the movement in which women had played such a major role. He censured American education for being too effeminate and in need of "a more virile and less elusive educational
theory" ("Discipline and Dogma" 573). Interestingly enough, Bagley was railing at the same time on what he called the "unwisdom" of adjusting the elementary curriculum to the needs of the local community (Bagley, Foundations 31-2). By the 1920's, liberal (and community-minded) women reformers, along with some of their male counterparts, fled from the arena of public education into the sanctuary of private schools. And, paradoxically enough, the faction once accused of radicalism was now accused of elitism. Many of the private schools collapsed, along with the economy, in the 1930's.

As suggested above, community-making was one of the great contributions of women in the progressive era. But their penchant for the associational was antithetical to industrial capitalism's urge to compartmentalize, divide and specialize, an urge fast becoming a dominant feature of American life. The result was that what had once been a burning desire for reform was stifled. Women remained active in the public sphere after 1920, but much less aggressively so. They continued teaching and working, but at the lower end of the administrative hierarchy, more often anonymously, less often in the forefront. The campaigns of radical women reformers which had informed and inspired almost every part of social, political and educational life were past history, and the world soon became engaged in another great war.
What was lost when women retreated from the vanguard of reform will never be known. But from her own latter-day perspective as a feminist literary theorist, Adrienne Rich concludes that, in general, the disappearance the "female principle" from the industrial age mainstream has been a great loss. She assails it as one of technological capitalism's most devastating effects, creating a "numbing of the powers of the imagination--specifically the power to envision new human and communal relationships" (83-4). Other concerned voices have been raised in the field of education. Curriculum theorists James and Susan Colberg Macdonald observe that while the relational qualities have evolved and matured throughout history in the female, yet women have often been denied their allotted roles in our culture. They urgently call for a reconceptualization of schooling that will encourage community, believing that only by doing so can our world survive: "The importance of those very qualities of community, of being at one with others and the world, of unity and cooperation, are the very qualities needed for the survival of humanity" ("Gender Values and Curriculum" 479).
Socialism will ... restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism and ensure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism.

"The Soul of Man Under Socialism"
Oscar Wilde

Overview

The first section of this writing was concerned with place. It physically "visited" Alabama, the contemporary community of Fairhope, the buildings which housed the Organic School and the room where Marietta Johnson once taught, now the Marietta Johnson Museum. The visit endeavored to make Marietta Johnson a palpable presence, to see her, to hear her voice and, as far as possible, to make her live again in the present.

The next chapter was concerned with a particular historical time. It reconstructed the historical dimensions of the multi-dimensional and reform-minded period known as the "progressive era" and education within that era in the belief that the person, Marietta Johnson, can best be understood within her own social and historical context. The section on education endeavored to gain some understanding of the ways in which the psychological and sociological idealism of the liberals
evolved alongside of the organizational efficiencies and bureaucratization forged by progressive conservatives. Attention was given to the unusual emergence of women into the public arena during the progressive era. The section especially sought to emphasize the roles of women, that is, their contributions to social, cultural and educational reforms.

Having gained an historical perspective of the nation in the progressive era, the next chapter returns once again to place, this time focusing on the microcosm of Fairhope, Alabama in the early part of this century. The founding of the Fairhope Colony was only one experiment among many attempted in the new social order which emerged out of the exigencies of the industrial revolution. Only a handful of these experiments have endured and Fairhope is one of them. Just how the community of Fairhope came to be founded and how a heterogenous group of radicals managed to form an enduring and coherent whole is integral to Marietta Johnson's story. As the story unfolds, it will become clear that the Fairhope experiment and her experiment were inextricably bound together and must be understood in tandem if they are to be understood at all.
The Founding and Founders

"The present social and economic order is doomed," proclaimed an essay read to a group of men gathered in a Des Moines, Iowa, office on January 4, 1894. The doomsday forecaster was 33 year old E. B. Gaston, a graduate of Drake University and now the editor of a populist newspaper called the Farmers Tribune. Gathered in Gaston's office to hear the doomsday forecast were a dozen of his populist friends. His strong language was not entirely unjustified. The troubling realities of a new industrial age were no longer just looming on the horizon; they were a fact. To make matters worse, the nation was floundering in a financial panic and one of the worst depressions it had so far experienced.

Under its oxymoronic banner "True Cooperative Individualism," Gaston's essay urged an escape from the deplorable conditions that seemed everywhere present. And the escape that he had fashioned was that of founding a "model community" free from all forms of private monopoly

---

which would insure its people equality of opportunity. His was not just a utopian dream for achieving moral perfection, he insisted, but it was a very practical plan: "We have not been carried away by dreams of an ideal society from which selfishness was banished and men sought only the happiness and good of others." Gaston was not the least sanguine about the tenacity of human selfishness, so salvation through pure socialism as practiced in other communal experiments was not what he had in mind. He recognized what he called the "two great laws," those of "human nature and human rights." Though human selfishness could not be eradicated entirely from human nature, he believed his plan would offer an equilibrium between human selfishness and the greediest tendencies of monopolistic capitalism. Therefore, his message dwelt on how those features of industrial capitalism were to be controlled.19

There was, first of all, the economic issue of achieving equality of economic opportunity for all citizens. But there was also the moral issue at stake. In a nation rich in land and natural resources, poverty of the masses had only deepened while a greedy few were accruing fabulous fortunes through monopolizing not only capital but land. The hope of progress had not been

19 E. B. Gaston's message quoted here was reprinted later in the Fairhope Courier editions of February 15, 1895 and March 1, 1895.
fulfilled for the masses in America. Rather than creating opportunities for everyone, all too often capitalism had limited opportunities, bringing in its wake wretched living conditions for thousands. If humans were to be moral, he argued, they must also have enough economic opportunity to provide a roof over their heads and enough to eat. Gaston denounced the "hideous injustice" of the prevailing economic and social order and talked of its overthrow in tones that would have done justice to a Marxist revolutionary. The present social order would go, of that he was certain, but he was impatient for this change he believed to be inevitable. He feared that they who recognized its evils and were "uniting a majority of its victims for its overthrow" might well be destroyed before a rising groundswell of opposition had its effect. It was a crisis that could not afford to wait for a political solution.

Gaston's sense of urgency was impelled by the same worries that had prompted the other reforms in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was a shocked response to the scarred countryside, the filth and poverty, the dehumanization and loss of identity that accompanied the hordes of people crowding into the cities; it was the disarray, confusion and loss of community that surrounded a world reinventing itself as a technocracy. The American dream had somehow gone wrong. They saw a
country headed not toward Valhalla through science but toward disaster and being "unable or unwilling to destroy it as a piece, they sought some loophole that would allow the American country to make its sudden leap into heaven instead of hell" (Wiebe 137). Community, that great casualty of the nineteenth century, was where they had come from and what they understood. A return to community would restore order. They had not forgotten their history but nostalgia distorted their memories. The past was where they wanted to return, not something they wanted to learn from.

Though Gaston and his friends called themselves populists, many of the era's other "back to nature" communitarian movements had been instigated by social gospellers, Christian socialists and romantic Marxists, all of whom believed that by isolating themselves in small communities of believers, they could re-invent a society gone wrong. Unlike other skeptics, communitarians such as Gaston did not necessarily aim to reform the system as a whole. They were content with more modest schemes to save the world and most were certain that a successful experiment, even on a local level, was sure to set a good example and in doing so bring the world to their doorstep.

On the surface at least, it appeared to be one of the greatest contradictions of the progressive era that side by side with the cheerful rhetoric of science and progress
there dwelt this deep malaise and wistful yearning to begin anew, to simplify, to return to the pastoral life and, thereby, to restore the Garden of Eden that the industrial revolution had spoiled. In an age of the industrial megalopolis when big government, big industry and big money threatened every day to suck the individual into the swirling vortex of its undifferentiated, amorphous masses, a migration back to the nuclear village had great appeal. Village life might have its cruder aspects but there at least human beings could claim an identity and there they might have some independence and control over their own destiny, or so they believed.

Fortunately for Ernest B. Gaston, another apostle of social change, Henry George, had already fashioned a mode of escape from what he too believed to be impending social doom. George's impassioned philosophy was somewhat simpler than the title of his best-selling book *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth... The Remedy*, commonly known as *Progress and Poverty*. George was a visionary and a powerful advocate of social change who theorized the deep structural causes underlying wealth, poverty and depressions. His book, while lengthy and agonized, was such popular reading in the 1890's that by 1905 an astounding two million copies had been sold (Henry George, Jr. xxiv).
Motivating Henry George to take pen in hand was rampant speculative fever in the west as elsewhere. It had allowed landowners to make huge profits by hanging onto property as values rose automatically merely by virtue of increases in population but without any exertion of labor. The resulting increase in wealth, George emphatically believed, had created a grossly unequal distribution of wealth and power. Not only were individuals victimized but such economic inequities had "destroyed every previous civilization." In words reminiscent of the progressives' passion but lacking their cheerful optimism, he pointed an accusing finger at every progressive community for allowing a condition where "Wages and interest tend constantly to fall, rent to rise, the rich to become very much richer, the poor to become more helpless and hopeless and the middle class to be swept away" (Progress and Poverty 528). George saw large fortunes being made merely through buying and selling land while farmers, artisans and craftsman became wage slaves and the unskilled, unpropertied masses lapsed into poverty. Speculation in land, he argued, was the major cause of the growing disparity between the rich and the poor. It was a simple linear equation: land speculation led to monopoly of capital and monopoly of capital led to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few thus widening the gap between the rulers and the ruled. The
result was that civilization became so top-heavy it collapsed under its own weight.

Like Gaston and his progressives comrades, however, Henry George believed that society could be saved. Yet he neither shared the typical utopian's romantic attachment to the past nor the progressive's sublime faith in continuous progress through science. Instead, he insisted on viewing progress through the prism of human history where seasons of growth, stagnation and decay had marked the transformation of civilizations rather than continuous, uninterrupted progress:

We have reached such a point that progress seems to be natural with us, and we look forward confidently to the greater achievements of the coming race--some even holding that the progress of science will finally give men immortality and enable them to make bodily the tour not only of the planets but of the fixed stars and at length to manufacture suns and systems for themselves. ... But without soaring to the stars, the moment that this theory of progression, which seems so natural to us amid an advancing civilization, looks around the world, it comes against an enormous fact--the fixed, petrified civilizations. (Progress and Poverty 481)

The extravagant optimism that was customary to progressives was almost entirely absent in Henry George. And, as it turned out, he was also opposed to the experimental enclaves founded on his philosophy.\(^{20}\)

---

\(^{20}\) Henry George was opposed to single tax enclaves and never did approve the Fairhope experiment. He believed that the single tax should be a federal prerogative not a local one. According to Gale Rowe, present secretary of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, there were several reasons why Henry George refused to
Hence, the man upon whose philosophy the Fairhope Colony was about to be launched, steadfastly refused ever to acknowledge its presence (Alyea and Alyea 25, 62).

Henry George had a much larger scale adaptation of his theory in mind than a single tax enclave. All federal lands should be held in common he believed: "We must make land common property" (Progress and Poverty 328).

Nevertheless, his plan did not include nationalization of land:

I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call their land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take the kernal [sic]. It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent. (405)

Under George’s plan, all landholders and leaseholders would pay a sum equal to the fair rental value of their land to the federal government. The "confiscated" rent collected from land would be the single mode of taxation and it would be sufficient to supply all social and cultural needs and public services such as schools, roads, utilities, libraries and museums. There need be no other acknowledge the Fairhope experiment. His greatest fear was that the colony would fail and invalidate the whole single tax idea. Another concern was that socialists would connect themselves with the community (Interview 25 Apr. 1994). The colony, of course, did not fail though George’s concern about socialists, was realized. The socialists never dominated the colony, however.
taxes levied on income or property including buildings, industrial equipment, household furniture, jewelry, stocks or other personal property. Nor should there be income taxes, excise taxes, customs duties, or business license taxation (Alyea and Alyea 2). And, finally, there should be no taxes on labor or its products. In fact any taxation on labor or property was an evil comparable to that of profiteering. George argued that if land as a product of nature morally belongs to the people in common, labor by the same natural law belongs to the individual: "Nature acknowledges no ownership or control in man save as the result of exertion" (Progress and Poverty 335).

His plan, George fervently believed, would eliminate the most flagrant abuses of monopoly capitalism as well as the grossly unequal distribution of wealth among the people and the nation would be saved. E. B. Gaston and the Fairhopers believed it just as fervently and founded their colony on his philosophy (though without his blessing).

Gaston's essay on "True Cooperative Individualism" bore other marks of the true Georgist doctrine and not the least was its frequent references to nature and its laws. Gaston acknowledged, for example, the "two great laws of human nature and human rights: 'All men seek to satisfy their desires with the least exertion' and 'Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not
the equal freedom of any other man'" (Courier 15 Feb. 1895, 1 Mar. 1895). Both George and Gaston were convinced that monopolistic land policies were in direct defiance of nature's laws which had meant the earth to be shared equally by all.

In evoking "nature's" laws to justify their faith, they were taking part in a common liberal progressive tradition. John Dewey, Marietta Johnson and many of their liberal progressive contemporaries commonly accepted themselves as the true adherents of nature and its laws and the term "nature" was usually used in its most kindly and beneficent sense. Carolyn Merchant, in The Death of Nature, describes this sort of identification with nature as central to an organic world view which dominated thinking prior to the modern age. But as the scientific revolution proceeded to mechanize and rationalize the world order, "Two new ideas, those of mechanism and the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world" (2). For industrial man, truth had come through science; and conservative progressives were quick to latch on to the mechanistic motifs of science so that by the early 1900's they had very nearly succeeded in recasting the universe as a great machine rather than a living organism. The liberal progressives, on the other hand, could not give up the image of nature as truth. They who deplored much of what the industrial age had
brought with it, would summon forth the kindly laws of
mother nature as their own truth. Nature's harsher, more
inexplicable laws, including so-called "natural
disasters," defects of birth and disparities in ability,
to name a few, were simply ignored.

There were other common ideological denominators
between George and Gaston. George's unsophisticated
philosophy called for a dialectical relationship between
capitalism and socialism that struck a resonant chord in
Gaston, an ideologue with a pragmatic bent. As conceived
by Gaston, the model community should tread the middle
ground between individualism and socialism with common
ownership of the land but individual ownership of labor.
Like Gaston, communal reformers typically believed land to
be a resource which should not belong to any individual
but should be held in common. Collectivism for most
communal reformers, however, usually meant sharing labor
and its products along with ownership of the land. The
distinction between socialism and single tax theory is not
always crystal clear to the uninitiated but there is a
fundamental difference. The socialist is first and
foremost a collectivist while the single taxer is first
and foremost an individualist. Paul and Blanche Alyea, in
their history of Fairhope, describe the "true single
taxer" as one who "possesses almost complete faith in the
efficacy of freedom provided individuals have effective
access to land or nature" (28). Therein lies a crucial difference.

While Gaston was a reformer who felt deeply about the well-nigh unbearable conditions of "misery, hardships and despair everywhere apparent," he had also seen "the multitude of failures of [communal] social experiments." He ascertained that those failures were due primarily to a flawed theory. A good theory, he was certain, would work, proving its value in the only way possible, by demonstration (Courier 15 Feb. 1894). He reasoned that if the "laws of human nature" included a degree of selfishness, then, in theory, that selfishness should be satisfied by allowing the laborer the full benefits of his/her labor. But the "laws of human rights" must also be satisfied:

What more reasonable, more practical, than for those who understand the devices by which the labor of the many is taken for the profit of the few, to unite for the elimination of the land speculators, the usurers, the monopolists of public service, and all the other parasites who fatten upon industry compelling the producer to gnaw the bone while they eat the meat. (Courier 15 Feb. 1894)

Consequently, in a resolution of dualisms that might have gratified John Dewey himself, Gaston and his friends resolved to fashion a community of "true cooperative individualism" based upon Henry George's principles. Land would be held in common while the fruits of labor would redound to the individual. They were convinced that one
which sought an equilibrium between the forces of individualism and collectivism was sure to succeed as other socialistic experiments had not. They saw the problematic merely as one of finding the right theory.

It should be stated here that Fairhopers were utopians but not utopians in the usual sense of that word. They were not a back-to-the-land movement nor were they concerned about theology or the ecology of preservation nor did they despise industrialism or reject technology in favor of simplified rural living. Unlike most utopians, theirs was not a nostalgic yearning for simpler times. They were economic utopians who yearned rather to redress the worst ills of economic capitalism. They were emphatically dissatisfied with hierarchical and economic arrangements in a society where a few amassed great fortunes while the many lived in poverty and they wanted to rectify that imbalance.

Robert Fogarty, in his history of American communes and utopian movements, *All Things New*, submits that one of the central tensions in American life during the industrial revolution was that between the forces of individualism and the demands of community (8). In 1894, Fairhopers addressed that tension by combining what they believed to be the best features of both. Whatever others may have believed, the Fairhopers' utopia was rooted in the practical--what worked; their head might be in the
clouds but their feet, they did not doubt, were firmly planted on the ground. Their motto would not be "from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs," but rather, "equal opportunities to all and to the laborer the full product of his labor" (rpt. in Courier 15 Feb. 1895). Gaston later defined the general plan in terms calculated to be understandable to the most obtuse:

The "Fairhoper" rents his land from the community. These rents bring in a fund from which the community pays all state and county taxes on its lands and on the personal property of the renter, including houses. Any balance remaining is spent on public improvements. The land belongs to the community. The houses and other things put upon it by the individual belong to him. He pays no direct tax except his rent. To quote the words of a single taxer, "We do not fine a man because he builds a house, or gets a piano for his wife." (Courier 15 Nov. 1903)

But in early 1894, Fairhope was still only a dream cherished in the mind of its founders. Before they could actually demonstrate its practicality, a suitable location for the experiment had to be found. In the late nineteenth century communal settlers looked toward the south as well as the west. Prior to the 1890's, most movement was in a westward direction, but between 1894 and 1899 one-half of the 34 colonies migrated to the south instead (Fogarty, All Things New 227-33). Fogarty offers several reasons for the southern migration including the continuing availability of cheap land. Also, however, communities could advertise the attractions of climate, an
extended growing season, and the fruitful gardens that settlers could bring to blossom (10). The advertising value of such Garden of Eden imagery was certain to strike a chord with frigid northerners and urban dwellers, and E. B. Gaston would use it liberally throughout his editorial life in rhapsodic and over-blown commercialism:

At this writing, January 14, roses are blooming in the Fairhope dooryards, strawberry vines are blooming freely and occasional berries of good size may be found. In the gardens turnips, cabbage, beets, radishes, etc. are growing. The air is sweet and balmy, the sun shines bright and fires are unnecessary except in mornings and evenings. Quite a contrast, we suspect to what you are enjoying (?). How would you like to try some of it? (Courier 15 Jan. 1901)

Once the decision had been made to marshal a group of like-minded reformers to form their own community, a party of two was dispatched from Des Moines to search out "the promised land." But first, a campaign had to be conducted to enlist members for the prospective colony. Both socialists and single taxers were welcomed—though single taxers were naturally more welcome. And a constitution was adopted for the prospective colony with the stated purpose of conducting "a model community or colony, free from all forms of private monopoly, and to secure to its

21 Among the early settlers were single-taxers, socialists, populists, social gospellers, greenbackers, Bellamyites and other varieties of reformers (Beck American Progressive Education 116; Courier 20 May 37). And not all of them were totally clear about the single tax principles by which they would be governed (Alyea and Alyea 30).
members therein equality of opportunity, the full reward of individual efforts, and the benefits of co-operation in matters of general concern" (Alyea and Alyea 305). Some of the more salient features of the Fairhope Industrial Association Constitution, which employed all of the affectation and legalese of a state document, were democratic government; religious freedom; rejection of any candidate by a 10% vote of the present members; voting rights accorded to members and their spouses. And then there were the more obvious features necessary to a single tax community including common ownership of land within the jurisdiction of the colony and one tax on that land which would be the only tax levied. Lessees were granted complete freedom in the use of the land and any taxes levied by the state, county or township were to be paid from revenue collected by the single tax (Alyea and Alyea 12-24).

After scrutinizing the merits of several sites in the south, the location on Mobile Bay was chosen for several reasons, including its supposed healthful qualities. Both literally and figuratively, the site would be their "city

---

22. The first constitution was adopted under the original name of the colony, the Fairhope Industrial Association. In July of 1904, the Industrial Association was dissolved in order to incorporate under the laws of the State of Alabama. At that time, the Association was reorganized under the name of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation and a new constitution was adopted (Alyea and Alyea 88).
set on a hill" and its advantages were speedily advertised. The first issue of the Courier, published August 15, 1894, in Des Moines, Iowa, only foreshadowed what would become a steady stream of public relations issuing forth from Fairhope. Gaston may have wanted to shut out the advancing industrial age by returning to the soil, but neither he nor the Fairhopers ever despised the machinery or renounced the technology that could distribute the Fairhope brand of boosterism far and wide. The Courier announced that the chosen site for the prospective experiment, high on the cliffs overlooking Mobile Bay, offered "all the advantages of the Gulf Breezes in its purity and, the high altitude and perfect drainage and the health giving aroma of the pines" (Courier 15 Aug. 1894). Many years later, Gaston described that same site to a Christian Science Monitor writer in tones much less flattering: "The site was the wildest spot along the eastern shore of the bay, with not a town of any size nearer than Mobile, across the bay. The ground was covered with timber of little value. It was not naturally fertile. . . ." ("Henry George Plan Thrives at Mobile Bay" 21 Nov. 1929).

---

23 The Courier was edited by E. B. Gaston from the first, but initially the publication was owned by the colony. In 1899, Gaston took over as owner of the paper and continued as its active editor for most of his life (Alyea and Alyea 19).
With characteristic passion, the young Gaston delivered his own version of the "Gettysburg Address," summarizing the unique mission of the colony in one of the first issues of the Fairhope *Courier* on September 1, 1894. The impassioned essay was certain to encourage and inspire a little band of prospective pioneers and urge new recruits to join them only two months before they would embark on their southern pilgrimage:

The Fairhope Courier will advocate what it holds to be correct economic theories and will insist that the same be made to "work." It denies the possibility of a "good theory" which is "not practical. "It holds the right of every man to do as he will, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other, to be self-evident and the fundamental law of human society; that the equal right of men in the use of the earth [a necessary corollary of the foregoing] can only be secured by applying the principle of single tax; that all natural monopolies should be administered by society in the equal interest of all and that a common interest dictate co-operation instead of competition in many departments of human effort, but that involuntary co-operation by whatever name it may be called is slavery. (*Courier* 1 Sept. 1894)

That issue of the *Courier* was published in Des Moines, Iowa. The first Baldwin County, Alabama issue was published on December 1, 1894, only two weeks after the colonists set foot on their land of "fair hope."  

---

24 The name Fairhope was believed to have been the suggestion of the founding members, Alf Wooster, who is said to have remarked that it had a "fair hope" of success (P. Gaston, *Man and Mission* 72, 132). In later years, however, E. B. Gaston's sister, Clara Atkinson, was credited with the name. For further comments, see Gaston, *Man and Mission* 72; Alyea and Alyea 10.
It listed 28 persons, 19 adults, and nine children, now "on the ground" at the chosen site. There were fewer than had been originally expected for several reasons. Among them was the fear of some single taxers who might otherwise have cast their lot with them that the experiment might fail and give their movement a black eye. Also, the current depression might well have severely limited the number of persons who were able to pay the relatively expensive membership fee. Included in the group, most of whom had come over from Mobile by boat was E. B. Gaston, his wife, his four children. A nephew of Mrs. Gaston's from Bayard, Iowa, accompanied the group and others arrived from places as distant and diverse as Los Angeles, California, and Dunbar, Pennsylvania. In the romantic tradition of true pioneers, some of them spent the first few nights on the floor of a log cabin and others in a covered wagon driven down from Ohio by one of the families. Gaston described the group in the same 1929 Christian Science Monitor article quoted above:

25 The membership fee was $200 plus a $50 contribution to the prospective "mercantile" department. (It was later reduced to $100.) Of the initial group comprising 25 colonists, the Alyeas report that five were not members of the Fairhope Industrial Association and, further, that most of the members had paid only $5.00 toward the $200 fee when the colony was settled (29-30).

26 Of the original group of eight families, only the Gaston family and Mr. Coleman would remain active in the colony. Two others retained inactive memberships in the association and the others became residents of Baldwin County (Alyea and Alyea 30; Courier 1 Feb. 1898).
The settlers were all poor. Most of them were unfamiliar with farming and there were no established industries to give employment. The participants were mostly strangers to one another. The usual differences prevailed and friction over questions of leadership developed. Many came and went away again, but a nucleus of faith and courage remained. (21 Nov. 1929)

Their first--the most important--purchase was 132 acres fronting on Mobile Bay bought for $6.00 per acre, but soon the association added 200 acres of interior land for $1.25 per acre to their acreage. (Alyea and Alyea 29-32). The first purchase included acreage that would later become the wide strip of park lands along the bluffs above Mobile Bay and the beaches below which were described in the introduction to this writing. It was because Fairhopers believed in communal landholding that this picturesque piece of real estate with its magnificent vista was saved from speculators and preserved for the Fairhope community into posterity.

In spite of its charming vista, splendid trees and apparently luxuriant vegetation, the newly acquired land was poor in quality. Inadequate financing had first forced the colonists to locate on sub-marginal land and

27 In 1897 title was secured to 320 of additional inland property but there were no further additions until 1900 when the colonists had accumulated additional funds from new memberships which had now been reduced to $100. The colony’s holdings increased steadily until 1907 (H. G. Brown, et al., Land Value Taxation Around the World 110). At its incorporation in 1908, only 40 per cent of the land belonging to the enclave was included in the city of Fairhope (Fogarty, Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History 220).
then made it difficult even to purchase adequate acreage to support themselves (Alyea and Alyea 33). According to one estimate, the entire assets of the group may not have exceeded $1000 (Beck, American 116). Also, unlike their earlier westward moving counterparts, Fairhopers were not settling on virgin land, and it had been a long time since anyone had eked out any living by farming what was then known by its less promising name of "Stapleton's Pasture" (Alyea and Alyea 35).

Had those early Fairhopers been utopian visionaries dreaming of a Garden of Eden where they would thrive on the prolific fruits of a fertile land, they would have been sadly disappointed. Not only was the land of poor quality, but there was no nearby wharf to dock a boat, no roads and no railroad lines to transport agricultural products to markets. Markets were a considerable distance away and the roads were abominable. Though railroads were invading much of the American landscape, they were inaccessible to Fairhopers. The most efficient transportation available was by way of boat to Mobile. In addition to the lack of farm-to-market transportation, there was the usual need for housing and a pure water supply. Even the simplest requirements for the civilized existence which they had previously known would now have to be secured by their own labors. But Fairhopers were not idle dreamers, they were hardy and practical pioneers,
just as their leader had earlier claimed, and they set to
work immediately doing their best to make their "good
theory work."

And right along with its single tax propaganda, the
pages of the *Courier* documented every agricultural success
from the pea crop to an extended, and only marginally
successful, community experiment with satsuma oranges.
Along with that, the *Courier* freely offered suggestions
for fertilizer. An item on "Handling the Manure" was even
featured on the front page (**Courier** 4 June 1909), and
Joseph Fels' special "jadoo" fertilizer shipped all the
way from Philadelphia was duly appreciated (**Courier** 1 Feb.
1900).

Though the settlers may have had to eke out an
existence on poor land with few of the amenities of
civilized life, one rarely glimpsed these harsher aspects
through the pages of the *Courier*. Noting with sorrow the
"keen distress of the terrible suffering of the poor in
the cities," the editor encouraged his little band (as
well as any prospective settlers) with the news that there
was "still plenty of sweet potatoes and fuel unlimited for
the cutting and none starving or freezing" in Fairhope
(**Courier** 1 Feb. 1997). And it was not long before they
had sunk their well, built their wharf and cut a road
through the cliff to carry lumber from the wharf for the
building of homes and stores (**Courier** 1 Jan. 1895, 15 Oct.
By July of 1895, they were already accumulating books for a free Fairhope library and by September was rejoicing in their own post office with E. B. Gaston installed as postmaster (Courier 15 July 1895, 15 Sept. 1895). By the end of 1895 they had celebrated the first wedding and the first birth in their colony (Courier 11 Oct. 1895). And by 1896 they were already occupied with more intellectual endeavors. In May of that year the opening exercises of the first Fairhope school was "enlivened by instrumental as well as vocal music" and by September they were holding public discussions on "The Money Question" (Courier 15 May 1896, 1 Sept. 1896).

Fortunately, not all single taxers outside of the colony feared its failure as did Henry George, and some of them eventually came forward with welcome financial support. The social reformer and philanthropist Joseph Fels, wealthy manufacturer of Fels Naphtha soap, was one of them. By 1900, Fels had become an active contributor. Adding to the Fairhoppers' ultimate good fortune was the happy circumstance that they were not destined to rely forever on their agricultural resources. What, in fact, finally proved to be their greatest assets were the scenic location on Mobile Bay, access to the warm gulf waters and their own intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness and zest for life. The Fairhoper's ability to live life to its fullest is legendary to those who are familiar with the
colony's history. The early colonists were a gregarious, genial lot, "more adept at living than at making a living" (Alyea and Alyea 82). In a 1909 letter to E. B. Gaston, Joseph Fels was hardly able to disguise his annoyance over the colonists' inclination for debate at the expense of more practical matters: "Your community is further behind in agriculture than in economic discussion, and I suppose the cultivators themselves differ in their ideas quite as much" (Alyea and Alyea 82).

Though life may have been primitive and the colonists had houses to build and crops to plant, they had not long been settled in Fairhope before they established a Sunday afternoon discussion meeting. The Sunday discussions were known later as "The Progressive League" and continued active for many years. Weather permitting, the citizens gathered in the park along the bay where a platform was eventually constructed around a giant magnolia tree to accommodate the Sunday meetings as well as other local festivities. A different leader was chosen each week and the subjects varied from week to week, but whether the subject was Christianity, revision of the Alabama Constitution or economics, the subject of single tax was certain to come up. Women were just as likely as men to speak and present papers, and the women spoke on political issues just as often as religion. The meetings, first noted in the September 1, 1896 Courier, customarily
included a lively question and answer period. In December of 1898, several lectures were covered by the Courier. A paper read by one Mrs. Leech was pronounced "a brilliant one . . . marked by earnestness and deep feeling upon [her] subject, and [it] elicited quite general discussion." A second paper titled "Christianity the solution of social problems" had been read by a Rev. Clarkson who was criticized because he "did not particularize enough" but, in general he "maintained his position ably, and insisted that he should not be placed in a position of hostility to the single tax." The editor congratulated all concerned, the speakers for their "utmost courtesy and good feeling," and the people of Fairhope on "the admirable spirit manifested in these discussions" (Courier 1 Dec. 1898). The Sunday afternoon discussions were reported in the Courier for many years to come. Even three decades later, Fairhoper's had still not lost their penchant for lively debate, a fact one Fairhope commentator found quite satisfying:

One homey thing about Fairhope--and in this we believe she stands alone--her audiences are not only permitted but requested to "talk back," giving their views on the subject under discussion. It is certainly unique to hear the audience boldly tell the speakers what they think of their assertions. (Courier 7 Mar. 1924)

The Sunday discussion group was only one example of "true cooperative individualism" at work in Fairhope.
Meanwhile other organizations and societies flourished, exemplifying a broad spectrum of cultural interests and talents. Some of those mentioned in the Fairhope Courier during the first years, listed in the order of their appearance, were the Women's Suffrage Society; Village Improvement Society; Economic Living Club, Progressive League; Women's Christian Temperance Union; Greeno Masonic Lodge; Women's Social Science Group; Fairhope Women's Economic Study Club; Women's Henry George Club; Ethical Education Society (to develop artistic, literary and dramatic talent; Fairhope School of Philosophy (for the encouragement and study of art, music, drama, literature, science, religious and social progress); Federated Women's Club; Fairhope Library Association; Esthetic Culture Club; People's Assembly; Christian Endeavor Society; Henry George Club; Mother's Round Table (later the Parent's Round Table); Fifth Thursday Club, Nighthawk Club; Henry George Athletic Club; Knights of Pythias; Arbitration Society (to arbitrate rather than adjudicate disagreements); Ladies Aid Society; Farmer's Educational and Cooperative Union; Arts and Crafts Society; Socialist Club; Boys Corn Club; German-American Club and the Croquet Club.

And that was not the entire list. But it serves to illustrate the eclectic nature of Fairhope's freethinkers and also affords a basis for Fels' caustic evaluation of
the Fairhoper's agricultural skills versus their discussion skills. Among the heterogenous collection of single taxers, socialists, populists, greenbackers and Bellamyites who had come to call Fairhope home (Courier 20 May 37), there was likely to be a forum for almost any social or political issue, an outlet for almost every talent and a club for virtually every charitable purpose. It was enough to cause even the most convivial of Fairhoppers, Marie Howland, to complain that it was the "bother of [her] life" to find any time to enjoy home life when "The whole time seems to be given to societies, clubs, leagues, sociables, concerts, dances, endeavor meetings, commemoration services anniversaries, surprise and other parties, and I don't think this is a complete list" ("Letters" Courier 1 Jan. 1903).

The eclectic collection of early Fairhoppers had wasted no time in forming the institutions which made them a community. What is more, women had established many of the organizations listed above and, as their names suggest, some memberships were restricted to women, though men might be allowed to attend. Moreover, the women's interests were not confined to so-called "Women's" issues. They were just as likely as the men's to be devoted to such serious matters as politics, economics, and social reforms.
Issues of Gender in Utopia

Fairhope was, and still is, known as an eclectic community of artists, intellectuals and radicals, though at present, there is more eclecticism among its artists and intellectuals than there is in its politics. The materially poor but richly liberal climate of the early part of the century has given way in the latter part of the century to material wealth and political conservatism. Marie Howland’s story serves to illustrate that point. Marie was a rather remarkable woman, a free-thinking feminist, author and communitarian reformer of some renown. She was the founder and patron of the Fairhope Library, one of the first libraries in Alabama, a library that at one time boasted one of the finest and largest collections of first editions and classics in the south. The books, collected by Marie’s late husband Edward, had been donated to the Fairhope library upon Marie’s arrival. Yet, if visitors should expect to find the local library named after its benefactor, or even a room dedicated to her memory, they will be quite disappointed. Moreover, if books from the spectacular Howland collection

28 The Alyeas report that the Howland Collection itself consisted of 1200 books (76). The quantity was less remarkable than the quality which included volumes of works by Shakespeare, Milton, Julius Caesar, Juvenal, and many other classics as well as a Bible printed in 1611 and some fine first editions. The books weighed over 1100 pounds according to the bill of lading (Courier 15 Feb. 1900).
remain on the library shelves, a searcher is at pains to locate them. Nor is Marie Howland's photograph among the photographs of the honored early residents hanging on the walls.

Marie Howland arrived in Fairhope in 1899, an educated and cultured woman destined to provide one of the most fascinating sidelights in the history of that little village. She was already an accomplished writer and feminist novelist who could write about Shakespeare, women's rights or roses with equal ease, and a translator of books from the French who could claim Charles Fourier and Jean-Baptiste Godin as her friends. Robert Fogarty's *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History* reports that her utopian romance, *Papa's Own Girl*, went through three editions, two under the title of *The Familistere*, and it may well have been the inspiration for Edward Bellamy's far better known utopian fiction, *Looking Backward* (56). But, alas, the novel's sympathetic treatment of free love and fallen womanhood was not considered respectable subject matter according to then prevailing conventions (P. Gaston, *Women* 42). Coming from the pen of a woman, it may have been particularly egregious. In fact, the novel was so offensive as to get it "banned in Boston" and elsewhere for it was officially banned from the Boston Public Library for its alleged "coarseness" (P. Gaston, *Women* 42).
At 63, Marie had come a long way from her New Hampshire birthplace, an impoverished heritage and an all too brief education cut short at twelve when her father died and she had to care for her younger sisters.\(^{29}\) She and her second husband, Harvard graduate Edward Howland, lived for a time at Godin's famous commune "The Familistere" in Guise, France.\(^{30}\) While in France, Marie met Fourier and became fluent in French while Edward collected first editions for the library that eventually traveled to Fairhope. Together they found a latent social consciousness and a passion for communal living that finally took them to a cooperative colony in Topolobampo in the Sinaloa province of Mexico. The colony, which was to have been a model of "The Familistere," had been hatched in the brain of Albert Kinsey Owen but it was doomed to failure through poor management and lack of funds. Edward died there in 1890 after a lingering illness. Marie was devastated by his death and disappointed by what she construed as narrow-mindedness in

\(^{29}\) Marie Howland's history prior to Fairhope given here was taken from "The Odyssey of Marie Howland," a chapter in Paul Gaston's volume: Women of Fair Hope (19-65). The pages of Fairhope Courier and Robert Fogarty's two histories on utopian communal movements listed in the "Works Cited" section of this writing also supplied helpful material.

\(^{30}\) Godin was a wealthy French iron manufacturer who founded the profit-sharing commune known as "The Familistere" in Guise, France. Marie had translated Godin's Social Solutions as well as other French works into English. (Courier 23 Sept. 1921).
her Topolobampo comrades. The possible cause of the trouble may have been her predilection for public swimming in the nude, her reputation as a free-love advocate and a reported affair with a millionaire socialist backer of the colony during Edward’s illness (Fogarty, Dictionary 56).

But her "Mrs. Howland’s Letters" column in the Courier was to reveal little of the racier side of Marie Howland. In Fairhope Marie continued to write of women’s issues but now placed them within the larger context of equal rights and single tax principles. Her column overflowed with her genuine love for flowers, gardening, children, Marietta Johnson and Fairhope. Kitchenless homes, nude public bathing and free love were in her past, at least if Marie’s columns were any indication. It may be that the difficulties endured at Topolobampo had mellowed her revolutionary urge. Or it may be that at three decades plus a few years, an aging and seasoned rebel was simply winding down an active reform career and tempering her views in contrast to her friend Marietta Johnson who was just beginning an active reform career when she settled in Fairhope. Nevertheless, though Marie’s enthusiasm for radical reform may have been somewhat tempered, her ebullient spirit, her energy and her wide-ranging interests were at least a match for the Fairhoppers’ own and suited her well to the Fairhope clime.
As the librarian, she reviewed and recommended books for the public and the schools in her column. Here she demonstrated a familiarity with the English classics as well as a more continental taste. Of course, she recommended Jean Baptiste Godin's work, *Solutions Sociales*, which she had translated from the French in 1873, and works such as Condorcet and Madame Vernet, some very sophisticated reading for a small, rural village (Courier 1 June 1904; 15 Aug. 1900; Fogarty, *All Things New* 7). Through her column this worldly and cultured woman lent a cosmopolitan flavor to the small Fairhope community that might have well been the envy of any city. And Marie even equalled E. B. Gaston himself in her enthusiasm for Fairhope and never tired of writing about its beauties and its advantages. Her columns were filled with appreciation for the flora though she was not always so enthusiastic about the fauna, complaining occasionally about wandering goats and wild rabbits dining on her garden. At 63 plus she was still an avid and knowledgeable gardener, was fond of visiting the school and discussing new educational ideas and was one of Marietta Johnson's most enthusiastic admirers. Through her column in the *Courier* Marie became Fairhope's ambassador to the world just as Marietta Johnson would become its ambassador to the world through her lectures.
Yet, almost one hundred years later, in a nation where attitudes toward women and sexual freedom have undergone a sea change, it is an ironic fact that the fabulous Marie Howland is almost a forgotten woman in the community where she gave so unstintingly of her possessions, time and talents. On the other hand, both a school and a museum commemorate the name of her friend Marietta Johnson whose reformism was confined to the somewhat less controversial matter of educating and nurturing children in the community. One might well risk the conjecture that Marie's pre-Fairhope history as a free-thinking feminist novelist who advocated kitchenless homes and was believed to have engaged in nude public bathing and free love, might be offensive in Fairhope's current political climate.

But the early Fairhopers evidenced no such reservations. They not only welcomed Marie with open arms but they set about preparing themselves, intellectually at least, for her arrival by reading selections from *Papa's Own Girl* at the Sunday afternoon discussion meeting in order that they might better understand their prospective citizen (P. Gaston, *Women* 48). And ever on the alert to advertise his colony in the best light, and, withal a man of liberal convictions, E. B. Gaston asked Marie soon after her arrival to be his associate editor, a position that she maintained until her death in 1921. As the
associate editor she was expected to publish extracts from the letters that she wrote and received from a wide acquaintance throughout the world (P. Gaston, Women 52).

Upon her death in September of 1921, Marie Howland was acknowledged by a grieving Fairhope as "a noble, unselfish soul ready to spend and be spent for any high cause which enlisted her sympathy and support, and devoting a long and active life to the welfare of her fellows" (Courier 28 Sept. 1921).

So it is that, although Marie's name and photo may be most notable by their absence in the library, with a little diligence one can find her in the bottom drawer of a metal file labeled "Courier Microfilm" and the effort is worth making. But this is Marietta Johnson's story, not Marie Howland's, and neither time nor space permits even a fraction of the recognition that Howland's rich contribution to Fairhope deserves, never mind her multi-dimensional career as a reformer, feminist and novelist. Surely in an era when women's stories are beginning to be recuperated, her story will not remain untold for many more years. That a biography on her life has not been written already is regrettable and serves as another reminder that women's histories have been sadly neglected. Though Marie Howland is only of peripheral interest to this history, she illustrates well the unique place of
women in early Fairhope history and the remarkable degree of diversity and inclusiveness which existed within this small community.

There were other notable and distinguished women among the Fairhopers, though somewhat less conspicuously so. Dr. Clara Atkinson, half-sister of Ernest B. Gaston, was not only one of the early Fairhope pioneers of the Fairhope Colony, but she was a pioneer woman in the field of medicine having received her M.D. degree in 1876 and established a practice first in St. Paul, Minnesota (Courier 20 Oct. 1932). Dr. Atkinson was early elected a colony trustee and held the position from 1896 until 1902. Joyce Totten Bishop recalls a great many interesting women "in the old days." She especially recalled a Winifred Duncan who had not only danced with Isadora Duncan but had written a "very scientific book on spiders and was known to Fairhopers as the "Spider Woman" (Interview 17 June 1994).

Fairhope's reputation for harboring the quaint and unconventional was not a reputation confined only to its own borders. Indeed, a 1903 Booklovers Magazine article described Fairhope as something of a melting-pot of humanity and a haven for eccentrics, both male and female:

Here are several single-taxers from Iowa; there goes one from the conservative state of Massachusetts; another is full of interesting reminiscences of a socialistic colony in Mexico; this family came by private conveyance all the way from Ohio; that one belongs to a party of
single-taxers from Holland; down by the bay shore a Norwegian is building his boats; up the hill the library is kept by a "Fairhoper" who lived for some years in Paris. In the winter the hotel and cottages fill up with northern travelers coming south to escape the cold; in the summer they are succeeded by the Mobilians who come out on the high bluffs to avoid the hot nights. (qtd. in Courier 15 Nov. 1903)

The writer added that even with "all of this diversity of population, the town is pervaded by a common spirit that is unmistakable, and is best described by the word 'democratic.'" A Courier item boasted more light-heartedly about the Fairhope eclecticism:

Fairhope has the most intellectual people, the prettiest girls, the most clever old maids, the most fascinating widows and the homeliest men of any town of its size in the United States. It also has more cranks, more theorists, and more grouchy individuals, than similar size towns. (11 June 1915)

Marie Howland was undoubtedly one of those "fascinating widows" and "clever old maids" who finally found a place in the Fairhope sun. But she was only one of the stars in a whole galaxy of radicals and eccentrics who managed somehow to form an integrated community.

In contrast to Marie Howland, Marietta Johnson and Lydia Comings practiced a more subtle--perhaps even subversive--brand of feminism in their lives. Lydia Comings was an early activist for nutritional and physical fitness. A 1905 Courier advertised that she would once more give her classes for "both ladies and girls in Physical Culture including exercises given for breathing,
body building, clubswinging, etc. Special attention to abnormal conditions" (27 Jan. 1905). The "clubswinging" exercise conjures up visions of a community of female Amazons but there is no record of unusual physical feats or violence inflicted by a Fairhope woman. Lydia also initiated the "Village Improvement Corporation" and "Woman's Social Science Class" for studying economics and social questions. She and her husband also founded an early version of the fitness center/health farm called "The Gables." Their advertisement for this establishment ran "High, dry location near business center. Pine grove in rear. Hygienic cooking. An ideal place for REST and HEALTH" (Courier 11 Aug. 1903). Though she was never as conspicuous as her more flamboyant contemporaries, Marie and Marietta, Lydia worked quietly on the sidelines for the betterment of her community. She was the Fairhope club woman extraordinaire who established and worked tirelessly in many of the local organizations. And in her own very dignified way, Lydia Comings also became the community-maker extraordinaire of Fairhope. She was sure to be prominently mentioned with respect to and often gave addresses on important Fairhope occasions and was fondly known in her later years as Fairhope's "grand old woman of Fairhope" (Courier 30 May 1924). Perhaps most important, had Lydia Comings' not befriended, encouraged and
supported Marietta Johnson, the organic idea might have died an ignominious death in Barnet, Mississippi.

Marietta Johnson was possessed of a more radical spirit than her friend Lydia, but like her, she practiced her feminism quietly in the background and in ways that did not raise eyebrows in the Fairhope community—though, again, Fairhopers' eyebrows were raised less easily than most. Yet she practiced her feminism very effectively at a grass roots level and one where she had great influence—in her school. Boys and girls alike were expected to take part in domestic science, manual training and folk dancing. Both sexes participated equally, though perhaps not always with equal enthusiasm. Marietta Johnson remarked in a business letter that in the Organic School "[b]oys and girls work and play together. We try not to make any comparisons, and try to give them all the same sort of experiences through the elementary and high school periods."31

One male student expressed the conviction that "a feeling for women's rights and the need for more equality for women. . . . seeped into me" during his years at the Organic School.32 He remembers a teacher, Dora G. Opal,

31 From a Johnson letter in the Organic School archives written to Mr. James L. Hyatt on August 24, 1935.

32 Laraway began kindergarten in the latter years of Marietta Johnson's life when he was four. After graduating from the Organic high school, he attended the University of Michigan where he obtained a degree in
who was responsible for his enlightened attitude. He kept in touch with her through high school and later visited her in Washington, D. C., where she was active in the women's movement (Interview 20 Feb. 1991). Marietta Johnson's curriculum allowed the young people in her school to overcome to some degree the culture-bound gender roles so prevalent in American life. Her former students do not declare themselves feminists or talk of "women's issues" but they are, as one former student put it, "self-actualized" women. The women among the alumni could definitely be called independent. They could also be described as highly individualistic, politically active, community-minded and cultured women who have engaged in a wide spectrum of careers.

Accounts of her contemporaries indicate that Marietta and her husband Frank shared a warm relationship. She fulfilled the traditional role of obedient wife in forsaking her own profession to accompany her husband on several failed attempts at farming. Even after her educational "rebirth" when she was eager to begin

architecture and later apprenticed at the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Spring Green, Wisconsin, and in Scottsdale, Arizona, under Frank Lloyd Wright.

33 The term was used by Mary Lois Timbes Adshead, a theater professional who studied drama in New York and founded the Little Theatre of Geneva, Switzerland, in 1981. Adshead returned to Fairhope in 1989, where she founded the "Jubilee Fish Theatre," a professional theatre group which she directs (Interview 20 Feb. 1993).
implementing her new ideas, she dropped a promising career for a second time and took up the role of farm wife once again. But when Frank’s health and eyesight failed, she took over as bread-winner. Whether it was her husband’s failure to provide a living for his family or something in Johnson’s own makeup—a reform spirit that just would not be extinguished—she assumed the role of dominant partner from that time forward. After that and for much of the rest of his life, Frank worked as the manual training teacher in his wife’s school and cared for their son Clifford Ernest while Marietta took to the lecture trail and gained prominence as the guru of child-centered education. And Mr. Johnson’s wife maintained a lecture schedule that would have been daunting even to the most energetic of missionaries, male or female. Furthermore, in spite of women’s emergence into community life, it was not common for women to travel about the country unaccompanied, let alone to give public lectures. Margaret Sanger, after all, was jailed for disseminating her radical ideas from the public platform. Marietta Johnson’s ideas were probably not any less radical in her own field than Sanger’s. But as a missionary on behalf of children, Johnson offered no threat to the male status quo.

And "one of the best men in the world," as Frank Johnson’s neighbor described him, never complained about
his own masculine status quo though he once good-naturedly admitted that he was "known mostly as the husband of Mrs. Johnson" (Courier 30 Dec. 1910). Frank showed his mettle, however, when he ran on the socialist ticket for mayor in 1912, won the election and then refused to submit to local socialist party demands. But Frank was quite innocent of that egocentric habit said to have originated with early man which regards the female of the species as a possession. His wife, however, was coming to grips with it early in the century when she wrote that a sense of possession was too large a part of marriage: "'My wife, my dog, my gun' was in the mind of the ancient huntsman." And it may be assumed that her mate did not inspire her next words: "While the modern man does not use these words, too often the same thought possesses him." She acknowledged too that "Men have always talked down to women" (235). Like any well-taught Fairhoper, she attributed such undesirable behavior to economic inequality believing that woman's economic independence was the solution but adding that "education has a great deal of work to do" in providing that economic independence (Youth 241). Yet, like other progressives including her mentor John Dewey, she steadfastly insisted that education could ultimately solve the economic and social ills of the world. And she recognized that women would achieve intellectual equality as well as economic
independence through education. The young women at the Organic School were therefore urged to attend college and have careers along with the men and many did. As a career woman herself, Johnson also expressed impatience with a society which prepared young women for a business or professional career, yet "when they were ready for the plunge we have lifted our eyebrows and shudderingly said, 'No, a woman's place is in the home'" (Hearst's Sunday American 8 Apr. 1928). From insisting that little boys and girls alike learn manual training and domestic science to promoting equality among the sexes in higher education, Marietta Johnson quietly promoted sexual equality in her own little domain.

There is other evidence to indicate that sexuality was an issue which this wife, mother and teacher did not sidestep. A chapter in her first book Youth was devoted to the subject which she introduced by announcing, "Sex is here. What are we going to do about it?" (220). She encouraged parental frankness in dealing with the subject and believed that sexual impulses should be met head-on by allowing boys and girls plenty of opportunity to socialize in work and play. They should "dance together and sing together, as well as have the fullest experience in dramatics" (239). Furthermore, in a village where women quite commonly bore a dozen children and in an era when birth control was not a subject discussed by genteel
women, she suggested that parents should not have unwanted children: "It is a great tragedy to come unwelcome into this world. . . . The parents who have undesired children lose the larger blessing of parenthood" (223). More to the point, she acknowledged that birth control was often a necessity: "It costs money to rear children and many people are controlling the birth rate for economic reasons" (225). It was economic necessities that were uppermost in her thinking when she urged her foster son's wife to be fitted for a diaphragm before their marriage. Johnson insisted that the young couple could not afford a baby (Dorothy Beiser Cain, Interview 11-12 May 1993).

Finally, though she was cast in several stereotypically feminine roles as wife, mother and teacher, Johnson was the equal of the most masculine of men in sheer mental and physical toughness and the ability to endure. She sailed off on hundreds of lecture tours by herself leaving her husband and young son to fend for themselves. Her profession took precedence over her family life and other people's children took precedence over Johnson's own. It was customary for a father's profession to take precedence over his family life; but an independent woman, even a professional woman and teacher, was another matter entirely. His father was at home caring for Clifford Ernest, yet his mother's frequent absences may well have embittered Clifford Ernest toward
her. He is said to have complained in later years that his mother was "so busy mothering the children of the world, she never mothered me."\(^3\)\(^4\)

Johnson's lecture schedule, traveling by train for days on end, would have challenged the hardiest male. Indeed, at times she seemed almost cold-hearted. After her little son's accidental death—which might have been a heart-wrenching blow to the most stolid of women—she quickly returned to her teaching without so much as a period of mourning. And she managed to lay aside her personal feelings just as quickly in the death of her husband. In May of 1919, Mr. Johnson began to suffer ill health (\textit{Courier} 9 May 1919). By July of 1919, the \textit{Courier} announced that Mr. Johnson was gravely ill, had been sent to a Mobile infirmary and his wife telegraphed. She was then tending her school in Greenwich, Connecticut, but soon traveled to Mobile only to return very shortly to Greenwich though her husband was still hospitalized in serious condition (\textit{Courier} 18 July 1919).

In early August, and apparently still very ill, Frank left the infirmary traveling by train to Greenwich where

\(^{34}\) Several sources attribute this comment to Clifford Ernest but when or to whom the comment was made remains unsubstantiated. It was corroborated by Dorothy Beiser Cain in a personal interview (11 May 1993). Laura Smith also quotes the comment in "A Woman and Her Idea" giving Eleanor Coutant Williams as her source (77). Eleanor was in Mrs. Johnson's first kindergarten class and was a close companion of Clifford Ernest in their school years.
he died on August 29th. On the day of his death, when his wife found that the Greenwich school had been dismissed for the day, she insisted that it be re-opened immediately and the children called back (Interview, Dorothy Beiser Cain, 11-12 May 1993). Not until his wife could more conveniently return from her work in Greenwich were Frank's remains returned to Fairhope and a memorial service held (Courier 9 Jan. 1920). Neither the unceremonious delay in paying tribute to the dead nor the unusual choice of cremation were commonplace in 1920. If Fairhopers were shocked by the apparent dismissal of conventions or the apparent absence of female sensitivities, it has not come to light and the Fairhope Courier continued to sing the praises of its now-famous school marm. One can only imagine what dire consequences Johnson's reputation might have suffered if her life's work had not been dedicated to children. But the role of attentive wife was one that Johnson had apparently cast aside. Once she had enlisted in the war to end mis-education of children, Marietta Johnson let nothing stand in her way. What is more, she never yielded control of her school to anyone even in the grim days of its most severe financial crises. Was Marietta Johnson hardened or only resigned? Was she cold-blooded or merely self-sacrificing? These questions may never be answered with any certainty. But had she not become the woman of steel
who could endure, stand and withstand in the face of all crises, her school might not have survived.

Marietta Johnson did not talk about "women's rights" nor was the phrase one that was bandied about in Fairhope around the 1900's, but the rights of women were usually acknowledged in practice. Fairhopers were certainly at the most liberal end of any barometer that gauged equality of the sexes in their day. The Fairhope colony was founded on the principle of equal rights and opportunity for all and, for the most part, men accepted sexual equality as readily as economic equality though they failed to extend equal rights and opportunities to blacks.

With the notable exception of racial equality, Fairhopers were after the whole cloth. Nevertheless, even in those early years, most Fairhope women were more conventional than the flamboyant Marie or the unconventional Marietta. At the same meeting discussed earlier, where Mrs. Herring spoke on the "Progress of Woman Toward Universal Suffrage," and Mrs. Howland read a paper on "Women as Reformers," a Miss Slosson gave "two violin solos" and sang "The Garden of Sleep," and the meeting was concluded with ice cream. They might have begun their meetings with a luncheon and closed them with tea and cake rather than ice cream, but they never closed with ill-will toward husbands, fathers or men in general; they merely expected to take their rightful place
alongside them. As one woman—Alice Herring by name—put it: "It is the difference of mental make-up, the different way of viewing things, of accomplishing things, which constitutes woman's value to man in all his affairs, public and private, business and social as well as man's value to woman for the same reason" (Courier 13 Nov. 1908).

Adrienne Rich has declared something of the same conviction some seventy years later, submitting the observation that "we can no longer afford to keep the female principle enclosed within the tight little post-industrial family, or within any male-induced notion of where the female principle is valid and where it is not" (Rich 84). It was such unhampered equality that Fairhope women were seeking and they could point to their own colony constitution and the single tax principles as guaranteeing that equality. Alice Herring explained in her speech to the Fifth Thursday Club: "Woman suffrage is arousing universal interest because its end is not the mere gaining of political and property rights for one sex alone, but the gaining of all rights for the whole of human society" (Courier 13 Nov. 1908). However, her sweepingly inclusive "whole of human society" proved to be an overstatement of fact in Fairhope.

From the beginning, women held offices within the colony, voted in colony elections, gave speeches at public
gatherings and joined the Women’s Suffrage movement, most Fairhope women would fit William Reese’s description of the American progressive era women. They were wives and mothers, many with large families, who were extending their housekeeping practices to the public arena, becoming “municipal housekeepers.” Like progressive women throughout the nation, they were active club women, joining other women to work for community improvements. While Marie Howland was getting her library started and giving French lessons to the local children, other women cleaned up the streets and planted trees and roses while they agitated for a pavilion in the park, kindergartens, temperance and franchise. And for its part, the Courier was equally approving of Mrs. McCall’s venture into the millinery business, Clara Gaston’s new method for making ladies’ hats and sunbonnets utilizing needles from the abundant local pines, and the ladies of the WCTU who managed to close the bar on the steamer Carney “which has been a prolific source of drunkenness and disorder” (Courier 1 May, 1895; 1 July 1899; 15 Jan. 1904).

While “drunkenness and disorder” might foment some activism and their hospitality might be large enough to include the irrepressible Marie, ordinarily Fairhope women

---

35 Four women were elected to colony offices soon after the colonists' arrival in Alabama (P. Gaston, Women 50). Mrs. Carrie Sykes and Dr. Clara E. Atkinson, the half-sister of E. B. Gaston, were trustees of the colony in 1896. Sykes was the vice-president in 1902 and 1903.
were not inclined to militancy. Like their husbands, fathers and sons, they were interested in a whole spectrum of social and political issues as well as gender issues, but they rarely ventured beyond the acceptable feminine norms. Only Fairhope's norms, it is understood, were a little more flexible than most. Fairhope women claimed no more than the same rights that men enjoyed. Up to and including the immodest Marie Howland, the women of "fair hope" did not usually attempt to usurp the power or prerogative of their men and, thus, avoided stirring up any necessity for manly resistance. So Fairhope women, like their counterparts in the rest of the nation, did the things that women had always done. They rarely pushed past the cultural stereotypes which cast them as angels of mercy and keepers of the morals and so left their men folks unthreatened. All the while, they managed to manifest the same hospitality and generosity toward the opposite sex as they had toward the more radical members of their own sex.

At the same time that women everywhere were emerging from home into community, joining together and mobilizing to educate, regenerate and reform the nation, Marie Howland, Lydia Comings, Marietta Johnson and other Fairhope women were forming a like-minded sisterhood to educate and improve their own little community. Reading the early issues of Courier, one quickly concludes that it
was largely the women of Fairhope who gave Fairhope its extraordinary sense of community. Marietta Johnson had a major part in that effort. From its inception until the end of her life, her school increased its role as a social center where Fairhopers of all ages gathered, participating in everything from tea parties and plays to folk dancing, holiday observances, celebrations and lectures on child-rearing. Paul Gaston provides a glimpse of the heady assortment of community activities undertaken by Johnson during the Fairhope years as well as a sense of the intensity of the passion she felt for her work:

From the beginning her "advanced thought" radiated in many directions, turning Fairhope into an educational laboratory. . . . She involved the colonists in the life of the school, rounding up talented adults to entertain the children with musical performances and storytelling; she presided over fortnightly discussions of the nature and needs of childhood; and she prepared for the future by starting a teachers' training course, giving young women the literature and the information of the new education that had been denied her as a student. All the while she demonstrated almost boundless energy and involvement in the life of the community. (P. Gaston, Women 72)

And later chapters will show that although Marietta Johnson's center of gravity was firmly rooted in Fairhope, her energetic spirit radiated outward and drew in the world.

Issues of Color in Utopia

Issues of race in Fairhope were a very different matter than those of gender. In fact, for the most part,
race seemed to be a non-issue for Fairhoper. They dealt with it by not dealing with it, drawing a line around community that bracketed out people of color. There was never an African-American teacher or student in the Organic School or, for that matter in the Fairhope public school, during Marietta Johnson's lifetime. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) had legalized the already universal practice of segregation in public places, and it was totally imposed in the south (Garraty 483). There is no known reason for the exclusion in the Organic School which was private nor was there any apparent policy on race, written or otherwise. It simply appears to be a given. Likewise, Fairhope's constitution never forbade African-Americans from membership in the Fairhope Colony though a prospective member could be rejected by ten percent of the membership. In 1898, E. B. Gaston wrote that "it may safely be taken for granted we presume, that under the conditions in which Fairhope exists, no colored person could secure the approval of a majority of the members necessary to admission" (*Courier* 1 Apr. 1998). Hardships caused by land monopoly were odious to Gaston, but his sympathies did not extend to the hardships of former slaves.

Such exclusions were not peculiar to Fairhopers, of course. They were an accepted practice in the south as elsewhere, an unusually ironic circumstance in an age when
demands for justice and equality were bending society into radically new shapes. John Garraty concedes that while "Most Americans of the Gilded Age did not especially wish the Negroes ill; they simply refused to consider them quite human and consigned them complacently to oblivion, along with the Indians" (483). Yet the policy is so inconsistent with a dogma which professed equality and opportunity for all that in the case of the Fairhopers it seems especially offensive. The "natural rights" which they celebrated somehow did not extend to the naturally black, perhaps the most land-poor group in America.

To repeat, if there was any policy at all regarding segregation in the Organic School, it was not stated in writing or even voiced as far as can be determined. That was not true of the Fairhope Colony, however. Though the colony had no stated policy or constitutional restrictions regarding blacks, its founder and editor articulated what may be presumed to be colony policy. When occasionally an especially zealous reformer would complain through the pages of the Courier about segregation--and that occurred a number of times--E. B. Gaston would dutifully print the complaint and respond to it. Gaston's response to one indignant writer was that he had no "right to insist that because we have undertaken to go farther than he has in the living of truths we hold in common, that we must follow the naked principle of equality unreservedly,
regardless of conditions existing, to defy which might simply mean self-destruction" (Courier 1 Apr. 1898). When another irate citizen complained of an ordinance prohibiting "colored picknicks and excursions from coming to Fairhope," the editor of the Courier responded that "in the present condition of public sentiment in the south it is best for both races that every opportunity for friction should be avoided which can be." Gaston likewise questioned whether the complainant himself "would feel bound to accept the application of a negro for a lot alongside of him." Furthermore, the editor was "convinced that in the present condition of public sentiment in the south it is best for both races that every opportunity for friction should be avoided which can be" (12 July 1907).

As spokesman for the colony, Gaston's position was that in order to exist in harmony with the surrounding communities--and the Fairhopers' oddities were already looked upon with suspicion by their neighbors--they must draw the line at racial equality. His appraisal of the attitude of citizens in the surrounding communities toward Fairhope was not unfounded. One such citizen speaking at the fourth anniversary of the colony managed to register in only a few sentences the prevailing attitude toward blacks, a cautious skepticism and a personal sigh of relief regarding his Fairhope neighbors:

Above everything you have impressed me that you come here to stay; to make this your home and to
become one of our people--and in doing so you have not brought the solving of the negro question with you. Whatever might be your shortcomings, be your religious and political convictions what they may, the people of the South will extend the hand of welcome to you when you come as you have come. We will not welcome any man or woman to our land who tries to place the negro on a social equality with the Anglo-Saxon race. (Courier 1 Feb. 1898)

Still, when racial matters did not threaten the success of his cherished single tax experiment, Gaston's more liberal instincts held sway. He complained loudly and bitterly in the pages of his newspaper about the Ku Klux Klan, the lynching of negroes and poll tax provisions in the Alabama law which disenfranchised both white and black voters (1 Feb. 1899; 1 Sept. 1903; 25 Aug. 1911; 15 May 1904; 19 Jan. 1923, 12 June 1925; 4 Aug. 1922). The 1904 Courier issue recorded angrily that "Baldwin County has been disgraced by a lynching--that of a negro for alleged complicity in the murder for purposes of robbery of a prominent physician." It went on to call the alleged murderer's confession "worthless," having followed "a severe whipping by the mob." On the Klan, he once wrote:

We would not deny that there are many well-intentioned men in the klan--the men who burned witches in our early days and the perpetrators of the Spanish Inquisition, no doubt thought they were doing God's service. . . . [However] No men are good enough to be trusted with "invisibility" and no good purpose is to be served by it. (4 Aug. 1927)

Gaston's liberal nature showed up in other ways, including a plan for establishing a nearby "negro colony of the same
character" as the Fairhope plan. Gaston and other leaders of the community met with neighboring blacks on various occasions to discuss the single tax theory and the blacks expressed interest but the "negro colony" never progressed beyond the talking stage (Courier 1 Dec. 1903). Gaston also supported and publicized the activities of the Anna Jeanes School, a private school for black children in Fairhope. The editor once noted ingratiatingly that the Jeanes School had "as part of its course such industries as a child would need in practical life" (19 Mar. 1909).

The Jeanes Foundation had come to Alabama in 1909 to relieve a serious shortage of teachers in the racially segregated black schools. About the time that the Organic School was getting established, Lydia Comings reported in a Courier column called "The Club Corner" that there were 67 white schools taught by 76 white teachers and 14 "colored schools" being taught by 15 "colored teachers" in Baldwin County (7 Feb. 1908). It was the Jeanes Foundation that had stepped in to fill that vacuum and began providing teachers to work in rural black schools in Alabama. The foundation had been established by Anna T. Jeanes, a Quaker from Philadelphia, as part of a philanthropic effort to help blacks in the rural South. By 1915, the Jeanes Foundation was supporting 22 teachers in 19 counties in Alabama (Graham, Community and Class
There were several other similar foundations made all the more necessary by a legislative revision of Alabama law in 1890-1891, which no longer made it necessary to distribute money equally among black and white schools. The rationale for that revision was given by the Superintendent of Public Instruction:

It is alleged that in portions of the State under our present law the colored race gets well nigh all the school fund, whilst that race pays a very small percent of the taxes that make up that fund.

What is more, the superintendent had concluded that colored children in general were "only capable of receiving and profiting by an elementary education which costs comparatively much less than that suitable for the white race in its more advanced stages of civilization" (qtd. in Graham, Community 108). The superintendent reflected a condescension that was not altogether uncommon in progressive America. Robert Wiebe speculates that "worried people in the twentieth [century] separated the legitimate from the illegitimate. . . . Those alternately called Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic or Nordic always rested at the top. Bristling with the language of the laboratory, such doctrines impressed an era so respectful of science" (156). And Darwin himself had unwittingly provided this

---

36 In addition to the Jeanes Foundation, there were other philanthropic efforts to support black schools in the South. For a discussion, see Graham, Community and Class in American Education 112-4).
simple and comfortingly scientific rationale. Those who were at the top of the economic and intellectual heap belonged there by virtue of the fact that the fittest survive. It was "natural!" It was merely a matter of using scientific language to make the conditional appear to be factual. In his *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes calls such use of language a conjuring device, which entirely through words has "turned reality inside out, has emptied it of history and filled it with nature" (142-3). The paradox is that progressives, including the Fairhopers, were not willing to provide the environment that would improve the lot of their formerly enslaved neighbors and this attitude survived even in the face of a strong progressive bias favoring environment rather than heredity as causative.

Fairhopers, including Mrs. Johnson, continued to talk glibly of equal rights and opportunities for "every" citizen when in all honesty they should have said every white citizen. "Every" did not include people of color in Fairhope. There are hints that the same may not have been true of Johnson's Greenwich, Connecticut, school, however. A few weeks after it opened, the *New York Times* reported that the Greenwich school (later named the "Edgewood School") was not only "flourishing with a vigor that would put the traditional green bay to shame" but that it was "attended by children of all social classes and--well,
more than one color" ("New Ideas" 27 July 1913). A videotaped interview with Hazele Payne who taught in the school corroborates the Times story. Hazele describes a school where two dozen or so poor Italian children mingled with the rich but not without some objections from parents of the latter. When the well-heeled parents objected, "Mrs. Johnson won out," said Hazele, adding that "Mrs. Johnson never turned anyone down who wanted an education whether they paid for it or not" (Interview 2 Mar. 1992). The racial diversity appears to have been confined to Italians and may not have extended to black children, but any racial diversity in this elite society of "rich New York suburbanites," as the Times referred to them, appears to be something of an anomaly. There was some compromise involved, however. The Italian children were required to sit on one side of the room and there was no mingling among the two at recess. Hazele recalls, too, Mrs. Johnson's insistence that nurses and chauffeurs who accompanied the "poor little rich children" sit in the hall rather than in the classroom. If there were other minorities besides the Italians represented in the Greenwich school, it has not so far come to light.

Meanwhile, down in Fairhope, the Courier was announcing that "There will be rummage sale at the Organic School on Saturday May 20th, for white people from 2 to 5 o'clock, and colored from 7 to 8 o'clock" (12 May 1916).
When they did raise their voices in objection to the treatment of negroes, even the most liberal of Fairhopers and critics tended to speak in tones that unconsciously suggested white superiority. This included Marietta Johnson and Marie Howland, conceivably among the most broad-minded of Fairhopers. One Frederick Wm. Chapman, a thoughtful and compassionate citizen, was incensed by the use of the word "nigger" but seemed unaware of his own condescension when he said, "These people, though adjudged inferior, have, under their dark skins, human feeling in some degree like to us whites; and are undoubtedly hurt by hearing their race so continually referred to in terms of contempt" (Courier 4 Aug. 1905). The usually tolerant Howland once announced in her column that "I like the Alabama negroes very much as far as I know of them but alas! They have the fatal flaw of undeveloped beings of any race; they cannot keep their word" (Courier 1 Sept. 1901). The same unconscious racism mingled with benevolence emanated from Marietta Johnson's pen when she remarked that "The saddest fact about certain backward peoples is that even the children do not know how to play" (Youth 116). Yet she denounced racism, arguing that "Intolerance is the mark of the closed, unsocial mind." In the same paragraph she attributed "Race prejudice and religious antagonism" to "arrested development" thereby assigning it to the same rudimental cause as labor.
problems, economic problems, war and indeed most of the world's ills (*Youth* 247-8). Later, in the same chapter on social development, she acknowledged that "The race is one," no doubt intending to convey the anthropologists' reminder that procreation is genetically possible among all humans; therefore, all races belong to the same species. In sum, Marietta Johnson, like many liberals of her time, was a latent but benign racist who expressed genuine concern for all of her fellow humans while accepting as "natural" the superiority of whites. In fairness to Johnson, it may also be added that a major part of the curriculum in the Organic School was devoted to the study and understanding of other (but more distant) cultures as a later chapter will demonstrate.

If either Fairhope or the Organic School had radically departed from southern customs, encouraging their African-American residents to live on colony land and attend the colony schools, the Fairhope story would have been a very different one. But it was for another time and place to challenge the system.
Overview

The next four chapters will present a more or less chronological account of the life of Marietta Pierce Johnson. A chronology was chosen to provide continuity but presented some problems. Because so many events were happening at the same time, the narration is not always strictly temporal. The chapters will generally cover the following periods: "The Years of Promise," or the period dating from the arrival of her own mother and father in the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1857 until 1902 when Johnson, her husband and son arrived in Fairhope, Alabama. In order that readers may have an image of Marietta Johnson to carry with them throughout the following chapters, "The Years of Promise" is prefaced by an abbreviated descriptive sketch of Marietta Johnson as she was remembered by her students. The next chapter covers the period from 1902 until 1907 or "The Years of Discovery," those years when the organic idea was still in the gestation culminating with the birth of the school. The chapter following "The Years of Discovery," departs temporarily from the time sequence, focusing on the "School for Utopia" and the framing of her theory, its socio-educational implications, the tensions and contradictions that were experienced. Next, "The
Missionary Years" encompasses the years from 1919 to 1930 when her first book and her first students ventured forth into the world and her own career as a missionary to the world for Fairhope and her school reached full flower. The closing chapter of the history concentrates on the years from 1930 to 1938, the final decade of Marietta Johnson's lifetime, years marked by both triumph and despair.

The Woman - Marietta Pierce Johnson

The words dreamer, non-conformist, missionary, zealot, crusader, pioneer, radical and even fanatic have been used to describe Marietta Johnson. Her students most often speak of her as a "presence." She was, to them, a magnetic, charismatic presence. Her lectures they often describe as "spell-binding." Something of an aura surrounds her name in Fairhope still. Paul Gaston speaks in terms of a "magic" that touched all who knew her (Women 66). These descriptions conjure up images of mysticism and enchantment and indeed the woman Marietta Johnson remains an enigmatic, elusive presence behind her well-known public persona. Of her inner life, her hopes and fears, her joys and sadness, little is known. She sometimes seems more symbol than flesh and blood woman. The facts and details of her public career as founder, administrator and missionary for her school and for Fairhope are documented in newspapers and journals. Yet,
just who she really was remains shadowy. Her students almost appear surprised when queried about Marietta Johnson's private life. Interviews with students, correspondence, histories, newspapers and journals yield so few glimpses of her personal life that one must finally conclude she had none. Her great-nephew, Dr. Pierce Frederick, who lived at the school home during the last four years of Johnson's life, confirms that indeed she had no private life. Her only outings or amusements, he believed, were in connection with the school: "The school was everything you know. Whatever she did had something to do with the school" (Interview 19 Apr. 1994). Though she was continually in the limelight, and from 1921 lived in the school home surrounded by young people and their activities, Johnson was a private person not given either to reminiscing or baring her soul to others, even those closest to her.

When the school home was built, she occupied quarters on the lower floor consisting of a study, bedroom and bath. Johnson's niece, Esther Pierce Frederick, was the school secretary, and Mrs. Frederick's two sons, Pierce and Paul, also occupied quarters there during the last years of Johnson's life. Both sons, now Dr. Pierce and Colonel Paul, still reside in Fairhope but they possess few Johnson memorabilia such as personal letters and virtually none of her personal possessions. Moreover,
letters and personal possessions have a habit of disappearing and memories have no doubt dimmed in the 56 years that have now passed since Johnson's death. If any light at all is to be shed on the person Marietta Johnson, therefore, inferences must be made, however risky that might be. A few may be ventured by reading between the lines of her writing, but most inferences must come from listening to the language her contemporaries use to describe her and their attitude toward her.

Johnson was a woman who inspired the respect of those who knew her. Some called her stern, others firm or determined, but all took great pains not to displease her. Comments of her students quoted earlier fully verify that conclusion. Pierce Frederick and Dorothy Cain both spoke of Johnson's habit of playing solitaire in front of the fireplace in the main hall of the school home at night. She appeared aloof at these times, immersed in her thoughts, and Cain said "You learned that was no time to talk to her" (Interview 11-12 May 1993). Joseph Johnston said "She didn't have to make us mind. We had a lot of respect for her and the one thing we didn't want to do was to do something that would make her feel bad" (Interview 27 Apr. 1994). Claude Arnold recalled that though Johnson might be late for an assembly, even if she was "everybody waited and when she came in it was like a--a battleship came--just came in the room and she took charge. And
there was no such thing as anybody--any misbehavior or chattering or anything like that going on" (Interview 21 Apr. 1994).

Ethel Davis Winberg, on the other hand, remembers Johnson as a kindly person who stopped and spoke to the children on the campus. And Olivet Hedden Stimpson said, "We all felt very--at least I thought we did--comfortable with her" (Interview Feb. 1989; Mar. 1989). Some students who were close to Johnson refer to her as Aunt Mettie or Ma Johnny, indicating a comfortable familiarity. Eleanor Coutant Nichols remembers a quiet, composed Johnson: "She could be at ease with anybody, anywhere. . . . And she was always quiet. I never heard her raise her voice" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990).

But Johnson was also a strong and charismatic idealogue who managed her school through the force of her personality rather than dictating the details of its operation. Her radical, almost obsessive, commitment to her school reveals a woman who knew what she wanted and strictly controlled the disposal of her time and energy to achieve her goals. Arden Flagg said of her: "She was a very energetic woman and she was very much in control. She knew what kind of a school she wanted and she educated everybody that had anything to do with it apparently" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990). Sam Dyson, a devoted fan of Johnson's and a major benefactor of the Organic School
throughout his lifetime, has but one criticism of Johnson: "When she was connected with anything, she ran it," he said. Though she was not given to "taking over any work in the [school] kitchen," he added with some amusement (Interview 22 Feb. 1994).

Johnson was determined that her school would survive and she sacrificed everything, including money, leisure, personal comfort and even a family life to get what she wanted. Paul Gaston believes that she may have been the anonymous donor who more than once saved the school from closing (Women 112). From 1921 until her death, she lived in the school home, turning over funds raised through her lectures to the school, leaving herself only enough for a spartan existence. Johnson "tithed" in reverse, according to a 1937 historical review of the Organic School in the Courier. She kept the 10% for herself, giving 90% to her school (25 Nov. 1937).

Johnson was a superb teacher according to all accounts. She had the ability to make students want to learn and opened doors that enabled them to learn. As Arden Flagg said, "She made opportunities for learning." Eleanor Coutant Nichols found words inadequate to express her admiration for Marietta Johnson's excellence as a teacher: "She was a teacher beyond--just an exquisite teacher" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990). Lydia Comings found these words in her "Intimate History":
Right here I want to pay this tribute to Mrs. Johnson, with older people she was an inspirational speaker and teacher, but with the children she was marvelous. I can never forget the eagerness and rapt attention of those children sitting on the floor in a circle about her . . . as she talked to them and in all these years I have never known Mrs. Johnson to ask anything of a pupil where there was not instant response. (3)

Some have referred to Johnson as an "intuitive," or "artful," teacher. As a teacher, Johnson was truly an artist, but "artful" implies imitation or artificiality.37 Both "intuitive" and "artful," however, denigrate and oversimplify Johnson's genius, never mind her knowledge and skill, as a teacher. Women's knowledge has often been interpreted lightly as "female intuition"—not real knowledge—in contrast to the more superior "scientific" and "practical" knowledge attributed to males. Intuition is not commonly accepted as scientific but as mystical, as Simone deBeauvoir notes "Man seeks [women's] intuition as he might interrogate the stars" (The Second Sex 206). Yet what is passed off so lightly as "intuition" can be attributed to generations of negotiating complex social relationships with others in

37 Lawrence Cremin chose to refer to Marietta Johnson as an "artful" teacher rather than a knowledgeable one (Cremin 152). (Agnes DeLima, reviewing Youth in a World of Men, had uncharitably described her friend's book as "quite naive and entirely innocent of expert or studied thinking." Then DeLima proceeded to demean the book's writer as one who only "By sheer intuition" had come upon "many truths important to childhood and normal development" ("For the New Schools" 615).
women's experience as teachers, housewives and nurses. Chodorow's analysis of women's intuition, or, "inner perception," acknowledges it as an outgrowth of women's rich and diverse inner world as well as "the greater continuity in their external object-relations," in other words, women's internalization of knowledge and their ability to relate (Mothering, 168-9). Proust also refers to intuition, what he terms the "memoire involontaire," as internalized knowledge, that is, experience relegated to the subconscious. Oversimplifying Johnson's genius by referring to it as mere intuition ignores the fact that she was a scholar, a student--and a well-read one--of her profession. What is more, she had learned her profession at her mother's feet as well as through teaching children and other teachers. And she was a keen observer of both teachers and children, a quality most desirable in a child-centered progressive.

It can be said with some certainty that Marietta Johnson was a religious person. Two of her students preferred the word "reverent." She was reared and had been active in the Christian Church in St. Paul but in her later years she was not a church-goer (Courier 29 Dec. 1938). Claude Arnold remembers seeing her frequently at the Christian Science Church, however (Interview 21 Apr. 1994). At various times she was not only interested in Christian Science but also Unity, Theosophy and, in her
later years, she studied a little-known California cult known as "The Great I Am." (Dorothy Beiser Cain, Interview 11-12 May 1993). In an early letter to the editor of the Courier, she angrily denounced religions in general, castigating the church's failure to address the "unrighteous dealing" of industrial capitalism. Then just in case anyone missed her point, she concluded emphatically that "The present lack of regeneration seems appalling considering the fact of nineteen hundred years of [religious] effort!" (10 May 1907). Religious dogma was absent from the teachings in her school and she was adamant that children should not be subjected to preachments about the wrath of God or the Last Judgment. Any dogma or belief which inspired fear she assailed as "positively immoral and irreligious" (Johnson, Youth 199). The years appeared to bring about a continuing transformation in her orthodoxy. One of the bases for that premise is the language of her second book which is significantly free of the biblical passages and allusions which peppered the first. Yet religion, like education, had never been a matter of ritual and ceremony for Johnson, something to be laid on a rose petal and got out for special occasions. In her chapter on "Religion and the Child" in her first book, Johnson wrote that true reverence was shown in "a sensitiveness for the rights and feelings of others, in a respect for all life" (Youth
211). Elsie Butgereit sensed that Johnson's religion was like her philosophy in that living it was what was important (Interview 21 Apr. 1994). Though Johnson was a zealot where children were concerned, she was not, apparently, a religious zealot. Instead, she placed her faith in the transforming powers of freedom, the single tax and "true cooperative individualism."

Just as some recall Johnson's firmness while others recall her kindness, when queried about her appearance, some remember her girth and others, her beauty. The women who knew her tend to remember the latter. Dorothy Beiser Cain happens to remember both: "To me she was a very beautiful woman. She was stocky and she had thick legs and she wore health shoes. But somehow or other, she did it in an elegant way" (Interview 11-12 May 1993). Helen Porter Dyson said: "Maybe her figure wasn't the best... But she was lovely. Lovely wavy hair and beautiful hands. She used her hands well." Helen's husband Sam Dyson, on the other hand, allowed that even though Johnson "was not beauty," she was a "very, very commanding speaker" (Interview 22 Feb. 1994). Many remember her long sweaters with pockets and her "ground gripper" shoes. Claude Arnold said "She was around campus with a sweater that was often down to her knees. She was too old to be attractive but she was sweet and interesting" (Interview 5 Jan. 1992).
She was not a "fancy dresser" said Ethel Davis Winberg, but she "just wore plain clothes, sort of a long dress, I think--it seems to me rather drab" (Interview Feb. 1989). And some descriptions hint of the inner woman behind the outer facade. Helene Beiser Hunter's comment here offers a glimpse of a determined woman beneath the physical appearance:

She was a very lovely looking woman. There was only one thing that really bothered me about her--her shoes. She wore what we used to call ground grippers--the high tops you know. Awful looking shoes. I can see her right now just trudging--she didn't have a very graceful walk, it was sort of plodding, you know, like it was hard for her to get around. But she was always with her head forward. You could tell she was anxious to do, constantly doing something. (Interview 7 Apr. 1994).

Hazele Payne spoke, too, of Mrs. Johnson's abounding energy: "I don't think she ever slept. She was always on the alert" (2 Mar. 1992). This was the woman, Marietta Johnson, as she was seen by those who remember her best--her students.

Beginnings and a Chance Discovery

The woman thus described by those who knew her, Marietta Pierce Johnson by name, began an unusual educational experiment in November of 1907, in the heart of the deep south and far from her own Minnesota roots. Her experiment began in the small utopian community of Fairhope, Alabama, but it was destined to radiate in all directions from Mobile Bay to the Canadian border and from
the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. The idea had been germinating in her mind for almost seven years now and it was not to be denied its manifestation. At 43 years of age, a period of life when not many women choose to begin a rigorous new career, this dauntless pioneer woman began her crusade to liberate the child from what she once called the "force, fear, fail" concept of education (Courier 28 Nov. 1933). Surely no one would have dreamed, including Marietta Johnson herself, that the founder of a small, Alabama school would eventually achieve a reputation all across the United States and even in Europe for her radically liberal ideas about educating children. And probably no one would have guessed from its modest beginnings in a rural settlement of impoverished pioneers that the growth of her conception would prove so sturdy, its maturity so undecaying.

Marietta Johnson, along with her husband John Franklin and baby son Ernest Clifford, had first come to Fairhope in December of 1902, ostensibly to improve their health in a more salubrious climate. His eyesight was failing and it is generally believed that she was in poor health, perhaps as a result of the birth of their first son Clifford Ernest who was born in 1901 (P. Gaston, Women 68).\(^{38}\) The Minnesotans landed on the balmy shores of

---

\(^{38}\) According to a biographical sketch by Esther Pierce Frederick, Mrs. Johnson's niece and secretary, the cold winters of the north had affected her aunt's health.
Mobile Bay in December. Just how they were persuaded to come to Fairhope is uncertain but a newspaper item of December 22, 1922 sheds a glimmer of light on the subject. The Fairhope Courier item explains that Mrs. Johnson herself had called that very week announcing that the 18th of December marked the twentieth anniversary of the family's arrival in Fairhope. The Courier item elaborates on the conversation with Mrs. Johnson as follows:

They came as a result of correspondence with Mrs. Getty, (now deceased) and Dr. Atkinson old friends in St. Paul, which was then their home and came on round trip tickets, but never went back except to visit. They left St. Paul in a howling snow storm and found the contrast of Baldwin county weather most grateful. Their first Christmas they were guests at Christmas dinner of Dr. Atkinson on a balmy day with flowers blooming and thought it must be too good to be true. 39 (22 Dec. 1922)

The balmy Christmas climate and blooming flowers after the cold chill of winter must have presaged a new season of hope for the Johnsons who had suffered severely from the ravages of a Minnesota winter ice storm

(Interview, Dorothy Beiser Cain 11-12 May 1993). It was

The typescript, dated 1971 and entitled "Marietta Louise Pierce Johnson," was generously made available to the writer by Esther Pierce Frederick's son, Dr. Pierce Everett Frederick of Fairhope, Alabama. Dr. Pierce is Esther Pierce Frederick's son and a grandnephew of Marietta Johnson.

39 Dr. Clara Atkinson, a physician, was the half-sister of E. B. Gaston, founder of the colony. Mrs. W. Getty was the granddaughter of the Swifts with whom Mrs. Johnson and Clifford Ernest roomed while Mr. Johnson searched for a farm in Mississippi (P. Gaston, Women 68; Beck, Johnson 48n).
only the second year of a new century already alive with epochal reforms and it would mark a new beginning for Marietta Johnson, now in her 38th year. Lydia J. Newcomb Comings, in her "Intimate History of the Early Days of the School of Organic Education" relates that after a year in the mild climate of Fairhope Mrs. Johnson's health had "recovered sufficiently for her to be able to take charge of the public school here" (1). But several years would elapse and two more moves would take place before Marietta Johnson's dream of establishing a school of her own would be realized.

Biographical data about the years prior to Fairhope are scarce and subject to some conjecture. No letters or diaries or pertinent newspaper articles from the period appear to exist and Mrs. Johnson was not prone to reminiscences about her earlier years. Then, apparently, no one at the time thought it important to record the details her early life and career for future generations. Nonetheless, it is possible to piece together some of the details from public documents and records, informal biographical material and reminiscences by those who knew her.40

40 An attempt has been made to choose the most accurate biographical information possible from among sources which often conflicted. Data here was derived from Robert Beck's unpublished paper, "Marietta Johnson: Progressive Education and Christian Socialism" which documents several public records available in the state of Minnesota; Paul Gaston's Women of Fair Hope which gives
Marietta Louise Pierce and a twin sister Harriet were born to Rhoda Morton and Clarence D. Pierce on the eighth of October, 1864. Rhoda Morton Pierce records that she, her husband and a son had landed in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1857, having come up the Mississippi River by boat from Iowa. There were no railroads and there were no bridges across the river in St. Paul at that time. The little family drove with their own team of horses through what is now the city of St. Paul to their "present abode, but only saw 2 or 3 houses all the way." But the family was not destined to remain in peaceful quietude for very long, for soon "it began to be noised around that the indians were becoming restless & intimated they would make raid on the whites." Mrs. Pierce's story indicates at once the prevailing nervousness about and attitude toward Indians during that period:

It was enough to make one's blood run cold to hear of the depredations of the indians & cruel slaughter of the whites; then came that evidence of being the most well-informed of the sources; Laura Elizabeth Smith's "A Woman and Her Idea"; Fairhope Courier, Golden Anniversary Issue, 12 Dec. 1957.; Fairhope Courier, 29 Dec. 1938; and the undated typescript by Esther Pierce Frederick, Mrs. Johnson's niece who was her secretary at the Organic School until Mrs. Johnson's death.

All of the information about the Pierce family in this and the following paragraph was derived from an unsigned three page typescript account attributed to Marietta Johnson's mother, Rhoda Morton Pierce, and entitled "Account of a trip from Ill[inois] to St. Paul, Minn[nesota], in 1857." The typescript is housed in the archives of the Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope.
terrible encounter @ Birch Coolie & the death of our noble officer General Custer. One might wonder what will come next & when will it end. When the 38 indians were hung @ New Ulm on account of their guilt & horrible cruelty, we felt that they were getting their just deserts.

By the time Marietta was born in 1864, Indian uprisings had been replaced by a far larger uprising between north and south. And other momentous changes were also taking place. In 1862, the railroad had invaded the bucolic Minnesota countryside, connecting the growing city of St. Paul with the rest of the country and with the Industrial Revolution.

Fate dealt a sad blow to the family when Clarence Pierce died leaving his wife a farm to manage and eight young children to raise (L. Smith 28). But Rhoda proved herself to be a sturdy and independent pioneer woman. She opened a school for neighborhood children and raised her family from the proceeds. She is believed by her family to have been the first school teacher in St. Paul.42 Her daughter, Marietta, would prove herself to be no less a pioneering woman and of the same independent spirit as her mother. But that was for a later time. In the meantime, her mother's experience was no doubt prophetic in other respects, for Marietta Johnson introduced her Thirty Years With an Idea saying: "I think I had always been a teacher

42 The preceding comment is attributable to a notation by an unknown author appended to Rhoda Morton Pierce's typescript account quoted above.
in my heart. At about ten years of age I began dreaming of the time when I should be a teacher, announcing on all possible occasions, 'I am going to be a teacher when I grow up'" (1). And interest in education evidently ran strong in the whole family since three others besides Marietta would choose the field of education as their career though only Marietta may have attended college. Laura Smith relates that Florence became a teacher, Clifford a registrar and field secretary for the University of Minnesota while C. Ernest became a teacher and high school principal. Of the other three, Smith writes that Marietta's twin sister Harriet became a nurse, brother Lowell a dairy farmer and Everett a printer. All three of the girls had careers, but Marietta was the only one who ever married (L. Smith 28).

---

43 Laura Smith, one of the few writers who has provided some biographical information on Mrs. Johnson's sisters and brothers, claims that none of the eight children went on to college (28). Smith does not document her source or sources. Marietta is known to have attended the St. Cloud Normal School for three years taking advanced courses in the arts and sciences as well as the required normal school courses, what would seem to be closely equivalent to a college education ("Marietta Louise Johnson," Who's Who in America); Mary D. Foster, Who's Who Among Minnesota Women; Mrs. Marietta Louise Johnson, Who's Who in American Education). Robert Beck, now at the University of Minnesota, reports that Johnson's brother Ernest B. Pierce, became Secretary of the General Alumni Association of the University of Minnesota in 1920 and remained in that post until 1948. Beck's information implies that Ernest, too, may have attended college ("Marietta Johnson: Progressive Education and Christian Socialism" 2).
Marietta Pierce and 34 year-old John Franklin Johnson, a carpenter and cabinet-maker, were married on the sixth of June in 1897. She was then 32 and had wasted no time in bringing her dream of being a teacher to fruition. In 1885, at 21, she had obtained a teaching certificate after attending the St. Cloud, Minnesota Normal School for three years. The school was about a decade old when she attended and likely one of the first normal schools to be established in the midwest. Who's Who Among Minnesota Women (1900-01) reports that after graduating, Marietta Pierce "taught several years in country and village schools" (133) But by 1890, she was recruited to teach teachers in the St. Paul Teachers' Training School. That position was succeeded by an appointment as supervisor and critic of teachers at the State Teachers College at Moorhead, Minnesota, in 1893. From there, she went on to a position as principal of the Primary Department of the Practice School at the prominent State Teachers College at Mankato, Minnesota, where she remained from 1896 to 1899. She recalls that she "enjoyed [her] work as a 'training teacher' in the city training school and State Teachers College," where her

\[\text{44} \quad \text{The data given here was taken from Marietta Louise Johnson's biography in Who's Who in America, 1932-33.}\]

\[\text{45} \quad \text{The information her is documented in "Marietta Louise Johnson," Who's Who in America 1932-1933. See also, Laura Smith, 30.}\]
duties were to "observe and criticize, sometimes giving special instruction in 'methods'" (Thirty Years 1).

It was her good fortune to be educated and begin her teaching career in what was reputedly one of the best educational systems in the United States. Joseph Mayer Rice’s favorable 1893 report in The Forum on the public school systems of St. Paul and Minneapolis was not unjustified. He reported that while the schools were not perfect, comparatively speaking, they were quite good and "rapidly improving." He noted that the St. Paul schools, unlike many in the country, had been "at a single sweep completely severed from politics." An enthusiastic superintendent had been hired who "set to work fearlessly and with zeal to break up the mechanical methods and to instil [sic] life into the teachers." Rice found that the teachers were generally competent, enthusiastic and well-trained, school life was made "interesting and attractive" and he was particularly satisfied with the "science method" of unifying reading and writing with other subject areas rather than teaching it as an isolated subject. He praised the new science programs introduced in 1891 and even commented upon the "unparalleled success" of the "moral training" in one school (211-13, 362-70).

As for the Minnesota Normal Schools, they were also considered among the best in the country. As early as 1886-87, the United States Commissioner of Education had
praised their modern libraries and experienced instructors. Science programs at the St. Cloud and Mankato Normal Schools, where Marietta Johnson took her own training and taught, were singled out for special commendation.\textsuperscript{46} Progressivism had arrived early in at least one remote locale still thought of as the far west.

University of Minnesota historian Robert Beck documents the course work that the St. Cloud school would have required at the time Marietta attended. First year students would have taken geography, botany and chemistry in addition to the history of education, psychology and English Literature. A two-year period of advanced course work followed including algebra, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy, physics, geology, school economy, Latin and the philosophy of education ("Johnson" 2-3).\textsuperscript{47} It was an impressive academic curriculum. Marietta had evidently benefitted by the excellent science programs which had occupied a considerable portion of her normal school training. They may have accounted to some extent for her interest in biology, a subject which appealed to her and


\textsuperscript{47} Robert Beck's "Marietta Johnson: Progressive Education and Christian Socialism" footnotes the information on course work at the St. Cloud Normal School described here noting that it was furnished by Ms. Pat Schenk, Learning Resources Services, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota (48).
one which she would often teach in her own Organic School.
Yet, critics would attribute her revolutionary ideas on
children to "intuition" ignoring Marietta Johnson's fine
educational credentials.

During the 15 years of her early career in teaching,
Marietta Johnson devoted her considerable talents to more
traditional methods of teaching in which she "enjoyed some
little distinction, and was interviewed by book agents
requesting commendation of their texts." She writes in
Thirty Years With an Idea that she "enjoyed a measure of
success" and believed teaching "was the most thrilling
work I could imagine." She not only accepted "the system"
but she excelled at it. The system was sacred. She did
all of those things traditionally expected of a teacher;
indeed she saw no reason to do otherwise. It was the
child's duty to "acquire knowledge" just as it was the
teacher's duty to "impart knowledge," as well as "to
direct and control, and to insist upon attainment and
achievement." The idea of a teacher directing and
controlling would become especially antithetical to her in
later years when she would passionately declare that
"Life--growth--cannot be forced into patterns!" But
little did she know that the time was now near when she
would radically and forever alter her ideas about
learning. She was then unconcerned about children's own
interests or readiness to read or the danger of premature
training to the nervous system. She was satisfied if only the child was "acquiring knowledge and skill and learning to behave well." Still, the enthusiasm and energy that would become her hallmark was poured into the work and she describes the "great joy" she experienced on finding that she could propel six-year-olds through "four first readers in three months!" She admitted that it was "high pressure, but they could do it!" Delight in prodding six-year-olds through four first readers in three months was one of the successes that she would eventually deplore as "the factory system at its worst," as well as a "violation of the order of development of the [child's] nervous system." Worse, she would come to despair that she had been no more than a "child destroyer," and the more efficient she had become at the system, the more she had injured her pupils (Thirty Years 2-8, 27).

Marietta and her new husband remained in Mankato for a time after marriage but moved to western North Dakota to farm on a cattle ranch in 1900. Their first son, Clifford Ernest, was born there in the spring of 1901 when she was 37 years of age (P. Gaston, Women 68).48 Dorothy Beiser

48 Most accounts of this period, including her obituary in the Fairhope Courier (29 Dec. 1938), add a brief sojourn in Montana, probably also farming or cattle ranching. Some accounts list North Dakota alone, others Montana alone and still others include both. There are no records, diaries or letters from this period that strongly support any conclusion and Mrs. Johnson was not prone to reminiscences about her pre-Fairhope history.
Cain, the wife of Johnson's foster son, maintains that the family suffered a serious loss during the Dakota sojourn as the result of a severe winter ice storm. In a rare reference to past history, Johnson confided to Mrs. Cain that there was a terrible ice storm the first winter and they lost everything they owned (Interview 11-12 May 1993). It seems likely that such may have been the case considering the short-lived nature of Johnson's foray into cattle-ranching in the north. At any rate, they returned to Minnesota again in 1901 where Marietta briefly taught once more at the St. Paul Teachers' Training school. 49

It was at this time that an important book came to her attention, a book which would eventually catapult into national renown a woman whose life had been entirely unremarkable until then.

As Johnson recalls the experience, her superintendent thrust a book called The Development of the Child by Nathan Oppenheim into her hands, saying, "Unless education takes this direction, there is no incentive for a young man to enter the profession" (Thirty Years 6). 50

49 Both Paul Gaston and Rocco Eugene Zappone give the date of 1901 for the Johnson's return to Minnesota but neither documents the source of that date. Gaston adds that Johnson taught only briefly in St. Paul. The Johnson's probable date of arrival in Fairhope is December of 1902. (P. Gaston, Women 69; Zappone 5).

50 Nathan Oppenheim was a graduate of Columbia Medical School and the attending children's physician at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.
superintendent's concern for a "young man's" incentive seems to have gone unremarked but reading Oppenheim's book was a shock (68). And like Paul on the road to Damascus, she experienced there and then a conversion that would have inspired an old-fashioned revivalist. In a 1913 interview for the New York Times, she too refers to the experience as a revelation of Pauline dimensions--it was a "scale dropper," she said, "it clears the vision" (D. Edwards). The same article reveals the extent of her transformation:

I had been so proud of my small pupils' reading and arithmetic! But after I had read this book I realized what all this cramming of young minds might really be doing, that it might be crippling children mentally, as definitely as ill-treatment would cripple them bodily. Then and there, I made up my mind that my own child--a little boy--should never be put through this old, old mill. Mills crush. (Thirty Years 10)

But now, having been exposed to Oppenheim, she found herself like a ship without a rudder, not knowing how to proceed: "There was nothing in my previous experience as a teacher to throw light upon my path." She had always relied on a course of study to follow, a pre-arranged plan or system, now she had nothing to go on, and "no one to whom to turn for advice" (Thirty Years 14-16). So Marietta Johnson, at 37 years of age and already an experienced educator in her own right, would become a pupil once again even though she had not been in the least dissatisfied with a system where she had already enjoyed
success and even distinction. A less flexible personality might very well have rejected out of hand so radical a change. Yet neither self-satisfaction nor egotism prevented Marietta Johnson from investigating further ideas that conflicted with her own. And once on her course, she neither wavered nor turned back.

One can only imagine what might have prepared her thinking for such a life-changing epiphany. Displaying a trait that would become all too characteristic as far as future historians are concerned, she provides little access to her thought processes and seldom looks backward. It seems likely that the birth of her own child and concern for his future may have at least stimulated her interest in the new educational ideas. But whatever the reason, Oppenheim's book became her "educational Bible" (Thirty Years 8). Of all the events in her history, this is the one most frequently documented by others and the one that she herself saw as an epochal moment, a rebirth of the spirit. Her semi-autobiographical Thirty Years With an Idea does not treat readers to any nostalgic glimpses of youth, family or her early life. She begins her own life-story with the reading of Oppenheim's book. She recollects for her readers almost nothing previous to the Oppenheim encounter with the exception of a few details concerning the "before and after" of her teaching
career and only then when it directly related to her change of heart.

There are many areas of her life that remain shadowy, some completely lost to history due to Johnson's own neglect in recording the past. Not the least of these are the details of her family and youth. It is only through public records that the time and place of her marriage and the birth of her first child are known. And it seems unusual that Marietta Johnson never refers to her parents, sisters or brothers. Yet there was no apparent animosity in the family since The Fairhope Courier notes Marietta's occasional visits to her family in Minnesota. News of Marietta's twin sister Harriet's arrival in Fairhope "to live with her sister" was announced in "Mrs. Howland's Letters." Harriet did not remain, but their mother did come to live in Fairhope at some point and died there in January of 1931 at 92 years of age (Courier 8 Jan. 1931). She is buried in the Fairhope Colony cemetery beside little Franklin and her daughter Marietta whom she preceded in death by only eight years. One can only

---

51 Mrs. Howland waxed poetic over the event: "Miss Pierce will live with her sister and I believe she will be a blessing to the colony if only for her face. Her genial smile among our too serious faces is like sunrise on a difficult trail" (Courier 13 Mar. 1911).

52 Pierce Frederick, Mrs. Johnson's nephew, gives the date of Mrs. Pierce's death as 1930 (Interview 19 Apr. 1994). However, the Courier indicates that it was very early in January of 1931 (8 Jan. 1931).
conjecture as to why neither Marietta nor her fellow Fairhoppers considered the details of her early history worthy of documentation even when she began to be recognized as something of a celebrity. But her own semi-autobiographical account combined with the paucity of letters, diaries, newspaper items and other historical records suggest that for Marietta Johnson at least, life began in the year 1901 with her reading of Oppenheim. And from that time on she never looked back.

The Organic Trio - Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey

There can be no ideal goal for human life. Any ideal goal means mechanization, materialism, and nullity. There is no pulling open the buds to see what the blossom will be. Leaves must unroll, buds swell and open, and then the blossom. And even after that, when the flower dies and the leaves fall, still we shall not know. There will be more leaves, more buds, more blossoms: and again, a blossom is an unfolding of the creative unknown. . . . We know the flower of today, but the flower of tomorrow is all beyond us. Only in the material-mechanical world can man foresee, foreknow, calculate, and establish laws.

Democracy
D. H. Lawrence

For almost six years, Marietta Johnson pondered and studied the writings of Oppenheim and added two other important theorists to her reading list: John Dewey, who was just then rising to prominence, and a lesser known educator, C. Hanford Henderson. These three formed the triumvirate upon which she would found her own, unique
educational experiment. One might say that her physics came from Oppenheim, her metaphysics from Henderson and her sociology from Dewey. From Oppenheim she had learned that the physical and mental makeup of the child was not to be compared with the adult. From Henderson she took the idea that each child was an individual, vitally interrelated and organic unit. From Dewey, she took an already relational posture to another level with the idea that society was composed of individual organic units transacting with each other.

How nicely Oppenheim fits the description of a progressive is immediately apparent in his activist spirit and his hope for the future:

One of the noteworthy characteristics of the time is the so-called moral revival which has shown itself in almost every part of the civilized world. From one end of the social fabric to the other the same note is heard; whether in regard to the subject of dress, or of charity, whether business methods or housekeeping, the spirit of the hour calls for a strenuous effort, a desire to improve upon the past, a noble dissatisfaction that can be quieted only by an active exhibition of individual endeavor. (The Development of the Child 1)

Oppenheim was also a creature of his time in that he was a thorough-going man of science and a disciple of Darwin's

---

53 Rocco Eugene Zappone's "Progressive Education Reconsidered: The Intellectual Milieu of Marietta Johnson" gives an excellent summary of the three theorists in their relation to the Organic idea of Marietta Johnson. Zappone, however, devotes 24 of 33 pages to the three theorists and only 9 to Johnson, his supposed subject.
environmentalism. He talked of the "predispositions" or "moulding forces" at work in the child's structure but differentiated these from the "plain and simple rules which [strictly] govern the descent of animals" which he believed could not apply to man (74). He rejected any notion that heredity was the single factor, or even the leading determining factor, in humans:

The doctrine of heredity, as commonly held, not only is falsely applied to human descents, but also renders the wisest and best efforts of training unnecessary and useless. For if at birth the child's bodily and mental organization is complete, if the acquired characteristics of parents are handed down to offspring, then there the matter ends. Every remarkable parent would have equally remarkable children, every deficient person would curse his descendants by a like deficiency; work, training, striving after noble ideals, would be useless and silly. There would be an end of private efforts, of an inward mission. (6)

If a child's bodily and mental organization were indeed complete at birth, then all efforts for improvement were surely useless. But with all the optimism of the genuine progressive, Oppenheim assured his readers that "matters are not so hopeless" (6). He pointed out that while individuals do function within a range of potentialities, environment is a greater determinant than is heredity. Like Lester Frank Ward, he insisted that environment could be controlled and, therefore, evolution could be supplanted through scientific knowledge and intelligent human action. He believed the child to be especially malleable, in an "unripe" state and easily capable of
being "played upon by an infinite number of influences that mould his body and mind" (7).

From there, Oppenheim proceeded to a second theme, the one which was destined to shock his disciple Marietta Johnson right out of the nineteenth century. His basic thesis was simple: children are not small adults; their bodies and nervous systems remain in a relatively unstable condition in comparison with the adult until they are fully grown. A child's bodily chemistry and composition of muscle, bones and even brain are in a constant state of flux with various organs of the body growing rapidly at one moment, quiescent the next, a differing pattern for each individual. A child who weighs seven or eight pounds at birth will gain twelve-fold in size and weight by 15 and comparatively little thereafter. Oppenheim constructed a table showing the relative differentials between the adult and child in their physical makeup. The brain, for example, was shown to account for 14.34 percent of body weight in the newborn but only 2.37 percent in the adult (15). For two chapters, Oppenheim goes on in elaborate detail explaining how physiologically dissimilar the child and adult are, from composition of muscles, bones and blood, to brain, liver, eyes and even chemistry (11-65). Each organ, he asserts, grows by fits and starts and in accordance with its own individual rhythms. No one can determine with any certainty exactly what will take
place at any particular time with any particular child—
nature; nature alone, makes that determination. Oppenheim
concludes the two chapters with a statement which Mrs.
Johnson found especially salient and quoted in her own
book:

The child who assumes responsibilities beyond
his years, who undergoes the wear and tear
attending the course of a too-rapid development,
who lacks the benefits of a wise restraint and
discipline, is bound to show the effects in a
partial and one-sided development that bars him
out from the full beauty of finished maturity.
Such a child suffers from the effects of a
misdirected and vicious nutrition. (Oppenheim
63-4; qtd. in Thirty Years 9-10).

Nutrition, as Oppenheim uses the word, covers food as well
as every other influence upon the child’s growth.

Oppenheim’s was one of the first voices heard arguing
the physical ill-effects of forcing children to conform to
adult standards. Though Oppenheim himself remained a
relatively obscure scientist, his sort of thinking
provided just what child-study adherents needed, that is a
scientific and medical rationale for what they had already
concluded: that curriculum must be subservient to the
growing child’s own interests and needs. And Oppenheim’s
language was neither tentative nor restrained as his words
"suffering" and "vicious nutrition" indicate. Requiring
children to perform beyond their capabilities was not
merely useless, it was positively harmful. To confine
them to overly fine and exacting exercises was "kindness
turned to cruelty" when their bodies and minds called for
"freedom and lack of restraint" (103, 118).

Moreover, requiring children to read before eye
muscles and nervous systems were fully prepared was only
one of the abuses inflicted upon the child that might
cause irreparable harm on into maturity. He believed that
the cerebrum was among the last centers of the brain to
develop with the result that nerve cells "being more or
less in a state of unstable equilibrium," were easily
exhausted. From this he concluded that postponing such
studies as reading and mathematics until at least the age
of ten would not only save young children from a "vast
amount of nervous wear and tear" but they also "would
learn as much in one year as they formerly might have in
five (110). Oppenheim couched his arguments in the
language of science while he addressed both the
psychological and the physiological nature of the child.
And he was an absolutist in believing that children should
not be forced to conform with adult human plans but
everything should be subordinated to "nature's plan," a
dictum that would appear again and again in Mrs. Johnson's
writing.

The essential philosophy that she took away from
Oppenheim was that the child is not simply a little adult
to be fed large doses of adult knowledge and trained to
behave in grown-up ways. Both physiologically and
psychologically, a child must be allowed to grow at its own pace. Absolutely nothing in a child's education should be forced. This included language, reading, mathematics and even physical activities. Just as the bud cannot be forced open, a child must unfold according to its own individual and biological time clock. For Mrs. Johnson, this was the "scale dropper" which would form the first and most substantial plank in her new educational platform. Oppenheim's ideas would eventually find their practical expression through such expedients as Johnson's insistence that the teaching of reading and the use of abstract numbers should be delayed until the age of ten. Also, in contrast to routinized procedures and long periods of sitting at desks, undirected play was encouraged at the Organic School. Oppenheim fiercely attacked schools for forcing children to spend "an important part of their lives in cages," controlled by regulations "fit for captives" and the "physical discipline of making them sit in stiff and studied attitudes on poorly shaped benches" (119). Had he had the opportunity to read them, the Rice exposés must have offended Oppenheim to the core. Not only was play to be allowed, said the good doctor, but it was to be positively

\[54\] In practice, and as a concession to parents, however, reading was taught to children as young as eight years of age in the Organic School though Johnson would have preferred that they be ten.
encouraged in the belief that learning took place more naturally through play. What is more, work itself could become play given the right environment. The "no pain, no gain" rhetoric found no place in the Oppenheim methodology. Hence, the organic language bristled with words of reassurance about the value of play. Along with plenty of first-hand exposure to nature, it was considered a most "important educational experience" (Thirty Years 29). Exposure to nature came to mean all sorts of outdoor activities rather than studies from texts. It included canoe trips on the bay and rivers, excursions to the nearby woods to observe local flora and fauna and walks to the local gullies to observe geological soil formations.

And, as Oppenheim had urged, work with abstract numbers was delayed until the age of ten though the foundation for mathematics was laid quite early with the younger children weighing and counting real physical objects and measuring out distances, such as the school yard, with a tape line. Too early use of abstract figures, Johnson believed to be a "barrier to the mind in gaining number conceptions" [emphasis added] (Twenty Years 61). The idea of having children conceptualize, grasping the meaning of a concept before being exposed to the abstract symbol, is especially significant here. It was in direct contrast to the memorization and rote-learning procedures that then predominated in schools.
Traditionally, children had been seen as mere peas-in-a-pod to be fed uniform, undifferentiated curriculum diets. Teachers had typically seen the child as only a passive receptor of adult knowledge rather than as a thoughtful enquirer and conceptualizer. They had so far failed to grasp the importance of the central tenet in child-study, that is allowing the learning initiative to originate in the child rather than the teacher.

After Oppenheim, C. Hanford Henderson's was the philosophy that Marietta Johnson studied most closely and where, no doubt, she found the very word "organic" which she would eventually affix to her theory and which would become the *raison d'être* and the theme of her school. Henderson was headmaster of Pratt Institute in New York. Though respected by his contemporaries, he is rarely remembered by historians. The extent of Mrs. Johnson's enthusiasm for this gentle mystic is indicated by her statement referring to "his epoch-making book, *Education and the Larger Life*" (*Thirty Years* 12). Expressing the same fervor for Henderson that had accompanied her reading of Oppenheim, she writes that Henderson's "practical program--life-giving to body, mind, and spirit" was an idea that "took possession of me and I could not rest until I had started a school" (12).

Like Oppenheim, Henderson held that environment was superior to ancestry as a determinative factor in human
experience, but, unlike Oppenheim, he was an idealist, more romantic than scientist. He was also a well-read scholar who was influenced by the transcendentalists and especially by Emerson.\textsuperscript{55} Romanticism had informed and influenced liberal progressivism in general but probably few were more susceptible to its impulses than Henderson. The Romantics' exaltation of childhood, the emphasis upon nature and the idea of man's return to nature and innocence—the symbolic return to the lost Garden of Eden where humankind had fallen from grace—were primary transcendental, and romantic, motifs. These were also motifs close to the hearts of many liberal progressives. To carry that point further, they were especially dear to utopians for whom escape from the ills of the industrial revolution became something more than symbolic and who intended to physically recreate paradise on earth.

The literary significance of the idea of organicism and its antecedents are well-known and often discussed but time and space do not permit a discussion here. It is perhaps sufficient to say that Henderson's thought was close to Emerson's and the idea itself is obviously related to Marietta Johnson's organicism though not directly. While Henderson took his inspiration from

\textsuperscript{55} For a discussion of Henderson's ties to the Emerson and the Romantics, see Rocco Eugene Zappone, "Progressive Education Reconsidered" (22-4).
Emerson, he developed his theories around and related them directly to children and their experiences.

Cultivation of mind, body and spirit as one unity was the dominant tenet in Henderson's organic theology. Johnson took the gospel according to Henderson for her own and took it very literally to mean that the spiritual, the mental and the physical needs of a child--the whole organism--must be in equilibrium. To neglect the even development of all three; body, mind and spirit was to risk what Johnson would often scathingly denounce as "arrested development" with possibly permanent consequences for the child. The dreaded "arrested development" literally means a drying up or wasting away due to disuse or lack of nourishment. The words alone offer a vivid picture of the awful possibilities. Everything from economic problems to greed and crime were attributed to "arrested development," which had its organic antidote only in the monism of "body, mind, spirit." When, and only when, pedagogy addressed the child as an organic unity of body, mind and spirit, then poverty, war and crime, indeed all social ills would recede: "Adequate development is the only earnest of a better civilization" (Youth 47).

As expressed in the following passages in Henderson's Education and the Larger Life, the body, mind, spirit
motif would become the cornerstone of Marietta Johnson's Organic School:

Everything we do must be in harmony with our initial creed of the unity of man. . . . Any attempt to separate our work, to cultivate the heart or the mind or the body quite alone, is doomed to failure, for the organism does not so act. (116)

In a more Emersonian mood and language he repeats the same "unity of man" theme joining it to the "interplay" between man and environment:

The social purpose is a humanized world, composed of men and women and children, sound and accomplished and beautiful in body; intelligent and sympathetic in mind; reverent in spirit; living in an environment rich in the largest elements of use and beauty; and occupying themselves with the persistent study and pursuit of perfection. (48)

The principle was quickly and wholly assimilated as part of Johnson's own philosophy of education. Then, as was her wont, she quickly conscripted her new organic theory for active service, providing not only the usual academic subjects or mind-building subjects in her school, but offsetting these with a liberal sprinkling of physical activities. These included calisthenics and folk-dancing (body-building), as well as creative dramatics, music and handicrafts (spirit-building). The physical activities that Mrs. Johnson especially encouraged, those such as the folk-dancing which her students remember with such pleasure, were also socially transformative.
The "mind-body-spirit" trio formed a second plank in her educational platform and a never-to-be-forgotten axiom, etched firmly and indelibly in the vocabulary of each student and teacher in the Organic School and was eventually immortalized as the School motto:

A sound and accomplished body
An intelligent mind
A sincere and helpful spirit.  

Block by block, Mrs. Johnson was building upon the foundation of Oppenheim's physiological perspective. The third and final member of her foundational trio was John Dewey. She had assimilated Henderson's organicism into her pedagogical hypotheses and now she expanded the idea of organicism to include relationships between individuals as well as relationships within individuals. Dewey's social reconstructionism provided the final important plank in her three-pronged platform but it is difficult to assess Dewey's influence on her ideas. The impression given by many of those who write of Johnson is that, although her inspiration came from Oppenheim and Henderson, Dewey's influence on her practice outweighed that of anyone else. His influence is definitely not to be denied although it may well have been overstated.

56 The motto, credited to C. Hanford Henderson, is found in several Organic School publications such as the Cinagro, the Organic School yearbook. It is also printed on the cover of an undated Organic School Association pamphlet entitled "The Fairhope Organic School" found at the School of Organic Education, Fairhope, AL.
Dewey's enthusiasm for Johnson's school when he visited there in 1913, suggests that his philosophy coincided with hers in many areas, most particularly in their views on socialization, their choice of subject matter and even their choice of furniture. It is possible, however, that Johnson's conclusions on socialization, curriculum and furniture were generated by her own developing theories which were very similar to Dewey's but also typical of many liberal progressives.

When her school was founded in 1907, Dewey was only just emerging as the prophet of progressive education. There is evidence that she read his educational writings although they were not extensive prior to the period in question.\(^{57}\) The School and Society, a short treatise taken from a Dewey lecture given to parents at the Laboratory School in 1899, was his first important contribution to education. It is not unlikely that

---

\(^{57}\) One of Dewey's more important pamphlets of the period was entitled "My Pedagogic Creed." Published in The School Journal in 1897, it was an early and comprehensive summation of his pedagogical theory. The School and Society originated as a 1899 lecture given to Laboratory School parents and was not published for general circulation until 1900. The Child and the Curriculum was first printed 1901 (Jackson xii).

Much of Dewey's educational theory was developed during his own eight-year experiment at the University of Chicago Laboratory School which had come to a close in the spring of 1904 only three years prior to the founding of Johnson's own school (Mayhew and Edwards 17). Most of his educational writing succeeded the Chicago period and his magnum opus on education, Democracy and Education, was not published until 1916.
Johnson read it, but she makes no direct references to it as she does to Oppenheim’s and Henderson’s books published at around the same period, in 1898 and 1902 respectively. Cremin believes that Johnson read some of Dewey’s early pamphlets but neglects to name either the pamphlets or the source of his information so that just what she might have read remains speculative (148). Johnson’s private library housed at the Organic School included no Dewey works as in 1991 although it has been badly decimated over the years. Johnson herself makes no references to a specific text though she quotes Dewey’s words without reference to any source several times in her own writings.

More telling may be the fact that she never spoke of Dewey’s theories with the same degree of fervor as those of Oppenheim or Henderson whose ideas she declared to have been her "inspiration" or to have "taken possession" of her." She refers only to Oppenheim and Henderson as the "scale-droppers" in at least two early articles, one in a

---

58 When Laura Elizabeth Smith was gathering material for her thesis "A Woman and Her Idea," Mrs. Johnson’s private library, housed in the Organic School, contained about 40 texts on the subjects of education, psychology, history, literature, metaphysics and also included Will Durant’s philosophical works. Smith wrote that the collection, even then, was depleted from the original (L. Smith 124-6). When this writer visited the school in 1993, Johnson’s personal collection was housed with the school library and was much smaller than even Smith’s 1991 list indicates, containing probably not more than 20 texts. When queried about it, the principal said that she had recently asked school parents clean out a closet containing many of the old materials, books, ledgers, etc. and she was uncertain what had been done with them.
journal entitled the Scientific American Supplement and the other in the New York Times. And Dewey himself disclaims any influence upon Johnson’s ideas in a letter to the editorial staff of School and Home Education: "So far as Mrs. Johnson’s Organic Education is not the result of her own public-school experience, it is inspired by the writings of Dr. Hanford Henderson" (Middle Works 7: 414).

But Dewey had graciously agreed to visit the Organic School during the Christmas holiday in 1913 when the school was not yet six years old. He was delighted with it and, together with his daughter Evelyn, thrust it into instant celebrity in their Schools of Tomorrow. This was surely a factor in Johnson’s loyalty to Dewey and would also associate the two educators in the public mind for many years to come. She admired and respected Dewey and they had much in common; they were both thorough-going liberal progressives who, in the spirit of a radical age, had given themselves wholly to reform. To restate a point already made, there is no doubt that Dewey did influence Marietta Johnson. How, and how much he influenced her is not clear.

On a practical level, the physical make-up, the activities and curriculum of the Dewey and Johnson schools

59 The Scientific American Supplement article was written in 1914 by Sidonie Matzner Gruenberg. Davis Edwards was the author of the full page New York Times article in 1913.
did, in fact, have many similarities just as many presume. On a philosophical level, the two shared a faith (along with both Oppenheim and Henderson) in the natural goodness of the child and a belief that environment rather than heredity was the determining factor in growth. What is more, the "natural" goodness and environment-versus-heredity themes were almost universal dogma in the child-centered progressive faith. A second faith that Dewey and Johnson shared was the pragmatist's conviction that the ultimate test of knowledge was its usefulness. Finally, and above all, Dewey and Johnson shared a lively vision of what schools and society might become through a community of educated citizens.

As for pragmatic convictions, Dewey's pragmatism is well-known. Granted, Dewey's eight year Laboratory School experiment was a practical expression of his theory. But it is his social criticism, not his school, which has distinguished and legitimized Dewey as the father of American pragmatic philosophy. He was essentially a theoretical pragmatist. Moreover, Dewey's most philosophically prolific period post-dated and grew from his Chicago experience. But Johnson's theory was negotiated and matured early in her experience, was quickly applied and remained committed to a pedagogical practice throughout the rest of her life.
Nevertheless, being essentially pragmatic, both Dewey and Johnson shared an enthusiasm for the broad-based, experiential approach to education that would enable the child to cope with all situations as they arose. Dewey firmly believed that activity should have meaning to the child and grow from the child's own interests. This meant, among other things, that "literature . . . should follow upon and not precede . . . experience" ("My Pedagogic Creed" 79). Like Dewey, Johnson considered second hand exposure to facts through someone else's experience as liable to prevent spontaneity and, therefore, risk behavior "utterly lacking in ability to meet situations" (62). In her first book, Youth in a World of Men, she voices the belief that conceptualization must come through experience: "The deeper real meanings emerge in living and in acting, not in merely reading about things." Education did not come about merely through living in a "world of words, symbols with little or no meaning" (190). As one of her students, Helene Beiser Hunter, described education at the Organic School, it "was living, was growing. It wasn't just books, the three R's. It was everyday living" (Interview 7 Apr. 1994).

For Johnson, the ability to keep an open mind and to wait for data before making decisions was essential. She insisted that her students must "find out what is true and
take it for authority--rather than hastily taking truth on [someone else's] authority" (Thirty Years 129). She was known to remind her students frequently that more important than committing mere facts to memory was an ability to meet the changing vicissitudes of one's experience. Her students were encouraged to think through their own experience and thereby to "preserve the freshness of intellectual attack" (84). Education, she believed, is not education when it becomes no more than a mere habit, losing its originality and inspiration.

The situation does not matter, "it's how you meet it," she reminded her students with some monotony. "Meeting the situation" must have been one of the favorite phrases, so firmly implanted in her students' minds that it crops up at virtually every gathering of Organic School alumni over a half century later. The freedom and ability to meet situations was made even more necessary by a liberal credo which prized freedom from outside control. The conservative progressives would, instead, have the situation already met with a system.

The freedom and ability to meet situations went hand-in-hand with the progressive continuous-progress-through-science gospel. Dewey saw no truth as final with every interpretation subject to continual reinterpretation as new contexts developed and scientific data emerged. Early in his career he had written that "With the advent of
democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence it is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions" ("My Pedagogic Creed" 78). If truth is a transient and ever-unfolding process revealing itself only incrementally, as both Dewey and Johnson presumed, then constructing a curriculum based upon past experience would, of course, be unnecessary and even futile. The Dewey-Johnson view simply did not permit the construction of systems. Only approaches or final goals could be suggested. Preparing for the future meant giving a child command of her/his own capacities. With an infinite number of possibilities always looming just over the horizon, how could one reasonably expect to plan and order the details of one's experience? It would certainly be better to provide a rich, open-ended, experiential base that would promote spontaneity and keep a child receptive to new possibilities, and, in doing so, to provide the tools as well as the confidence to make wise decisions in the future. Environment, with its inevitable transience, was paramount in this doctrine. If contexts are mutable, then humans cannot be immutable and education must necessarily remain fluid. Patricia Graham argues that Dewey's admiration for Darwin may well have "stemmed more from the fact that he found in Darwin's work a confirmation of his
own conviction of the primacy of change and development over fixity . . . than from any Darwinian conversion experience" (Arcady 5-6). We hear Johnson applying those sentiments to schooling as she writes that the school's responsibility is that of furnishing the best environment for every child rather than the best curriculum (Twenty Years 52).

It is no surprise that the Dewey-Johnson tendency toward open-endedness, their cavalier dismissal of time-honored traditions, has inevitably led to accusations of ambiguity as well as lack of clarity and design. For example, Cremin wonders if "Mrs. Johnson was not attempting to have her pedagogical cake and eat it too." Could a school both "honor spontaneity while it molds good habits," or "follow nature assuming that reason will emerge in its own good time"? While he admits that Mrs. Johnson might have been artful enough to produce results under such a regimen, "one shudders at the thought of what it becomes under less capable sponsorship" (152-3). And Dewey's attempts to resolve "dualisms" were often interpreted as just plain indecisiveness.60 Graham complains that his interests were so eclectic, his language so imprecise and his publications so frequent.

---

60 The question of Dewey's ambiguity reoccurs with great frequency. See for example, Church 262; Stanley 27-8 and Graham, Arcady 158-9.
that virtually every variety of progressivism came to be "sheltered under his mantle" (Arcady 57).

Even though it is true that Dewey was identified at some time in some way with almost every progressive reform, it was his fate to become identified for all time with liberal child-centered reforms for which he was both blamed and acclaimed throughout his lifetime and since. Both he and his disciple Johnson spent a lifetime defending themselves against public accusations of running "do-as-you-please" schools. Mayhew and Edwards' history of the Dewey School does not corroborate that image and Organic School alumni fiercely refute such a label. Registering her own scorn for any such conclusion, one student describes Johnson as a rather stern disciplinarian at times. Claire Totten Gray maintains that "It was always a 'do-as-you-please school' as long as you pleased to do what you were supposed to be doing" (Interview 30 Dec. 1993). But Johnson's was, in spite of all, a truly child-centered philosophy which, as Cremin said, "would have warmed the heart of G. Stanley Hall," (149) and she abetted that image by peppering her language liberally with references to the "whole child," the "child's interests," "meeting the needs of the child."

Dewey's position, like Johnson's, was child-centered in that he was firm in his insistence that learning should start with the child's own interests and activities. But
from that point, the theorist was careful to link the child's interests to the subjects of a carefully planned curriculum. He states unequivocally that "the question of education" must become one of "taking hold of his [the child's] activities, of giving them direction" (emphasis added) (School and Society 36). Children led active lives in their homes and neighborhoods and brought these interests to the school, he insisted. It was the teacher's job not only to give these interests an outlet but also to give them a specified direction. Unlike Dewey, the Fairhope school marm never spelled out linkages between subject matter and teachers in her writing and her curriculum was considerably more flexible than his. She was very cautious about any directing of children, believing their own interests would direct them. Moreover, for Johnson, curriculum could never, a priori, supersede the interests of the child. Yet she clearly believed in the necessity for teacher guidance:

Children do not know what is best for them. They have no basis for judgment. They need guidance, control, but this must really be for their good, not merely the convenience of the adult! Every effort is made to have this conformity merge into and become obedience. . . . The fundamental condition for securing the cooperation of the child is to cooperate with the child. (Thirty Years 95)

Dewey, on the other hand, was always a bit chary about what he saw as an over-emphasis on the individual at the expense of the development of social consciousness.
His theories had far more to do with sociology than with the psychology of the creative individual. A careful reading of Dewey tends to dissipate any notion of a supposed over-emphasis on the individual child, an emphasis which he himself more strenuously opposed as apparent excesses surfaced in the late 1920's. Dewey's contemporary biographer, Robert Westbrook, also casts doubt on such conclusions, reminding readers that Dewey's critique of formalism in education with its failure to connect the subject matter to the interests and activities of the child was tempered by an equal critique of the advocates of child-centered education for likewise failing to connect the interests and activities of the child to the subject matter. Moreover, Dewey's most eloquent prose was always saved for extolling the virtues of democratic, participatory community, not the individual.

Dewey envisioned the school itself as an "embryonic community" which reflected the life of society in general (The School and Society 29). And because liberal progressive thought was usually articulated through--though not necessarily dictated by--John Dewey, the community and the child were interrelated concerns in many child-centered schools though with varying degrees of

---

61 For Dewey's views on the excesses which he perceived to be apparent in child-study schooling during the period in question, see the following: "Progressive Education and the Science of Education" (1928); "How Much Freedom in New Schools" (1930), in The New Republic.
emphasis. Dewey's often-quoted statement below reflects quite accurately the liberal progressive ideology:

> What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy. All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self. Here individualism and socialism are at one. Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself. (The School and Society 7)

Here one sees individualism and socialism as two sides of one coin. The individual is shaped by the community and the community is, in turn, shaped by the individual in a never-ending cycle. Individuals, then, move back and forth halfway between internal and external, the world changing them and the world being changed by them. For Dewey, progress itself must be seen as a dynamic and ever-changing horizon whose form and shape is constantly modified by the course of events.62

It was Dewey's recognition of the loss of community wrought by the industrial revolution that caused him to aim much of his own educational theory at restoring the lost social organism, not through a return to the past but

---

62 Dewey's thought here was consistent with that of his contemporaries who viewed progress through science as indefinite improvement with no final destination, such as the Christian heaven, in mind. (See pages 28-9 of this writing for further comments.)
through a revival of social history in the present. The factory system had robbed children of a first-hand knowledge of the processes of production that had once taken place in the farms and homes of small communities and had brought families and communities together. He proposed restoring this knowledge, literally transforming the school into an embryonic, pre-industrial community. Dewey was thoroughly a man of the age, a man of science, wanting only that children visit the past, not live there. History would be revived, relived through learning and practicing the occupations which had engaged man throughout the centuries. What is more, children would be engaged in the sort of first-hand experience that a pragmatist valued. But more especially, they would learn the most important lesson of all, that is how to be cooperative members of a community.

Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, teachers in the Dewey school, provide a vivid picture of a school where boys and girls alike engaged in gardening, cooking, sewing, weaving and carpentry. The occupational interests served as the basis for lessons in history, mathematics, physics, biology and chemistry, languages, reading, art and music.\(^{63}\) Carpentry introduced children to

\(^{63}\) Camp and Mayhew’s *The Dewey School* gives a detailed description of the school. For excellent summary accounts of the activities and philosophy of the school, see also Westbrook 83-113; and Kleibard 958-88.
mathematics and cooking to chemistry. Raising a pair of sheep, shearing them, carding and spinning the wool supplied self-direction and instilled a spirit of cooperation within the miniature community. Reproducing the existing social order through efficient channeling of students into occupations could not have been further from Dewey's mind. Learning occupational skills would, instead, enable children to take an active part in solving real problems and thus prepare them to actively engage in the democratic process, the *sine qua non* of all existence. Furthermore, the occupations provided a means for children to work together. Such activity was intended to foster the community spirit and young people who were early taught to work together would insure positive social change and a purer democracy. How the activities of the Laboratory School correlated with those in the Organic School will be seen in a later chapter.

It is worth repeating that where Dewey and Johnson were most completely at one in their progressive credo was in their vision of community. The de-humanization and loss of individuality accompanying the industrial revolution no doubt played a role in their determination that humans should be re-related to each other and their environment. Dewey's writings evoke visions of a utopian community where education finally erases all divisions between the individual and the community and all class
distinctions are dissolved as each human reaches her/his full potential. "Citizens educated to take part in a participatory democracy" is how Dewey often phrased it. Here, Dewey's thought intersected with that of the Fairhopers for all were disciples of Henry George. Dewey esteemed George as no less than America's greatest philosopher and was most interested in George's [and by implication Fairhope's] semi-socialistic plan for obtaining the re-distribution of wealth and power through land reform (Westbrook 315, 454). Like Henry George, Dewey deplored what he saw as the "inhumanity bred by economic competition and exploitation" and one of his most deeply held desires was to create a philosophy of cooperative education whose "social aims" would alleviate the excesses of "modern capitalistic industry":

In a world that has so largely engaged in a mad and often brutally harsh race for material gain by means of ruthless competition, it behooves the school to make ceaseless and intelligently organized effort to develop above all else the will for co-operation and the spirit which sees in every other individual one who has an equal right to share in the cultural and material fruits of collective human invention, industry, skill and knowledge. ("The Need for a Philosophy of Education." 13)

For Johnson's part, she held all problems "which now confront civilization" to be soluble through education.

---

64 For other information on his views regarding education in a world of competition, see the chapter entitled "The School and Social Progress" in The School and Society (6-30).
"All problems of labor" were likewise dismissed with the sweeping statement that they were "no doubt, due to lack of development," whereas the "fully developed individual seeks to understand the rights of others and is keenly interested to see that fundamental justice prevails" (Youth 15).

Unfortunately, the Dewey-Johnson language did not always describe their practice nor was their creed always inscribed within their practice. Dewey's school was hardly an American melting-pot in miniature. A great cultural gap lay between the children of the middle-class professionals who attended his school and the masses of immigrants and poor whom his friend Jane Addams served in the slums of "hell turned loose." Besides that, the Dewey school was a very special place indeed, well-insulated from the conflicts and discontinuities of the larger world, having access to the resources of a great university center and a staff of excellent teachers with a pupil-to-teacher ratio of about ten to one (Jackson xxix). Dewey's faith in community as a cure-all for the world's ills sometimes betrays a naiveté about the realities of American culture. Though he never exactly defined community, it is probable that his vision of community was wedded to the New England town hall tradition of liberal, participatory democracy that was so familiar in his native
Vermont. Yet how vastly that community must have differed from Chicago's polyglot of cultures, classes, races and languages. To engage in participatory democracy, one must be able to enter a dialogue, but entering into a dialogue familiar to white, male, middle-class Americans in a small Vermont community might pose serious cross-cultural difficulties for an Italian immigrant.

Marietta Johnson's Fairhope community, like Dewey's school, was well insulated by its very location from the conflicts and tensions of the outer world. But it was also far more homogenous in its internal makeup than Chicago. Residents tended to be intellectually curious and gregarious though most were poor and white. Divisions were more apt to be along political or racial lines and less likely to be related to culture or class. Unlike Dewey's Laboratory School, however, the Organic School accepted residents free of tuition allowing for somewhat greater class diversity, at least within the community. Racial diversity was another matter. An African-American was never among the students or faculty of the Organic School though there was a black community existing on the  

---

65 The sentiment expressed here concerning John Dewey's vision of community is from the author's class notes from a graduate seminar on John Dewey conducted by Dr. William Doll at Louisiana State University. Dewey was the subject of Doll's 1972 doctoral dissertation at Johns Hopkins University which was entitled "John Dewey and the Concept of Change."
fringes of the Fairhope community. It must be said that the word community takes on a somewhat narrower coloration in light of the exclusions that were present in both the Dewey and Johnson schools.

Nevertheless, what virtues of community Dewey extolled, Marietta Johnson was hard at work to achieve in Fairhope, Alabama, as later chapters will make clear. Where community is concerned, if one could link John Dewey's words to Marietta Johnson's practice, it would yield a picture of the complete school-as-community. Dewey is well-remembered for his theoretical resolutions of dualisms but Johnson resolved them in her practice. Though Johnson's language and lectures over-flowed with the vernacular of child-centered pedagogy, her actual practice of schooling found a middle ground that favored neither the social nor the individual but a dialectical relationship between the two. Dewey's social theories, in fact, became a sufficient description of Johnson's Organic School situated in the midst of its essentially homogenous community of intellectually curious and open-minded citizens. The key word for Johnson was always organicism, an organically coherent person and an organically coherent social system. It was the perfect opposition and antidote for the fragmentation taking place in a mechanistic, industrial society.
Marietta Johnson had found a complementary trio in Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey. With each one, she had added another link to her chain of organic philosophy. Beginning with Oppenheim and the physical unity of the child, she had moved on to Henderson and the psychical unity of the child. Then Dewey's social theology confirmed for her the child's natural organic relationship to the world, the link that related the inner child with the outer world. All humans were deemed to be social creatures with vital links connecting them to each other, to nature and to their environment.

The three theorists were essentially an "organic" trio but that was not all that united them. All three men dismissed the relevancy of histories or ancestors, believing environment superior to heredity in determining human experience. Marxian theory had already pointed out that the flaws of civilization could be remedied by environment, even those flaws that by Darwinian theory were genetically inimical to the species. A "scientifically" controlled environment could mitigate the harsher aspects of Darwin's "survival of the fittest" doctrine to which the world was now awakening. Darwin's heredity could somehow give way to Marx's social and environmental engineering. His theory took only a little adjustment to suit their purposes. After all, had not society evolved from simple, primitive forms to
genetically superior forms which could now conceive of ways to harness the energy of the universe? If animals and humans had been evolving blunderously and unconsciously through a "survival of the fittest" evolutionary process, now humans had access to absolute scientific truth which was guaranteed to unlock the secrets of the universe. A salutary physical, psychological and social environment was calculated to rid America of poverty, criminality, alcoholism and almost every other social problem. Now humans could select an environment more favorable to the consequences desired. It is a question whether progressives ever recognized or resolved the inherent paradox between social engineering and biological determinism.

With an optimism approaching the sanguine, liberal progressives did not question that nature, on its own, would produce good results if a right environment was available. This meant everything must work together so that "nature" could be manifested, which, in turn, would necessarily tend toward good effects. One might well grant that relationships began in the home, were fostered in the school and radiated out into the community. But some important factors were missing from their calculations. It was all very well to talk about environments and social relationships in a small laboratory school comprised of children of middle-class
professional colleagues who placed a high premium on education or in an homogenous community of open minded and intellectually curious radicals. But it was a more complex problem than it appeared on the surface. Even if the perfect educational environment could be supplied, what about the child who went home every day to a less than perfect home? What about the child whose parents may have worked on a factory assembly line and were too tired to care or the child who went home to poverty and ignorance, family conflicts and so on? What about the child of parents who were barely able to supply food and a roof over their head, never mind worrying too much about "arrested development"? Caroline Pratt, a contemporary of Dewey and Johnson, confronts that very question in her book *I Learn from Children*. She had investigated the custom tailoring trade with her friend, the liberal feminist Helen Marot and provides this insight, one which Dewey and Johnson did not confront:

It was for me a bitter eye-opener, that experience. The work was done in the home, with no limit to the hours the people worked, and no check on working conditions—which were also living conditions, and which from both points of view were appalling. The contrast with educational practice as I knew it were painful.... As a district nurse said of a family of Italians who lived in a basement, "Their plants die in the little clay pots, but the children live."

What might the "natural" tendencies of children in such an environment have been? These questions were, by and large, unaddressed while the liberal progressive faith in
environment as the answer to the nation's educational woes marched unflaggingly onward.

To summarize, what Marietta Johnson gained from her theoretical trinity, Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey, respectively was as follows: 1) A child must be allowed to develop in its own way and in its own time. To force a bud open before its time is to risk physical harm. 2) A child's education consists of developing the whole child—mind, body and spirit. To neglect one or the other is to risk retarding the development. 3) The organic idea cannot be confined to the individual child but must include the community and the world. The list of books in her personal library and the readings required of her normal students suggest that Johnson read and studied many thinkers on the subject of education, but the theories of Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey formed the primary blocks in her organic philosophy.66 Marietta, the spinner, took the three theoretical strands and spun them tightly together forming the warp and woof that would become the fabric of her school.

None of the foregoing should be interpreted to mean that Marietta Johnson's whole organic idea was lifted wholesale from other, more original, thinkers. To believe that she was not "intellectually innovative" or that her

66 In addition to Oppenheim, Henderson and Dewey, Johnson refers to Froebel, G. Stanley Hall and several lesser-known men—but no women—in her writings.
own theory was "little more than a synthesis" of ideas gathered from others, as some contend, seems unfair (L. Smith 21-2). She did not adopt anyone's philosophy in its entirety, but she pulled together various strands of each and wove them into her own unitary practice. Furthermore, for some reason known only to herself, she was intellectually prepared for a radical break with tradition though why or how she was prepared is unclear. It required an advanced and receptive state of mind for an experienced teacher at 40 years of age to be so deeply moved that she would cast aside everything she had learned about teaching and a system which had proved to be very successful for her and begin over. Finally, Henderson's organismism might have been directly attributable to Emerson and the transcendentalists and Dewey was influenced by the ideas of Hegel, Thomas Hill Green, George Sylvester Morris and even his own wife, Alice Chipman Dewey (Westbrook 34). Yet Henderson is credited for a theory almost universally attributed to Emerson, Thoreau and others and Dewey is extolled as one of the few great original thinkers in American philosophy.

It must be assumed that there was a receptivity in Marietta Johnson's thought which allowed her to be so deeply affected as to reinvent herself as a teacher. As literary theorist Wolfgang Iser has observed: "We can only make someone else's thought into an absorbing theme for
ourselves, provided the virtual background of our own personality can adapt to it" (Iser 293). Having no course of study to follow may have caused her to question the sufficiency of formalistic educational systems in general, for she remarks retrospectively and with evident pride that her own school "has always been an effort to work with children from the point of view of meeting their needs rather than getting them to meet the demands of any system" (Thirty Years 14-16).

It may be argued that all ideas are borrowed from someone, synthesized and recombined in one's life experience. Moreover, learning is hardly possible without receptivity on the part of the student. To be educated requires receptivity to ideas, usually to the ideas that belong to someone else, and the continuing emphasis upon book-learning by educational institutions practically guarantees that knowledge is appropriated from others. But it bears repeating that Marietta Johnson was a student who formed her own unique synthesis from what she learned. And, as we shall find, she adapted what she learned in ways that suited her and which she in turn could suit to the Fairhope community. What is perhaps more important, she incorporated a melange of abstract ideas into a practice that could be, and was, judged by the whole world. And the practice was not abandoned after a few short years but it was one which emerged from crisis after
crisis to extend over the next 31 years of her life and beyond.

Beginning with Oppenheim, Marietta Johnson's whole thought had undergone a leavening process that eventually transformed the woman. Through the leavening process she internalized the ideas she had embraced. And it was not until that process was complete that the Organic School was born in Fairhope, Alabama. Marietta Johnson gave new meaning to C. Hanford Henderson's observance that "No utopia can be imposed from without," but it must "grow up within the human heart itself" (Henderson, Education 58).
CHAPTER 6

THE YEARS OF DISCOVERY

Paul Gaston begins his chapter on Marietta Johnson with the statement that although his grandfather, E. B. Gaston, was Fairhope's chief architect, founder and leader, it was Marietta Johnson who gave it "a dimension and a destiny he did not dream of when he drew up the plans for his 'model community; and much of its fame radiated from what she created there'" (Women 66).

The details of Marietta Johnson's life and experience in Fairhope given in this chapter were retrieved from a variety of documents and sources which merit acknowledgement. Kenneth Cain, Johnson's foster-son and his wife Dorothy Beiser Cain, have gathered together a wealth of papers, letters, newspaper items and student videotapes which are now available at the Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope, founded in 1991. The Fairhope Public Library has on file a complete set of Fairhope Courier microfilm from the year 1896 up to the present. The Courier files proved an invaluable source of documentation, having scrupulously reported the daily and weekly events in the life of their esteemed citizen, Marietta Johnson as well as those of her Organic School. Laura Smith's Harvard paper entitled "A Woman and Her Idea," Robert Beck's 1988 University of Minnesota paper entitled "Marietta Johnson: Progressive Education and Christian Socialism," and Eugene Zappone's University of Maryland bachelor's thesis entitled "Progressive Education Reconsidered: The Intellectual Milieu of Marietta Johnson" were all particularly helpful in providing a variety of the lesser-known details of Mrs. Johnson's early life and sources for further research. Paul and Blanche Alyea's Fairhope supplied important data relevant to Fairhope community at the time of the Organic School's founding. Finally, former Fairhoper, now Professor of History at the University of Virginia, Paul Gaston, included an account of Marietta Johnson in his Women of Fair Hope written in 1984. His appreciative account of Marietta Johnson and the Organic School which he had attended offer rare personal glimpses of Johnson not available in other sources.
Marietta Johnson's salvation had come through Nathan Oppenheim while Ernest B. Gaston's had come through Henry George, but it was the act of relocating and combining that infused each of their respective missions with its ultimate meaning and purpose. Their intellectual journeyings were followed by physical journeyings, and both finally came to rest on the serene shores of Mobile Bay in a new clime and among kindred spirits who were also shedding the old and trying on the new. It might have been called Shangri-la, Valhalla, Camelot or even New Jerusalem. But while still only a dream in the minds of the Iowa pioneers, it had been named. They called it "Fairhope."

It was early in a new century, December of 1902, when Marietta Pierce Johnson arrived in Fairhope with her family. At 38, her family life, like her mental life, was still deeply immersed in the leavening process. She had already come a long way from St. Paul, Minnesota to Fairhope, Alabama, but she had more miles to travel before she could call Fairhope home. These were transitional years but they would set the stage for the years to come.

It was less than a year since she had been exposed to Oppenheim, and his trenchant observations were no doubt still ringing in her ears. And, like any good theologue, she was already bolstering her newly-found faith with readings gathered from other respectably progressive
sources. Meanwhile, Mr. Johnson, still seeking his fortune in agriculture, was combing the region for a suitable farm site while his wife and son roomed with the Swift family in Fairhope. Hazele Payne, a granddaughter of the Swifts who was also living with them at the time, recalled some ninety years later that Mrs. Johnson would often call her grandmother to come up and put little Clifford Ernest to bed. Hazele described Clifford Ernest as "a beautiful dark-haired, dark-eyed child [who] was very bright and always into some kind of mischief, but minded my grand mother well." With the mischievous Clifford Ernest in bed, Johnson "studied John Dewey, Froebel, Henderson and Oppenheim 'til all hours of the night--they were her Bible."68

Whatever her health problems had been, they must not have been severe and Johnson may have found the warm

---

68 The comments here were taken from Hazele Payne interviews (17 Apr. 1991, 2 Mar. 1992) and from Hazele's two-page, undated typescript on Johnson now housed at the Marietta Johnson Museum. It is entitled "Marietta Pierce Johnson" and was copied in January of 1979 from Hazele's own notes.

Hazele was ten at the time Mrs. Johnson lived with her grandparents, the Swifts. She was nearly one-hundred years old when her interview was recorded. She appeared to be very clear-minded, articulate and possessed an excellent memory. She never attended the Organic School due to the objections of her grandfather, an "Easterner who believed in reading, writing and arithmetic and he believed in having it taught the hard way" (Interview 17 Apr. 1991). Hazele wrote in her vignette that "there were some hot arguments when [Mrs. Johnson] lived with us." Hazele had teacher's training with Mrs. Johnson, however, and taught in Marietta Johnson's schools in both Fairhope and Greenwich, Connecticut ("Marietta Pierce Johnson" 2).
Fairhope winter no less healthful than the *Courier*s frequent and sometimes extravagant claims for it. In any event, it was not long before the Minnesota school marm was enlisted for action. A January 1, 1903, *Courier* item announced that school "patrons" had held a meeting and would endeavor to secure Mrs. Johnson, "our late arrival from Minnesota," to teach their public school. She agreed to the arrangement but must have had some uncertainties, whether health or otherwise, about beginning a new career so soon for the item adds that "Mrs. Johnson has been a very successful teacher in schools of many grades, but was loath to take up the work again." A February 1, 1903, *Courier* item also noted the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Comings of St. Joseph, Michigan. Four years later, these two would befriend Mrs. Johnson and help launch her Fairhope school. But nothing would be settled until both had tried their hand at still other projects. Mr. Johnson had not given up his yen for farming so the Johnsons attempted it once more, this time in Mississippi where there were not likely to be any ice storms. And the Comings trekked from Fairhope to Florida, back to Fairhope, and on to Illinois, lured by prospects.

---

69 The first Fairhope School was established in 1896. A *Courier* item announced plans for one on April 1 of that year and a May 15 item describes the opening exercises as being "enlivened by instrumental as well as vocal music." A January 1, 1904 *Courier* item reports that the school would probably "open as a public school" that school term.
of an industrial school position for Mr. Comings, before they settled on Fairhope for good.

The first report to the *Courier* from Fairhope's "efficient teacher" revealed that her new progressive faith was beginning to take hold while traces of the old still remained. Some of the old urge to force learning full speed ahead is evident in the teacher's words: "Members of the highest class should be able to complete the course" during the school year but "the demands of the home and society may cause a number to fail." She also admonished against absences saying "Every day's absence means the loss of two days' work." Not too many years hence, she would boast instead that though teachers followed a daily program, "it is always subject to change without notice," and, "We have always been happy to say that we never make up work in the elementary school" (*Thirty Years* 26-7). Yet Oppenheim's voice is loud and clear in her acknowledgement that "children should not be overtaxed in school" nor should "too great demands on their physical strength" be made at home. In the same article she outlined a disciplinary code that she would repeat again and again in years to come, a few simple requirements that would be most stringently observed in a school which prided itself on its freedom and flexibility. The requirements were that children must be home and early in bed on school nights; tardiness and irregular
attendance were sternly discouraged; a "more intimate acquaintance" with the school on the part of parents was strongly encouraged (15 Mar. 1903).

The same issue of the Courier that carried the new teacher's report, also boasted that Fairhope now had

71 dwellings on the ground, 2 general stores, dry goods and millinery store, drug store, bakery, butcher shop, barber shop, shoe repair shop, blacksmith shop, a hotel, saw and planing mill, rice-mill, post office, printing office, a public hall used also for school purposes, a free public library of over 2000 volumes. (15 Mar. 1903)

Marie Howland had established and now presided over the 2000 volume free public library, which included the fine collection of books accumulated by her late husband Edward Howland. Marie's arrival in Fairhope had pre-dated Marietta Johnson's by almost four years. The Fairhope public library, first established in her own home, was quite a coup for the little village. It became a bragging point for the Fairhopers who "enjoyed boasting that not even Mobile had a public library" (Alyea and Alyea 77). It might have been one of the first in Alabama and might well qualify as the largest and most complete in that state at the time.70

70 By contrast, Patricia Albjerg Graham discloses that there was no public library in the entire county of Butler, Alabama until 1970 and adjoining Lowndes County had none as late as 1974 when her study was concluded (Graham, Community and Class in American Education 1865-1918 126).
In addition to serving as librarian, the public-spirited Marie also served as Associate Editor of the *Courier*, contributing her bi-monthly column entitled "Mrs. Howland's Letters." She was captivated by Marietta Johnson and early proved it by warmly praising her new friend who had apparently lost none of her teaching ability in the recent migration. Mrs. Johnson was not only a "great worker," Howland enthused, "but she has the power to awaken the spirit of study in her pupils." Johnson's newly created class in Shakespeare evidenced a "delighted interest in the play, *As You Like It*" and Mrs. Howland was just as delighted that "our children have the opportunity and the high pleasure of learning something of Shakespeare, not in a scrappy, desultory manner, but critically." Again, it is a teacher not yet entirely disengaged from the drill and recitation mode of the nineteenth century that is described (though Howland's own flair for the descriptive is notable) in the following words:

The little ones who sat on benches at the right of the platform came to the front to recite. They were nice children, tidy in person and attire, tho' all were barefoot. When sent to their seats, most of them ran like joyous little animals, and almost as noiselessly. (1 Mar. 1903).

Though Oppenheim's message was still haunting the Minnesota woman's footsteps and she was still a pupil "studying 'til all hours of the night," she had not
entirely parted with the traditional methods. The barefoot school children in a village which boasted a 2000 volume library is an irony consistent with a community where pigs and goats roamed freely in the streets while the colonists gathered in the park every Sunday to debate such subjects as "Revision of the Alabama Constitution" and "What is Socialism?" (Courier 14 Nov. 1898, 1 July 1899, 21 July 1905).

On September 1, 1903, the Courier made two important announcements: the first telephone connections to Fairhope were to be undertaken and Marietta Johnson would begin a normal course for teachers in October.71 Already the missionary fervor and boundless energy that constantly dazzled her friends and sometimes dismayed her historians were thrusting Fairhopers forward into an educationally advanced utopia. The same Courier announced that the school term would be extended to eight months. Under her direction, the high school would include an awe-inspiring variety of offerings for a village of a mere 100 persons (P. Gaston, Women 72). What is more, the county superintendent, attending the "The First Annual Commencement" exercises, had been properly "felicitous and complimentary" of the first graduating class in the county

71 The public telephone system was to be the first public service paid for entirely out of land rents. It was also costly and caused bitter dissension among Fairhopers (Alyea and Alyea 77-78).
Johnson was also conducting the normal course at the Fairhope Public School, nor was that all. Her lectures at the County Teacher's Institute had been so well received that she was asked to be the normal instructor for the county. It was an intoxicating experience for the new teacher. The "Mrs. Howland's Letters" column described Johnson as "radiant" with hope for the future (15 Dec. 1903).

But, alas, her future was destined to take another direction and, once again, a promising teaching career was set aside for a time. Mr. Johnson had finally found and purchased a pecan farm in Barnet, Mississippi, and sometime in April of 1904 his wife joined him to become a farm wife once again (Courier 15 Apr. 1904). The very same Courier that reported her departure also reported her brief return from Mississippi, "according to promise," to act as normal instructor at the Baldwin County Teacher's Institute which was held at Fairhope and pronounced "a great success." But the mid-April issue regretted another Fairhope loss: the "extremely pleasant and helpful citizens," the Comings, had moved on to Ruskin College in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. But the Johnsons' and Comings' lives were destined to intersect once again before too many years had elapsed.

Marietta came down to Fairhope once again in April of 1906 to take charge of the Baldwin County Summer Normal
School. By this time she had added Henderson's *Education and the Larger Life* to Oppenheim's *The Development of the Child*, requiring both as reading for her normal students (P. Gaston, *Women* 75). She was also expected to teach a kindergarten in conjunction with the school which, according to a *Courier* advertisement, would be held in Fairhope under the auspices of "The George Academy." The announcement assured prospective students that they would not only get a thorough exposure to the best teaching methods but they might also enjoy "excellent bathing" in a climate where there is "always a delightful breeze so that recreation can be combined with study" (23 Mar. 1906). The "delightful breeze," the bay and natural recreational resources, an intellectually progressive and politically diverse citizenry, combined with the *Courier* editor's gift for public relations, were guaranteed to make Fairhope a lively wintering site for intellectuals and radicals of every ilk. And Mrs. Johnson, who rarely met a person whom she could not teach, would take them all under her pedagogical wing. Her liberal progressive spirit, from this time forward, eventually spread its ample wings over stranger and resident, radical and conservative, serious student and neophyte.

The "Mrs. Howland" column, which rarely missed an occasion to eulogize Mrs. Johnson's virtues, described a kindergarten class of 12 children conducted by Mrs.
Johnson at the 1906 Normal School. The kindergarten was held in addition to her class lectures and demonstrations in "Methods of Work." Marie explained that her friend was now using "her own system largely, and with notable success." She also dwelt upon Mrs. Johnson's "modern method of training children by their natural attractions" and Johnson's warnings against the dangers of "too persistent and arbitrary control." Howland had visited the kindergarten and paints this charming picture:

As I entered she greeted me from a circle of little red chairs whereon were seated less than a dozen little ones intently absorbed in showing what they knew of the story of Hiawatha, and how they could imitate the voices of birds, the wind in the pines; and the rushing waters. There was singing, marching with calisthenic movements; exercises in cave-making in a big heap of fine cream colored sand at the door. They were illustrating how "Ab," the primitive man, lived. Then followed running, jumping over a bar held at different heights, and ball throwing. The most interesting exercise, perhaps, was clay modeling, in which children, kindergartners, students and visitors took part, each one making birds' nests, with eggs. . . . (Courier 29 June 06)

Eleanor Coutant Nichols was in that kindergarten and remembers a teacher who "was a teacher beyond--just an exquisite teacher!" and the entire experience as "one of the most delightful periods in my life" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990).°°

°° The comment is another from an interview (2 Mar. 1992). Mrs. Nichols was 92 when the interview took place. She clearly recalled the kindergarten as well as a devastating hurricane that struck the gulf coast several months later in the fall of 1906. Many homes were
Mrs. Howland's report suggests that Johnson's Mississippi sojourn had not been wasted. Recitation and rote were yielding to mind, body and spirit. A nascent gift for rhetoric was also coming to the fore: "She is a very clear, forcible and earnest speaker" (Courier 29 June 1906). But the same column repeated Marie's frequent complaint that her friend talked so rapidly and with so few pauses that she doubted if the most expert stenographer could follow her. This may explain, at least in part, the unavailability of extant Johnson lectures since she rarely spoke from a text.  

She was, by all accounts, an unusually gifted orator. While precise accounts of the subject matter in her lectures is scarce, there is no shortage of newspaper accounts praising them from city to city throughout the entire country. Agnes DeLima, another prominent progressive, portrayed Marietta Johnson as a "rebel" possessed of a "gift for oratory and a rich and destroyed and the newly constructed public school building later occupied by the Organic School was lifted off of its foundation but left mainly intact (Courier 28 Sept. 1906).  

A Courier writer, covering the high school banquet at the close of the 1918-1919 term, remarked that "Mrs. Johnson gave a most inspiring address which like most of her best things was not written and cannot be reproduced" (6 June 1919). Many of these newspaper accounts are included in the "Marietta Johnson Scrapbook" housed at the Organic School in Fairhope. Dates of publication are not often noted and all-too frequently even the city of publication has not been included.
overflowing personality." The subject is treated more fully later on, but the practical effect of this gift would be to spread the fame of the Organic School and the Fairhope Single Colony across the nation. It also augured well for the future finances of her school.

The Mississippi years were challenging ones for the Johnsons. In the spring of 1905, a second son was born and was named Franklin after his father. Mrs. Johnson was 40 at the time. Early in the same year their home and belongings were destroyed by fire and though they rebuilt their home, the pecan farm never proved profitable.

Hazele Payne describes the home in Barnet as a "big old southern house with a dog-trot through the middle; a delightful place" ("Marietta Pierce Johnson" 2). A personal letter from Marietta to Marie was published in the latter's column in September of 1907. The letter is full of the homely details of domestic life on the farm and affords a very rare glimpse of her personal life, not to mention her life as a housewife. She describes, almost breathlessly, an endless round of chores. Along with doing "all the family sewing, washing, churning," she is

---

75 The quote here was taken from DeLima's critique of Marietta Johnson's book *Youth in a World of Men* in *The Survey* (614).

76 The *Courier* took note of the fire (17 Feb. 05). It was also corroborated by a Hazele Payne interview. (2 Feb. 1992). "Mrs. Howland's Letters" likewise reported that a fire which "burned everything they had accounts largely for their failure" (*Courier* 29 Nov. 1907).
cooking three meals a day, has "put up 150 quarts of 'sass,'" and even makes time to "teach Ethel, tell stories to Clifford Ernest, read the papers, study organic education, and write ever so many letters, as I have most all of the business correspondence to do since Mr. Johnson's eyes have been failing" (Courier 6 Sept. 1907). In the midst of and in spite of such housewifely duties, the interest in "organic education" did not let go its hold on the student. But the little vignette describing Marietta's life as a housewife proved to be the first and last of its kind though Marie commented in the same column that her friend had expressed pleasure with her (Marie's) "'preachment' on the home duties of wife and mother."

Franklin Johnson's failing eyesight may have ended once and for all his hopes and dreams for success at farming since only two months after the Howland column appeared, the Courier announced the Johnson's impending return to Fairhope. The somewhat cryptic announcement read:

Mrs. M. L. Johnson who is so well and favorably known in Fairhope has decided to cast her lot among us and establish a school for Organic Education in Fairhope, as nearly in harmony with the ideal suggested by Dr. Henderson in his

77 Ethel was one of the Fairhope children who came over to Mississippi to live and study with Johnson (P. Gaston, Women 74).
Education and the Higher Life, as possible."
(Courier 8 Nov. 1907)  

The transitional period was near an end and the Organic School was about to become a reality. But two other comments are especially noteworthy in the above item. The school she had in mind would be patterned after Dr. Henderson's ideal, not John Dewey's, as many later believed. Furthermore, the article did not reveal a behind-the-scenes arrangement made between Marietta Johnson and the Comings that would make the school possible. Lydia J. Newcomb Comings wrote in her brief history of the Organic School some years later that they had received a letter from Mrs. Johnson in the summer of 1907, saying that conditions in Mississippi were "very unsatisfactory" and that they had "decided they must make a change, but had no definite plans." The Comings came to the rescue immediately, making their own plans for the Johnsons and a school (L. Comings "An Intimate History of the Early Days of the School of Organic Education" 2). The Comings had wished for some time to sponsor a school which combined industrial education with physical development and nutrition (P. Gaston, Women 74). They now asked the Johnsons to return to Fairhope and offered Mrs. Johnson $25 to open a kindergarten, which would "give her the opportunity to work out some of the problems which so

78 Henderson's book, Education and the Larger Life, was mistitled in the article.
interest us." The offer was accepted at once and Marietta Johnson returned to Fairhope bringing with her two children from New York, the first of many boarding students that would find their way to the school in years to come (L. Comings 2).

The first school devoted to "organic education" began in November of 1907 as a kindergarten. An advertisement in the Courier invited all of the children of Fairhope "between the ages of 4 and 10 who are not otherwise employed" to attend a "Free Kindergarten" conducted by Mrs. Johnson (15 Nov. 1907). Six local students and several older children that Mrs. Johnson had brought with her from out of town attended (P. Gaston, Women 77). The school was properly launched by its acknowledged mentor, C. Hanford Henderson, who fortuitously passed through Fairhope en route to California on the first week in November. It was only the first of several visits that Henderson eventually made to Fairhope. On this occasion he delivered an address appropriately titled "Organic

79 The Comings and the Johnsons had found they shared a keen interest in education while Marietta Johnson was teaching the Fairhope public school. The Comings had invited her to take her dinner with them at The Gables Inn where they were rooming at the time and the discussions of educational methods that ensued confirmed in all the "feeling that a complete change was imperative" (L. Comings 1). Hazele Payne also recalls that while Mrs. Johnson was teaching the public school, Mrs. Comings would come up and teach calisthenics once a week and Mr. Comings would "come up and teach, I guess you'd call it whittling" (Interview 3 Feb. 1992).
Education" to the Sunday afternoon citizen gatherings now called "The Progressive League" (Courier 8 Nov. 1907).

The school was incorporated later as "The Comings Memorial College of Organic Education," a name suggested by Mrs. Johnson. Joseph Fels, a Philadelphia philanthropist who made a large contribution to the school several months later, raised objections to the "college" designation causing it to be legally removed. Then the "Comings Memorial" designation was dropped by common consent as too cumbersome, leaving the name "The Organic School of Education" (L. Comings 4). The school itself, less pretentious than its name, had modest beginnings in a little cottage which was rented for $15 leaving the teacher $10 of the $25 stipend from the Comings for supplies and salary (Alyea and Alyea 155). Mrs. Howland reported that, though the school had "opened under many difficulties," its founder was "able, persistent and 'dead earnest' in her work" and could be seen every morning "by the roadside before her cottage, exercising with her pupils in running, jumping, etc." (Courier 29 Nov. 1907). Howland did not elaborate on the "many difficulties."

Mrs. Johnson called her school an experimental school and there she would seek to answer her fundamental question: "Would more physical and intellectual freedom lead to better learning?" Now she was ready. She had discarded the old system and was prepared for the new.
She had constructed a theoretical framework for her school around the ideas she had gleaned from the writings of Oppenheim, Henderson, Dewey and a few other minor figures. But now the question was how these ideas could be rendered as a concrete expression and what kind of pedagogical apparatus such a pedagogical expression would require? She writes that there was nothing in her previous experience to "throw light upon my path." Heretofore, she had only needed to "find the best way to administer" the curriculum (emphasis added) but had not been trained to evaluate results in "eagerness of attack, in spontaneous activity, in the growth of initiative--bright eyes, healthy satisfactions" (Thirty Years 15). Now she had nothing to guide her, no road map to follow in developing a curriculum for real children out of what were, for the most part, abstract theories. Just what these theories indicated in the way of practical application was still quite unclear. It was all very well to know that the child was not a miniature adult or that the whole child, including mind, body and spirit, must be taken into account. But what did that imply in a real-life pedagogical practice? Does educating the "spirit" imply religious training? How should children be classified, graded and tested? What sort of curriculum would foster the whole child? Where do the arts fit into such a curriculum and what kind of arts should be pursued? What
sort of activities best "educate" the body? What about sports in a school and community that wishes to foster the cooperative rather than the competitive spirit? And, perhaps most of all, would Fairhope parents allow their children to attend a school which espoused radical new ideas? Many years later, she would write simply that her school had always made an effort to work with children from the "point of view of meeting their needs rather than getting them to meet the demands of any system" (Thirty Years 15). But, for now at least, these questions were yet to be answered and circumscribed within a concrete curriculum.

No sooner had the school opened than tragedy visited again. Early in December, two and one-half year old Franklin, described in the Courier as "a child of exceptional beauty and promise," was tragically killed in a fall while playing with the other children in the school (6 Dec. 1907). Then, in a devastating double blow of fate, Mr. Comings suffered a fatal stroke on Christmas Eve (Courier 3 Jan. 1908). Johnson, typically, makes no mention of either catastrophe in her Thirty Years With an Idea, leaving the historian with many unanswered questions. But Hazele Payne recalls that Mrs. Johnson refused even to believe the little boy had died and "She held him until he had to be taken from her." Hazele Payne's account is not an implausible portrayal of a woman
who has just lost a child, but her story is uncorroborated by any other witness.

Helen Dyson who, like Hazele, taught in the Organic School during Mrs. Johnson's lifetime, said that Marietta Johnson spoke occasionally to her of Franklin's death and had once told her that the little boy was on the school porch and another child pushed him off. Mrs. Dyson said, "She [Mrs. Johnson] wasn't reconciled. . . . She just had to accept it." She added emphatically "Mrs. Johnson's life was her work" (Interview 22 Feb. 1994).

The wife of Marietta Johnson's foster son, Dorothy Beiser Cain, tells a somewhat different story. She not only refutes Hazele Payne's account of the grief-stricken mother's behavior but submits the observation that, although they were quite close, Marietta Johnson never once spoke to her about the child's death and, to her knowledge, never spoke to anyone about it. Mrs. Cain relates the silence to something that Johnson once said to her about the family's winter of ranching in the north and the extensive losses they had suffered there as a result of the severe winter ice storm. She quotes Johnson as saying that she resolved "right then and there, I will never let the loss of material things devastate me again" (Interview 11-12 May 1992). Was the death of the little boy a wound so deep that it could not be voiced and must forever be buried in silence or was Mrs. Johnson a woman
made impassive by hardship? What is certain is that a woman who had not learned such lessons in endurance might well have perished in the storms that lay ahead.

Whatever the truth of the matter might be, it is sure, as Mrs. Comings wrote many years later, that the two women "passed through deep waters" (L. Comings 2). Such a blow, coming as it did at the beginning of a new career, might have led a lesser woman to withdraw in despair. But "undaunted" Marietta Johnson "stood by her little group of children and the work went on" (L. Comings 2). And Lydia Comings stood by her friend's side as she would for the rest of her long life. Probably one of the most exceptional aspects of Johnson's Fairhope experience was the strong sisterhood established between herself and women such as Lydia Comings and Marie Howland who were substantial and distinguished women in their own right.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Johnson's expansive tendencies were already in play. After opening a free school in November for "those not already employed," by January she had already inaugurated night classes two evenings a week for "those whose duties prevent them attending school in the daytime." They would consist of "literature and mental arithmetic" (Courier 10 Jan. 08). In February of 1908, the Colony Council added a $25 per month appropriation for the kindergarten (L. Comings 3). In March, Mr. Joseph Fels of the Fels-Naphtha soap fortune, a liberal-minded
reformer, philanthropist, and ardent single taxer, donated $1000 to the school. It was the first of his several donations all of which were generously tendered without any restrictive policy-making conditions. In January of 1909, the fourteenth anniversary celebration of Fairhope's founding and the occasion of Fels' next visit, it was announced that he had given $5000 more to the Organic School for building and equipment and an additional $1000 a year for five years toward maintenance. This was a very bountiful endowment indeed for a school in a village of "four hundred sixty-six white and one hundred three Negro residents" which also supported a public school! (Courier 10 Apr. 1908).80

In April of 1908, those legally eligible according to the laws of the state, voted to incorporate a municipality of Fairhope which should not supplant the Single Tax Corporation but exist side by side with it. While the nineteenth amendment to the United States Constitution was still well over a decade in the future, the constitution of the Single Tax Colony had granted women the vote as well as the privilege of holding office. The editor of the Courier deplored the circumstances which, by state

80 Schools, of course, were very much segregated and not a great deal had been achieved in ensuring schooling for black children in Alabama. Several philanthropic funds had been established in the north to aid in providing schooling for southern blacks. For a discussion, see Graham, Community and Class 112-17.
law, prevented women from voting on the issue of incorporation. In tones of high moral indignation, he regretted that women would continue to be so deprived "until the men of the state can be educated to see the justice of equal suffrage regardless of sex and amend the statutes accordingly" (Courier 1 May 1908). On the subject of voting, Marie Howland was even more greatly aggrieved, scolding those "voters" who, "ever since the signing of the declaration of independence," had maintained that political rights were "a matter of sex"! She denounced the practice as a "disgrace to human intelligence!" (Courier 10 Nov. 1911). The Fairhope Colony, however, was another matter. Women could, and many did, vote in a local school bond election held shortly after the incorporation, and the Courier forthwith extended what was obviously meant to be a gracious tribute to those active in the matter: "A woman may not be able to sit down with a pencil and laboriously reason step by step but she can jump to a conclusion of right or wrong with an intuition that makes man's logic seem pretty foggy" (Courier 12 June 1908).

The first public school was had been housed in a vacated store front in 1896, but a school building had been completed in January of 1905.\textsuperscript{81} The building, later

\textsuperscript{81} The first Fairhope public school appears to have been established in 1896 (see page 84). It was first mentioned in the Courier in May of 1896. The school term
named the Bell Building for the large bell tower constructed directly over the center, measured 24 x 74 and consisted of two large rooms and a 10 foot wide central hall. Owing in part to the continued munificence of Mr. Fels, the colony had added a third room in 1908, creating a T-shaped structure. At the founding of the municipality of Fairhope in 1908, the structure became a three-way point of contention between the Fairhope Colony, the newly incorporated municipality and Baldwin County. One of the critical issues at stake was how to effect the transfer of public facilities owned by the colony to the municipality. The school land and building had been furnished by the colony elders who agitated fiercely for the city either to purchase the school or at least to pay a rental fee. But the newly-formed town council insisted that the building be turned over to the town free of charge. The school had also secured a share of public school funds from the county and thus the county also entered into the controversy. The debate raged on from October 1908 through May 1909 eliciting the wry comment from one city alderman that Fairhopers might be better served if the bond issue involved remained an open question for future

was short at first but it was slowly extended over time (see page 196). A high school was included only later but seems to have operated only intermittently in the early 1900's. Occasionally, the high school students appear to have attended the Organic School. Courier coverage implies indirectly that the Organic School received public funds for high school students.
discussion "as Fairhoppers love to argue, and it would be cruel to remove all cause for argument" (Courier 14 May 1909).

Not without grumbling from some quarters, the entire problem was settled when the Colony received and accepted an offer for $2000 from "The School Improvement Committee" on behalf of the Organic School for the building and the 10 acres surrounding it (Courier 25 June 1909). At the same meeting, the Colony agreed not to collect the usual equivalent of rental value from the property "in consideration of Organic School being conducted as a free school for colony pupils" (Courier 25 June 1909).82 Lydia Comings attended the relevant council meetings and so appears to have been an important factor in affecting such an agreeable arrangement for the Organic School. Lydia and five other women, including Marietta Johnson, soon comprised an all-female school corporation now made necessary by property ownership (L. Comings 4).83

Meanwhile, as these events were unfolding, the school which began in 1907 as a kindergarten with nine students,

82 Gale Rowe, present secretary of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, says that rent was never collected from the original Organic School Campus property but financial donations to the school were ceased in 1970 because of legal questions (Interview, 22 Apr. 1994).

83 The other women in the incorporating group were Mrs. Clara M. Gaston, wife of Fairhope's founder E. B. Gaston, Mrs. Minnie H. Brown, Mrs. L. A. Powell and Mrs. D. K. Bancroft (L. Comings 4).
had reached an enrollment of fifty by December of 1908, not including "three young ladies who are taking the [teacher] training course" (Courier 18 Dec. 1908). A second teacher, Miss Helen Taggart of Freeport, Illinois, had been added to the staff in the fall. A monthly "Mother's Meeting" was quickly inaugurated "under Mrs. Johnson's enthusiastic leadership" and would continue for the entire duration of her tenure though it became a bi-monthly meeting and was later christened with the more inclusive title "The Parent's Roundtable" (Courier 6 Nov. 1908). Nor had Mrs. Johnson lost any time in re-establishing her normal training classes and adding a manual training department under the capable instruction of Mr. Johnson who had also recently taken a seat on the Colony Council (Courier 19 Feb. 1909). An extensive list of "the very best obtainable" tools purchased and delivered to the Organic School was given in the Courier (19 Mar. 1909). The tools would be a well-used source of pleasure for future generations of students, boys as well as girls.

Fairhopers had long ago convinced themselves that their tiny Fairhope Colony was setting a fine example for the world in combatting the evils of the industrial revolution which had spread themselves across the nation

---

84 The same Courier edition reporting those statistics also reported that 80 students were now enrolled in the Fairhope public school.
creating, as they believed, paroxysms of speculation, competition, special privilege and monopoly. While the colony founder and editor of its newspaper, E. B. Gaston, might stand aghast at the social ills brought about by naked capitalism, he was not loathe to make use of one of its most ubiquitous by-products, advertising. His newspaper served as a marketing vehicle to trumpet the virtues of the single tax colony to the world, and its pages were filled with paid advertisements almost from the beginning. Nor were the possible benefits of the school lost on him, and he quickly incorporated the new school into his propaganda campaign for the colony, lauding its features as "an institution which deserves encouragement from its citizens, not only for the progressive system of education to which it is devoted, but for its possibilities as a means of bringing people to Fairhope temporarily or permanently." He exulted in that the school's founders, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Comings, together with Mr. Fels' "ample means and generous heart," were hoping to attract "scores--hundreds--even thousands--of pupils, even from different states; some of whom will be accompanied by their parents; who will take cottages to remain with them and others of whom will be boarding pupils" (Courier 9 July 1909). It was on a somewhat more wishful note that he enlisted Mr. Fels' "ample means and generous heart" in promoting the effort since no further
offers of financing had been forthcoming. But their hopes were not entirely in vain. The school did attract its hundreds, though not many thousands, and parents did come with their children to winter in cottages, while boarders were sent by the parents from many states and even a few foreign countries.

The enthusiasm of the Fairhope newspaper, the actions of the colony council, and the rapid increase in students at the Organic School all suggest that the Fairhope citizens almost immediately threw their support behind their new school. In their mutual quest for an ambiguous principle called "cooperative individualism," the school and community would eventually become synonymous. One of the first of the prominent Americans attracted to Fairhope by the Organic School was Upton Sinclair who enrolled his eight-year-old son David in the school in the Fall of 1909. David, who had not much education up to that time but who had at his disposal the "world's best literature" according to his father, found the Organic School to his liking (Sinclair 163). And the elder Sinclair's autobiography provides an unvarnished, and probably more accurate, assessment of the Fairhope Colony than the pages of the Courier:

Here were two or three hundred assorted reformers who had organized their efforts according to the gospel of Henry George. They were trying to eke out a living from poor soil and felt certain they were setting an example to the rest of the world. (162)
The idea that Fairhoppers were "eking out a living on poor soil" might have come as a surprise to a non-resident reading the Courier. It had a fairly wide circulation throughout the country because of northern friends and relatives of the colony as well as a variety of single taxers, socialists and would-be social reconstructionists who were interested in the colony's Georgist principles. Hoping to attract still more settlers to the colony through his newspaper, the Courier editor was prone to see his village in a distinctly rosy glow, elaborating its virtues and neglecting its handicaps. If residents complained of goats and swine in the streets, he was objective enough to print their complaints, but such discouraging words rarely came from his own pen. No sooner was the colony settled than he was regularly reporting such agricultural events as "the first strawberries of the year" pronounced "delicious in flavor and aroma." Meanwhile, another family had already enjoyed "a mess of green peas from their garden March 30." (Courier 1 Apr. 1896, 15 Apr. 1895). Such glowing reports were calculated to appeal to northern friends and relatives in midwinter but Sinclair's report was probably more accurate. Colony land was universally poor in quality and colonists would be hard pressed to make a living through agriculture. That was the truth of the matter in spite of every effort on the part of the Courier
to publicize the latest in fertilization techniques and Mr. Fels' shipment of "a ton of 'Jadoo' fertilizer from Philadelphia, freight prepaid" (Courier 1 Feb. 1900).

In 1909, the industrial age, whose worst vices the Fairhopers had once longed to escape, made its way to the shores of their Mobile Bay site in the form of the first "home-owned" car (Courier 30 July 1909). Since their landing at Battles Wharf in November of 1894, many changes had taken place and another was about to transpire. Ever since 1897, Joseph Fels had given generously to the colony in the hope that their commitment to Henry George's single tax principles would set an example for the world. Through his generosity, 2200 acres of land had been added to the colony, $1000 donated to the library and $11,000 to the school. He had invested heavily in the steamer Fairhope as well as other private enterprises in addition to his other generous gifts (Alyea and Alyea 136n). His interest in the colony as a single tax enclave had first been piqued when he read a Courier article on "Justice" so that in the fall of 1897 he wrote the editor asking him for a subscription. But after 1909, the editor's expectations of charity from this man of "ample means and generous heart" proved no more than a wistful hope. The support that had undergirded the thriving Fairhope community and set the school on its economic feet was now virtually at its end. As the Courier declared, Fels'
largess had brought them safely through the "perilous formative years of our existence" (13 Mar. 1914). Though the reason for Fels' decision to withdraw his assistance to the colony is uncertain, it came to an end at about the same time as the incorporation of the town, a move which he feared would cloud the purity of the colony's demonstration of single tax principles (Alyea and Alyea 136n).

As for his assistance to the school, it had become clear that, although he had attached no conditions to his money gifts, Fels' interests and those of Mrs. Johnson diverged in the matter of who was to be educated at the Organic School. Mrs. Johnson's chief interest was in providing free education for as many children as possible including children on colony land as well as those in the newly incorporated municipality. Fels' interests, on the other hand, were directed toward attracting as many settlers as possible to the Fairhope Single Tax Colony. His concern is documented in a March 1909 letter praising her "great goodwill to all people" and expressing his conviction that she believed in "the right kind of Socialism." The Johnsons were believed to be socialists when they arrived in Fairhope and, in later years, Frank ran for mayor of Fairhope on the socialist ticket and won. Any direct evidence of their socialistic background is difficult to locate, however. Helen Christine Bennett's article "Mrs. Marietta Johnson" in the American Magazine, however, makes the only unqualified statement on the
more certain he became that the "benefits of the Organic School should go to the people living on Colony land," adding that he should have made his contribution "conditional on this being done" (qtd. in Alyea and Alyea 156). But Marietta Johnson was steadfast throughout her life, refusing donations that imposed conditions on her school which ran counter to her own ideological principles. This was in spite of the almost continual financial crises which it faced. She had become a missionary to educate children and the more she could educate, the better.8 Yet she writes that occasionally the offerings, though "refused with considerable firmness," were sometimes also refused with great regret (Thirty Years 42).

One of those which may have been refused with regret was an offer from the Henry Ford Foundation to provide something in the way of long-term financing, an offer which she reportedly refused because it came with strings subject: "Mrs. Johnson is a socialist, and believes that with the training she has outlined, children will develop the courage to meet the injustices of society and to overthrow them." Bennett added the comment that "There is no socialism taught in her school, however, for she also believes that the soul should grow unfettered by any system" (31).

8 A 1921 brochure at the Marietta Johnson Museum called "Concerning Mrs. Marietta Johnson and the Fairhope School" was pleased to announce that Fairhope children were admitted free but that the 14 non-resident pupils were "invited" to pay a tuition of $150 per year. Of the 14, however, only one was able to pay and five were unable even to pay their own board.
attached in the form of a controlling board of directors. But she could not have a board controlling her school.\textsuperscript{87} Fortunately, by the time the Fels' contributions ran out, Mrs. Johnson had already proven herself to be a spectacularly successful fund raiser on her own.

\textsuperscript{87} The information here was taken from a personal interview with Dorothy Beiser Cain (11-12 May 1992). Though Johnson did receive an outright donation of $12,000 from Mrs. Henry Ford for twelve lectures to be delivered in the Detroit area, no documentation of a sustaining offer from the Ford Foundation other than the comments of Mrs. Cain has been forthcoming.
A SCHOOL FOR UTOPIA:
MARIETTA JOHNSON AND THE ORGANIC IDEA
VOLUME II

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by
Janet Ruie McGrath
B.S., Lamar University, 1978
May 1996
CHAPTER 7
A SCHOOL FOR UTOPIA

Introduction - Voices from Utopia

Imagine attending a school where classes are held out of doors; where play is encouraged; where desks are not among the furniture; where grades, tests, homework and recitations are never required; where "passing" is automatic, there is no need to bother with reading or mathematics until one is quite ready and curriculum requirements include a very liberal helping of dancing, arts and crafts and non-competitive sports. For most of us, this describes summer camp, not school. Certainly by present standards, Utopia's school was more like a summer camp than an honest-to-goodness school. Neither is that notion in any way dispelled by various newspaper and magazine articles of the time nor by the tales of former students who recall the glorious times had at "Organic."

88 John Dewey's chapter in Schools of Tomorrow on the Organic School, titled "An Experiment," will be used in this chapter to document the curriculum in the Organic School. For the most part, however, Marietta Johnson's writings will speak and her students' voices will act as her witnesses. Thirteen students and/or teachers were personally interviewed and audiotaped by the author and 37 videotaped interviews on file at the Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope were used. All but two of the interviews used here were students who attended the school during Marietta Johnson's lifetime, most of whom are now in their eighties and nineties. David King and Suzanne Hunter Gilmore were students after Marietta Johnson's time, but they are second generation Organic School students. King is the son of Grace Arnold King and Gilmore the daughter of Helene Beiser Hunter, both of whom attended and graduated from the Organic School.
They talk of tramping the gullies, of building and sailing boats on the bay, of constructing real wigwams out of pine needles and then occupying them for a week. They like to tell about the fun they had making jewelry and ceramic pots in arts and crafts, and they will usually point to some wooden table or shelf made in manual training that still has a special place in their homes after as many as four decades. When together, they reminisce about the folk dance parties and traveling around the country on an old bus giving folk dancing demonstrations, a skill for which they achieved something of a national reputation.

Organic students, by all accounts, loved their school and preferred going to school to almost anything else. So universal is this affinity for school that it is fairly impossible to find even a mildly objective detractor, never mind an outright critic. Former student Reed Myers remembers turning down opportunities such as going fishing with his family and attending the Ringling Brothers Circus because he preferred being at school. Paul Frederick was anxious to get to school every day and remembers that "class was not only fun, but it was very educational and I thoroughly enjoyed it." He adds that the "interplay

89 Reed Myers' recollections of Organic were taken from a videotaped interview (30 Dec. 1991). He attended Organic during the depression from 1932 until 1937 when the family returned to Cranford, New Jersey. Reed is one of a number of former students who have returned to Fairhope in recent years to retire.
between the students and the teachers was outstanding. . .

. teachers would enter into whatever activity you were
doing and become part of the class itself."\(^{90}\) Hector
Sutherland recollects that "every morning when I got up, I
thought it was so great that I was going to be able to go
to school."\(^{91}\) Likewise, Madeleine Gibbs Scott "loved
every minute of it because it was the only place that I
felt there was no pressure and no fear."\(^{92}\) "The
beautiful thing about it," echoes Mary Emma Arnold Creek,
"was that there was not the pressure." Paul Gaston muses
that "Those fifteen years [at the school] were just
extraordinary years. . . . all just glorious years."\(^{93}\)

---

\(^{90}\) Colonel Paul Frederick III is Marietta Johnson’s
great nephew who lived at the school home with his mother
Esther Pierce Frederick for a number of years. Mrs.
Frederick was Marietta Johnson’s secretary for many years.
The comments here were taken from an undated videotape
interview in the library of the Marietta Johnson Museum.

\(^{91}\) Hector’s recollections were taken from a
videotaped interview (2 Mar. 1992). He attended the
Organic School from 1926 until 1929 when his family moved
to Greenwich, Connecticut. There he attended the Edgewood
School, a satellite of the Fairhope Organic School, and
graduated in 1934. He is a graduate of New York
University. Hector retired from the Rochester Institute
of Technology as a Professor Emeritus in 1983 and returned
to Fairhope to live in 1992.

\(^{92}\) Madeleine Gibbs Scott spent only part of her high
school years at Organic though she wishes she could have
spent all of her school days there. Her comments here are

\(^{93}\) Paul Gaston’s history and career were documented
earlier. The comments here were excerpted from a
videotaped interview with Gaston found at the Marietta
Such enthusiasm for school must stand a little strain of credibility for most of us; nevertheless, it was the rule, not the exception in Utopia's school. Somehow, the stories of organic students from the halcyon days of a new utopia sound more like fanciful tales about a mythical story-book kingdom than anything resembling a school. It is true that unhappy memories have a way of fading just as happy ones become even better. Yet, whether or not Organic School students received an education which would have pleased Joseph Mayer Rice, they heartily believe they had the best there was to offer, and there is no reason to doubt their memorials. After all, it was utopia.

Part One - Shaping a Practice

Overview

The following section has been divided into two parts. Part One contextualizes the narrative and addresses the practical concerns of curriculum, teachers and John Dewey's visit to the school. Part Two treats the major themes and tensions which emerged as Marietta Johnson tested her theories and developed her practice.

Context and Perspective

The school which prompts such enthusiasm among its alumni, is one that grew from a revelation that dawned on Marietta Johnson early in the twentieth century. By that time it was almost ten years since the Rice exposés had made disgracefully clear that American schools were rigid,
sterile and formal environments where children listened, copied, memorized and recited but rarely conceptualized, experienced or expressed. With an aroused nation crying out for educational reform all around her and having celebrated her own personal epiphany, Marietta Johnson began imagining a radical re-vision of schooling within a school of her own. She began to imagine a school without artificial pressures to achieve, where children would actually enjoy learning, where they could be free and natural and out-of-doors as much as possible, where they could investigate the world around them for themselves, formulate their own conclusions, satisfy their own interests and create from their own imaginations. It would be a school where the child's needs would be the primary consideration, not meeting the arbitrary standards of adults. In short, it would reverse almost everything Rice had found in the nation's public schools. Yet Johnson had not dismissed offhand the importance of gaining knowledge and intellectual skills. These goals "still seemed to me desirable," she said, but whether they would be an "inevitable accompaniment" of the educational process that she had in mind remained to be seen (Thirty Years 16). Her words portend a curriculum where knowledge and intellect would be secondary accompaniments in learning.
As she said in *Thirty Years*, there was no precedent yet established to guide her. She had "no expert criticism--no one to whom to turn for advice" (*Thirty Years* 15-16). Even the pedagogical prophets from whom she had gathered her theories could not advise her. Oppenheim, after all, was not an educator but a physician. Furthermore, Dewey's school had been a short-lived affair conducted among intellectuals in an urban setting and Henderson's was a summer school for wealthy boys. So it was up to her to take Oppenheim's physiology, Henderson's idealism and Dewey's social theories and from them distill a pedagogical practice that applied to real children in a poor, rural environment in the deep south.

First of all, anything that smacked of the mechanical had to be purged. She could have no further recourse to systems: "I must work from a new point of view. . . . [one] of meeting their needs rather than getting them to meet the demands of any system." How to design a system when one wanted most of all to avoid systems was the crux of her problem. A *New York Evening Post* writer, describing the organic philosophy, admitted that though it all "sounds very vague," Mrs. Johnson has "translated her creed into a curriculum" and would "be outraged if anyone called it a system because system is the word against which her soul revolts" (6 July 1923). Her revulsion was shared in other progressive quarters. How much system was
enough and how much too much was a continuing debate throughout the life of the progressive movement. For years conservatives and liberals had waged a relentless war with one another, conservatives blasting liberals for being organizational jelly-fish while liberals fired back that conservatives were rigid, oppressive tyrants.

Meanwhile, for the ultra-liberal Mrs. Johnson, anything but the sketchiest curriculum outline was in danger of becoming a prescription to be slavishly copied in lesson plans and courses on into infinity. She was simply passionate upon this point. Even Dewey advocated more structure than Johnson. Thus, one of her school’s most distinguishing features would come to be its flexibility and, above all, its avoidance of system. Instead, it reflected a state of mind, the state of mind its founder had attained about how children should be educated. Nor was she deterred or intimidated by what her detractors construed as philosophical formlessness and lack of pedagogical structure, countering that "Much initiative has been lost, many fine aspirations have been destroyed, by too much organization" (Thirty Years 27). "Standardization of learning," she would doggedly insist, "makes extremists of us, ruins the spirit, and makes us conscious of meeting external requirements" (Johnson, "The School and the Child" 14). Her pedagogical design would
be a creation, not a system. She was an artist, not a mechanic.

So during the first years following the founding of the school in 1907, she tested her ideas and fashioned a practice that she ever after insisted was not a system, a method or even a philosophy, but a "point of view." By 1913 the school was in its sixth year and a thriving institution of some 150 students (P. Gaston Women 81). A curriculum had been crafted around the founder's unorthodox educational views and the world had begun to take note of the little school on Mobile Bay. In March of 1913 the New York Times featured a flattering full page article on the school (13 Mar. 1913). In April of that year, the Courier reported that Mrs. Johnson, whose fund-raising lecture tours were now an established routine, had just returned from a successful two month trip in the east where she had met "a great many distinguished people in sympathy with her views, including the 'first lady of the land,' Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, Dr. Oppenheim, . . . Edwin Markham, the famous poet, Dr. Dewey professor of philosophy in Columbia University and others" (11 Apr. 1913). This is probably the same meeting that Johnson spoke of in Thirty Years, telling that

Mrs. Woodrow Wilson and other distinguished people were at the meeting and expressed full agreement with the principles of morality for which I contended. The response from the audience was electrical; there were two encores, reporters crowded about after the meeting and
many appointments to speak to and about Philadelphia followed. And, of course, all of this resulted in more or less financial help for the school." (39)

Two more articles appeared in national publications in July. One *New York Times* article covered Johnson's demonstration school in Greenwich as already mentioned, and another written by Helen Christine Bennett appeared in the *American Magazine*. In December, a well-known journal called *The Survey* featured an article, "Education as Growth" written by Johnson herself (237-40). In December, the great John Dewey set a final, triumphant capstone on the year by visiting the school, sending it rocketing into a national prominence that would not reach its peak until the 1920's.

The Dewey View

It was a group of eastern women in sympathy with the Johnson views who were responsible for arranging the famous Dewey visit to Fairhope. The Fairhope League, as they came to call themselves, was a group of well-heeled women from the Greenwich, Connecticut, area. Dewey was by that time situated in the philosophy department of Columbia University, and his schedule did not permit him to make a trip to Fairhope during the school term so the visit took place during the Christmas holidays. The students and faculty were advised of the momentous visit about to take place and voted to remain in school during the holidays so that what might have caused a minor
rebellion in many schools was amicably arranged though not entirely without inconvenience. The teachers, many of whom did not live in Fairhope, found it necessary to rearrange their schedules to leave on Christmas Eve if they were to arrive home by Christmas.

While arrangements made for the visit were not elaborate and classes were expected to be conducted as usual, the usually optimistic and self-confident Mrs. Johnson was faced with a frightening specter. She recalls in Thirty Years that the Dewey visit and the "thought of being 'investigated' together with the fear that his report might be unfavorable constituted the most critical experience of my life!" (40-1). But an early report to the Fairhope League in January quieted her fears and lent some encouragement. In a short letter addressed to a Miss Hunt, then the League secretary, Dewey wrote:

As it will be some days yet before I shall be able to get a formal report in shape I want to say that I was pleased even beyond my expectations with what I saw of the Organic School. In fact, I am so enthusiastic that I have been self-deceived or allowed my enthusiasm to run away with my judgement. (qtd. in the Courier 16 Jan. 1914)

In late February a more detailed Dewey report entitled "Dr. Dewey Endorses" was prominently featured in the Courier (27 Feb. 1914). Part of that report was later incorporated into the Deweys' Schools of Tomorrow. The part excluded from Schools is in some ways the more interesting. Dewey, like Upton Sinclair earlier, gives a
slightly more objective glimpse of Fairhope than the steady stream of boosterism issuing forth in the pages of the Courier. A now well-urbanized and sophisticated teacher at Columbia University, Dewey seemed taken aback by Fairhope’s rusticity. He even commented quite frankly that at the end of his first day in Fairhope he "felt that the community was too crude and too unpromising to make it worthwhile to make much sacrifice to keep the school where it is" (27 Feb. 1914). It is true that formalities were not closely observed in the Organic School as another easterner, a new student, was shocked to find:

I particularly remember it because the first thing they did in the morning was to have an assembly where all the grades met together and I walked in and sat down on the bench and Mrs. Johnson got up and started to talk to us and right in front of me under the bench was the biggest set of bare feet I've ever seen in my life. I'd never been to a school where kids could come barefoot. And next to the feet was a dog and so dogs were allowed to come too! (Arden Flagg, Interview 30 Sept. 1990)

The sort of school where dogs and barefoot students were welcomed in classrooms might have been something of a cultural shock to a genteel and urbane academic of New York City and lately of Chicago. But in spite of its simplicity and informality, Dewey noted and praised the orderliness of the school which was manifested, he thought, in spite of the "greater freedom" allowed the students there. And he also praised "the general happiness and contentment of the children in the school"
who appeared to like it so well that he believed they might go Saturdays and Sundays if they could (Courier 27 Feb. 1914). Even Dewey’s Sabino, who had accompanied his father to Fairhope, caught the Organic spirit. Sabino reported to the elder Dewey that all of the children he talked to were "crazy about the school" and before their visit ended, he too begged to be left in Fairhope (Dewey, Middle Works 7: 387).

The elder Dewey also found that the longer he stayed, the better he liked his rustic surroundings, finally admitting that the "simplicity of rural life in the south makes its education more plastic to radical changes" (Courier 27 Feb. 1914). Dewey might not have been aware that rural life in Fairhope had major disjunctions with rural life in the greater south generally, but still he had hit upon a fundamental truth. With a few exceptions, Fairhopers were simple visionaries who had chosen to locate themselves outside of the existing cultural order to test their radical theory. Their unorthodox experiment in "true cooperative individualism" had already located them on the margins and embracing Marietta Johnson’s experiment pushed them even further toward the radical fringes. What Dewey saw as simplicity and plasticity, even crudity, may have also suggested an absence of the rigidity and paralysis which often mark mature communities. Marietta Johnson had early recognized the
simple environment of Fairhope as an asset. It would give her the freedom to work out her idea, a freedom which might have proved impossible in a more sophisticated community (Thirty Years 46).

Dewey's report continued in the same slightly condescending vein, acknowledging some initial reservations about the school: "Before going, I expected to have to make allowances on account of the obstacles against which the school had worked, both because of the inherent difficulties of any new step and because of the lack of means to secure properly trained teachers." He was relieved to find that he did not need to "make nearly as many allowances as I had anticipated." But his report included helpful suggestions for improving and strengthening the school as well as alleviating its financial stress. He suggested that Mrs. Johnson continue and even extend her teacher training courses for carrying on similar work in the vicinity and elsewhere. Young men and women "should go to Fairhope both to study and assist in the school with a view of adapting the Fairhope ideas to richer, more complex and more sophisticated communities in the north" (Courier 27 Feb. 1914). Crude environment notwithstanding, Dewey had found the organic idea an exportable commodity.

Dewey was also quick to perceive and analyze the school's omnipresent financial woes and offer some very
practical suggestions to keep it afloat. He particularly stressed that Mrs. Johnson should be relieved from financial "worries and anxieties," thus freeing her time for the primary work of supervising the school and preparing teachers who would carry on her work in other locales. To that end, he suggested establishing a guaranteed fund which would ensure the school's finances for several years in advance. And, he suggested that a boarding home be built to accommodate out-of-town students who would pay tuition and supply a regular source of income. The guaranteed fund never appeared nor was Mrs. Johnson ever to be relieved from the "worries and anxieties" of fund-raising, but a boarding home was finally built in 1921. And, just as Dewey predicted, the boarding department did supply a reliable source of income throughout the Johnson years.

But it was Dewey's summation of the school in the second part of the endorsement featured in the Courier that must have sent Marietta Johnson's spirits soaring:

In my judgement the school has demonstrated that it is possible for children to lead the same natural lives in school that they lead in homes of the right sort outside of school; to progress bodily, mentally, and morally in school without factitious pressure, rewards, examinations, grades or promotions while they acquire sufficient control of the conventional tools of learning and of the study of books--reading, writing, and figuring--to be able to use them independently.
And appended to that very agreeable pronouncement, which also concludes the chapter about the Organic School in *Schools of Tomorrow*, was the statement that "The demonstration is all the more striking because of the odds against which Mrs. Johnson has labored and because of the simplicity of the means by which the results have been attained." As the founder and administrator of his own, but now defunct, elementary school, Dewey could well appreciate the odds against which Mrs. Johnson had struggled.

Dewey spent a great deal of his time in the shop and said of it that "It is good. On the whole, it is the best I have ever seen. . . . Here, the technique is good and the children are free" (*Thirty Years* 40). Naturally, Dewey was especially interested in the manual training classes which, like his own "occupations," were not looked upon as vocational preparation but rather as providing a useful context for the study of reading, writing, history, arithmetic and so forth. Also, Dewey and Johnson both emphasized the social rather than the utilitarian value of occupational activities which promoted fraternization among the students.

Johnson was no less enthusiastic about the shop than Dewey. It was her pride and joy. Manual training also included the arts and crafts department at the Organic
School. That this department was one of the most important places on the campus is seen in the following:

Our shop is the largest, most attractive building on the grounds. Here are three large rooms: one for work in clay— one for weaving, metal working, color, and leather— and a still larger one for wood-working. All are very light, airy and comfortable and every child in the elementary school spends two periods daily in the shop. *(Thirty Years 89).*

The hypothesis that lay behind the Dewey and Johnson enthusiasm for shop work, like most of their hypotheses, had to do with connections and relationships. In this case, they theorized that experiences with familiar and commonplace tools provided a basis for moving into the unknown and more abstract areas of learning; they also promoted cooperation among students and forged a link to the larger working community. Like Dewey, Johnson was unequivocal in her support of the shop as a learning tool: "Many a trifling, indifferent student has made remarkable strides in concentration, seriousness, and devotion to school work through power developed here" *(Thirty Years 105).* A long list of alumni who took up and excelled in fields of mechanics, engineering and craft work tends to justify her enthusiasm.

All in all, the Dewey visit was a great coup for Marietta Johnson. The school was the first of many that John and Evelyn Dewey finally documented in *Schools of Tomorrow*, the book which Lawrence Cremin endorses as an "eloquent and invaluable" record of progressive education.
"Nowhere," says Cremin, "is the faith and optimism of the progressive movement more dramatically conveyed" (153). The Dewey visit to Fairhope took place in December of 1913, and Schools was published in early 1915, just over a year later.

But the great man's visit was much more than an invaluable and eloquent record to the founder of the Organic School. A three day visit by the elder statesman of American philosophy and education became a Midas touch that turned to gold for Marietta Johnson. It brought lecture invitations, boarding students, teachers and funds to a school administered by a woman engaged in a relatively unsung experiment in an out-of-the-way corner of the world. The Dewey voice was authoritative and the Deweys' unqualified praise of a relatively eccentric venture gave the school and its founder a prestige and stature that resulted in a flow of funds for many years to come. Mrs. Johnson may never have been relieved of financial worries and the need to raise her own funds as Dewey had hoped, but thanks to both Deweys, her burden was considerably lightened.

The Curriculum Canvas

The curriculum of the Organic School was no more than a skeletal framework for the fluid forms which flowed over and enveloped it, moving in concert with the rhythms of the school. Though metaphors have their limitations, the
curriculum may be compared with an impressionist's canvas which, on the surface, appears to represent nothing more than random splotches. Yet, when one squints the eyes, an underlying order, more organic than external, appears. If she had drawn upon real canvasses rather than children, Marietta Johnson might have been an impressionist. As an administrator, she did not micro-manage the affairs of her school. She touched her pedagogical canvas lightly and with large brush strokes, leaving the details to be filled in by students and teachers within the textuality of their classroom experiences.

Had John and Evelyn Dewey accomplished nothing else in *Schools of Tomorrow*, they have provided one of the most descriptive documentations of the Organic School curriculum to be found and one of the few records extant. As might be expected in a school where grades, marks and records of accomplishment were looked upon with distaste, there is little documentation regarding which courses were taught at any particular time and none at all of the elementary classes.\(^\text{94}\) Then, too, there was a general

\(^{94}\) At the time this research was done, there were three record books containing handwritten information including names of students, courses taken, books read and brief comments on students' progress. Typical of such comments are "good student, splendid spirit and initiative, poor in application, fair ability, inclined to be negative, poor in math," and so forth. The three record books cover the years from 1917 to 1923, 1923 to 1936 and 1936 to 1945. All three cover only high school students and curriculum and occasionally included the junior high. In light of the Johnson philosophy, the
antipathy to records among liberal progressives owing to their high regard for an experimental and more spontaneous approach to curriculum making (Rugg and Shumaker 75).

Nevertheless, using the Deweys' book and Johnson's own account as well as various publications and student anecdotes, it is possible to piece together a general overview of the curriculum though it is one that withstood some revision from year to year.95

The school day at Organic began with an assembly attended by the whole school with Mrs. Johnson presiding when she was in town.96 Most students remember the assembly well as a very special moment in their school day and particularly when their dynamic leader was present. First in the order of assembly business, the Pledge of junior high. In light of the Johnson philosophy, the records were probably kept only to satisfy college entrance requirements. If there are other records extant, they have either been lost or destroyed in a fire that took one of the early structures that housed the library.

95 The information here was gathered from several sources including Thirty Years With an Idea, Schools of Tomorrow, an undated pamphlet (ca. 1915) by S. H. Comings included in the Marietta Johnson Scrapbook and entitled "Daily Program of the School of Organic Education Fairhope, Alabama" and a Journal of Education article reprinted in the Courier in January of 1911. The curriculum in any one year was always subject to the availability of financing and teachers. Both the curriculum and the ages represented in the Life Classes changed from year to year especially as the school grew and expanded in the early years. The description here is more representative of the later years.

96 The assemblies may have been daily or once a week on Friday. Student recollections differ.
Allegiance was said and a non-denominational prayer, more pantheistic than pious, was repeated:

   Give me thy harmony Lord that I may understand the beauty of the sky, the rhythm of soft wind's lullaby, the sun and the shadow of the woods in early spring and Thy great love that dwells in everything. (Interview, Frances Perkins West, Apr. 1994)

Without any prompting, many of the alumni will offer to repeat the prayer word for word from memory. Next, schedules and school business were taken up and announcements made. Helene Beiser Hunter remembers that on Fridays--with the advent of radio broadcasting--the assembly listened to Dan-rosch music appreciation concerts on the radio and "that's the way we were introduced to this classical music, symphonies and the operas."97

Classes were divided up among several buildings dotted around the campus--there were eventually ten of them. The ten acre campus was adjacent to the business district of Fairhope but boasted wooded areas for nature walks and tree climbing as well as large open spaces for gymnastic equipment and playing fields. A devout single taxer, Mrs. Johnson encouraged cooperation rather than competition in her school. Nevertheless, by the mid-twenties high school

---

97 Comments here are from a personal interview with Helene Beiser Hunter (7 Apr. 1994). The Courier notes the first Dan-rosch concerts in October of 1930, announcing that "The new radio functioned perfectly and the reception was excellent" (30 Oct. 1930). Mrs. Hunter is one of five children whose father moved the family and his business to Fairhope so that the children could attend the Organic School.
football, baseball and basketball teams competed with surrounding schools. And there is no evidence that Johnson discouraged team sports but *Courier* coverage indicates that the Organic philosophy stressed good fun, good sportsmanship, teamwork, and, of course "doing one's best."

The kindergarten was housed in a separate building. Children were enrolled in the kindergarten as early as age four and remained there until age six. There were even stories of some children attending as toddlers. Kindergarten at the Organic School was not unlike present day kindergartens. Children worked in clay, water-colors and weaving. They sang, danced and played musical games. They engaged in gardening, gymnastics, stone-throwing and other games which would develop the larger muscles just as Oppenheim advocated. Students especially remember the large building blocks, the swings, slides, tree climbing and playing in the indoor sandpile. In later years a wading pool was added at the rear of the kindergarten building. Students recall those days with great pleasure as many as 80 years later. Anna Coleman Myers, Frank Laraway and many others especially recall the "Froebel Blocks" with which they could build several houses in the

---

98 Paul Gaston, for example, claims he enrolled himself at three (Interview 29 Aug. 1993) and Harriet Hedden Yeager believes that she attended when only eight months old because her four brothers and sisters were all there (Interview 21 May 1917).
large playroom. Claire Totten Gray remembers that whatever was read to them, they dramatized it: "We always, even in kindergarten were putting on 'The Three Little Pigs' or whatever [we were reading]."

As students progressed from kindergarten through their Life classes, the departure from conventional schooling became increasingly more pronounced. Kindergarten, the "children's garden," never quite ended in utopia. The First Life class, as it was called, usually included children from six to eight although in the early years the age range was greater due to the fact that there were fewer students and teachers. Reading was not taught, and all work, like that in kindergarten, was self-initiated and often spontaneous. If the fire engine happened by or if a snake was observed under the schoolhouse, lesson plans were set aside while the children followed their immediate interests: "The teacher has a program, but she is not obliged to follow it. The whole morning may be spent in the gully, at the bay or in the woods without a guilty conscience!" (Johnson, Thirty Years 64). One visitor, F. W. Fitzpatrick by name, wrote of Mrs. Johnson's school:

---

99 Claire Totten Gray's family had come to Fairhope in 1919 because of the Organic School and the single tax principles espoused there. All five Totten children graduated from the Organic School (Interview 30 Dec. 1993).
The youngsters take a notion they like to see a locomotive so down to the tracks they go. They go. They study the engine, take it all in, have it explained to them, go back to the class, draw it, paint it, model it in clay, build it out of wood, and tin until they know the engine thoroughly. A while ago I saw a steam scoop shovel made by three year olds that actually worked, pulleys, turn table and all.100

Children used saws, nails and rulers to build objects from wood. Dewey had been quite impressed with the physical control of the Fairhope pupils, most evident in the carpentry shop where even the youngest children handled full-sized tools, hammers, saws, and planes. He thought it "an instructive sight to see a child of seven, too small to work the pedal, holding his piece of wood, turning and shaping it in the saw without hurting himself" (Schools 39).

Each First Life child had his/her own vegetable garden just as did every group from kindergarten through the normal training class. All students were free to choose which vegetables they would plant. They cared for their own gardens and often cooked their produce in the school. Eleanor Coutant Nichols remembers how thrilled she was when her carrots were chosen for making creamed carrots one day.101 Stories were read to the children

100 Fitzpatrick's observations are from an undated newspaper article found in Marietta Johnson's personal scrapbook located in the present Organic School.

101 The remarks were taken from an interview conducted with Eleanor Coutant Nichols and her daughter Arden Flagg (30 Sept. 1990). The gardening idea was
which they illustrated in their sandbox or with clay and crayons or by dramatization. Poems, fairy tales, folklore, myths and the great stories of history were favorites. Children were exposed to languages, such as Spanish, German and French, through conversation rather than direct instruction. A large part of their time was devoted to nature walks, perhaps visiting a neighboring pond to observe the development of tadpoles into frogs, walking in the woods to identify trees and wild flowers and watch the birds build nests or, again, visiting a nearby gully to study geological formations. There was plenty of creative activity using simple materials such as clay, paper, crayons, water colors and pencils to illustrate stories and poems. Fussy detail and intricate work was discouraged by using large sheets of paper, large paint brushes and vivid colors.

The above was, of course, in accord with Oppenheim's dictum that the large muscles were first to develop while the wrists and the eyes were not yet fully developed for detailed or close work before the age of ten. Also, in accord with Oppenheim, reading was not taught, although children frequently learned to read on their own without sweeping the country as schools were urged to abandon their screwed-down desks for active learning in shops, fields and gardens. Lawrence Cremin writes that by 1906, "thousands of boys and girls the country over were tending gardens, raising chickens, collecting insects, wild flowers and cooking, canning and baking all under the sponsorship of the local school authorities" (79).
any prompting or, indeed, any encouragement. Work with abstract numbers was also delayed until the same age though the fundamental concept of numbers was gained quite early with the younger children as they weighed, counted and measured familiar physical objects. They might use a rule to measure objects in manual training or a line to measure the length of the schoolyard or bundle and count sticks, but measuring and counting was always confined to concrete objects. The use of abstractions at too early an age was believed by Johnson to produce an absolute "barrier to the mind in gaining number conceptions" [emphasis added] (Twenty Years 61). Moreover, through starting with the concrete objects and working up to the abstract symbols, it was believed that the relationship between the two could be conceptualized: "The quarter of an apple is a fact to [children] not an abstraction. Quarter five apples and take half of one quarter away and [the children] will very quickly tell you how many eighths of apple you have left" (D. Edwards, New York Times). Experience came first, multiplication tables next. The idea of having children conceptualize rather than copy, memorize, repeat and recite was a direct contrast to the rote-learning procedures then predominating in traditional schools. Traditional means of education had seen the child as a passive receptor of knowledge rather than a thoughtful, purposeful inquirer and discoverer.
By Second Life, or age 9-11, abstract numbers replaced work with concrete objects and reading was introduced. Abstract arithmetic concepts could now be gained through the usual mechanical operations such as addition, multiplication, and so forth, but reasoning problems and those requiring analysis were further postponed until Third Life. Singing, folk dancing, outdoor gymnastics, creative work, drama and manual training were continued along the same lines as First Life, and outdoor classes remained a prominent part of life in the Organic School through high school. Outdoor real-life "laboratory" experiences continued to be favored over book-learning in geography and biology: "To carry a large, twisting squirming snake around one's neck, with its tongue lapping one's face, is an experience developing courage and self control" (Thirty Years 67). Mrs. Johnson muses upon the "never-exhausted attraction" of the bay and the many happy hours spent by this age group dramatizing the Greek myths and poetry such as the Iliad and the Odyssey in a neighboring gully (Twenty Years 63). The dramatization of plays and stories was a great source of pleasure for students from kindergarten through high school and the dramatizations were regularly reported in the pages of the Courier in a special Organic School column named "Organic School Notes."
Lillian Rifkin Blumenfeld taught at the Organic School in the early 1920's and writes of building tepees on the beach at Mobile Bay which her students then might occupy for a week. She writes of making beads from chinaberry seeds and dishes out of clay from the gully banks and of carving out small canoes from the bark of trees and sailing them in the bay (3). Field geography, story-telling and map drawing were used as means of gaining abstract number concepts. By this age, Mrs. Johnson believed that children were just as eager to explore books as they once were to explore things and, hence, could teach themselves (note the emphasis on children's teaching themselves, not being taught) to read very quickly. And Blumenfeld confirms that children did indeed learn to read in only one week what younger students might have struggled with for months. She also wrote that students learned time-tables easily simply by hanging a chart over their bed (Blumenfeld 3). Reading was never taught as a subject at any age but was always acquired through exploring other subjects. It might be acquired as a by-product of study about the French and Indian War, the Fall of Troy or the building of the Panama Canal. Learning to read took place so naturally that most Organic students do not recall learning to read at all.

Dewey and Johnson were alike in believing that reading as a subject by itself was a dry, isolated
exercise. In order to have meaning to the child, reading should relate to something of interest to the child. It should be the means of acquiring a much desired object (Dewey, *Schools* 22). Dorothy Beiser Cain remembers her concern about two brothers already in Third Life who refused to learn to read. No need to worry, assured Mrs. Johnson, apply no pressure and let their own interest in science solve the problem. And that was indeed the case (Interview 11-12 May 1993).

In the Third Life were found pupils from 12 to 13 corresponding to junior high or the present middle school. Studies in history, geography and science continued at a more advanced level and languages were learned when a language teacher was available. Several students recollected a Señora Morgan, who taught songs and games and how to count in Third Life Spanish. Learning about Columbus and the discovery of America was made memorable for Ethel Davis Winberg when her whole class rowed up to Fly Creek in three rowboats christened the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria and finished the trip off by making a kettle of Indian stew (Interview Feb. 1989). The place of creative work, manual training, singing and folk dancing was just as prominent for this age as it had been in kindergarten. Dramatizations were a seemingly inexhaustible source of activity and pleasure for students. Hector Sutherland provides a particularly vivid
description of one such play and the type of learning experiences that were evolved mostly through student initiative. Here is his story:

I think the most interesting projects we were involved in--we were studying something of European and English History. We decided that we were going to produce a play centered on the life of Robin Hood. Of course, this was a story that Mary Chase [teacher] read to us in some detail. What we were going to do--we made our own costumes and Mrs. Bottstein [teacher in charge of music] said, "Why don't we make a little bit of a musical out of this?" So we worked to see what kind of songs would be appropriate . . . who were the singers in the class . . . . We were going to put on this play in Comings Hall but somebody said, "Why don't we put it on outside of the Dahlgren Building . . . . Here was Sherwood Forest right on the campus. . . . Fran Albers had a big brown horse and somebody said, "Well, Fran should be King Richard." It was fun to put together Robin Hood and people seemed to appreciate the effort. It was quite a learning experience and we learned quite a good deal about English history, and, at the same time, about literature, something about how a play was put together, how you'd use music in a production, somewhat of the discipline of acting and to be able to make the costumes and get the set that you wanted. (Interview 2 Mar. 1992)

Hector's story showcases organic education at work. Here were young people pursuing their own interests, creating and implementing their own ideas. And here one catches a glimpse of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a leader, a subject which will be discussed at greater length later. One also gets some sense of the freedom with which students were allowed to initiate their own activities at the Organic School up to and including a live horse on campus.
In Marietta Johnson's high school more serious attention was given to traditional subjects though she would have perhaps chosen otherwise. Johnson insisted that education was itself life and growth, not just preparation for something to take place in the distant future. And college should be no exception.\textsuperscript{102} In any case, within the Johnson-Dewey concept of fluid progress, there was no way of knowing exactly what was on the horizon and therefore no way to prepare for it. One could only suggest approaches and orientations, never final goals. Johnson believed that the only question that should be asked of any prospective student at any level, up to and including college, should be "What do you want—what do you need?" (Thirty Years 107). College education, like all education, should serve the needs of each individual student and every student who was eighteen years or older who desired to enter college and had spent time in some profitable intellectual work should be accepted.

Nevertheless, since she did believe a college education was desirable and it was not within her power to alter college requirements, Marietta Johnson tailored her high school curriculum to prepare students for entrance examinations while taking solace in the fact that a

\textsuperscript{102} For Dewey's view, see especially Democracy and Education (54-7).
handful of colleges would accept Organic students without them. One college president who did so found Organic students "noticeable for their keenness of interests, sincerity and loyalty," adding that few students were "able to use their native endowment to such high advantage" (New York Times 27 Mar. 1932). From the first, Johnson had cherished plans to include a college unit in her already ambitious educational undertaking but her plans never reached fruition (Courier 6 July 1923; 5 June 1930; The New Republic, "To Redeem the High School" 168-9). High school students took four years of advanced mathematics, English, science and history or social studies. Again, when possible, languages were part of the curriculum. Though Claude Arnold remembers "complaining bitterly" for two years when he had to take Latin, he

103 In a 1920 address before the Progressive Education Association in Washington, D. C., Johnson named the University of Minnesota, the University of Alabama, the State Technical School of Alabama and several others who were accepting Organic students without examinations and others who were considering doing so ("The School and the Child" July 1920). In 1925, The New Republic carried an article titled "To Redeem the High School," which claimed that "Former pupils of the Fairhope School are now represented in the student body of eighteen colleges and universities, and none of them has failed in his work" (168-9). Similarly, in 1932, the New York Times reported that 25 colleges and universities were accepting graduates "without reference to the amount of knowledge they have amassed" (27 Mar. 1932).

104 The compliment was paid by President Morgan of Antioch College in Antioch, Ohio. Morgan also wrote Johnson that if she had "any more material like them, send them along" (Courier 2 Feb. 1928).
found the exercise quite useful later when his Latin background enabled him to pick up Spanish in only a few days when he was located in Panama (Interview 5 Jan. 1992).

The texts and authors used at the Organic School were similar to those used in traditional schools. Walter Hedden recollects that they did not get into calculus but they had algebra, two geometries and trigonometry. Out-of-doors activities and classes continued wherever possible. And Walter tells of field trip trigonometry where they "went down to the Bay with a surveyor's transit and measured the length of the pier and triangulated and calculated the distances to various [points]." And business math also kept students in touch with practical applications. Furthermore, even in high school, Johnson did not capitulate to the system with respect to evaluations, measurements or testing. She did, however, compromise with respect to keeping a record of subjects

105 Walter Hedden's comments here are part of videotaped interviews with five of the eight brothers and sisters who attended Organic through the 1920's and early 1930's: Lyman George Hedden, Olivet Hedden Stimpson, Harriet Hedden Yeager, Gladys Hedden Hays and Walter (Mar. 1989). Walter graduated in 1932. His experience at Organic led to a degree in ceramic engineering and a 26 year career of research in that field. A ceramics kiln was first purchased in 1924 and was responsible for a fire that destroyed the Arts and Crafts building in January of 1925. A new fireproof arts and crafts building was built on the Organic campus and the kiln re-installed in it in October of 1925 (Courier 19 Dec. 1924, 16 Jan. 1925, 23 Oct. 1925).
taken and texts used by each individual student in high school, also including a cursory comment or two on each student's achievement, whether it was "good," "fair" or "poor" and so on. This was undoubtedly a concession to colleges which required student records.

In spite of a greater emphasis on getting down to basics, high school in utopia was quite unlike its more traditional equivalent elsewhere. In the high school, as in the lower school, there was no passing and no failing. There were examinations, but with books open. Former students have many vivid memories of high school that they love to share. Helene Beiser Hunter tells of Sunday morning breakfasts given by the language teacher where nothing was spoken but French (Interview 30 Dec. 1991). She also recalls her history class where a teacher, Bill Edwards, "had these great big sheets of paper on a stand and when he would give you a history lesson, each sheet would be turned over and those bright, beautiful maps--and we all helped make them. . . . I can still see those great big colorful maps." One story that students never tire of repeating, chuckling over and amplifying, concerns the building of a two-masted schooner. The thirty-foot schooner, christened the Osprey, was constructed in the manual training shop. In order to remove it, the walls of the building had to be torn out and replaced. Once the boat was finally launched, it became a tradition for
junior and senior classes to have overnight jaunts on the schooner, and the _Courier_ takes note of many happy outings had by students boating around Mobile Bay on the Osprey.\(^{106}\) Besides building boats, gliders and model airplanes, some of the campus classrooms, including Comings Hall, were constructed with the help of students. The _Scientific American Supplement_ published a picture of one such building project with a half-dozen young men on the roof and a young woman in ankle-length petticoats delivering supplies on a ladder (Gruenberg 14 Nov. 1914). On one occasion, car parts from wrecked cars were gathered in the village and evolved into "a rather respectable car named the Rolls-Rejoice!" (Thirty Years 90; _Courier_ 18 Mar. 1926).

Some talented mechanics and engineers got their start at the Organic School and Claude Arnold was one of the engineers. He claims that he not only learned mechanics at the school, but because of a well-equipped chemistry and physics lab, he learned more about chemistry and

\(^{106}\) Walter Hedden was one of the students who worked on building the schooner and his videotaped remarks are quoted here (Mar. 1989). The _Courier_ takes note of the first cruise of the Osprey in August of 1926 (5 Aug. 1926). The construction of so large a vessel required great skill and dedication on the part of students and Edwards. An awed and wondering Fairhope visitor had asked "What visions of the summer had held its builders through hours of difficult, detailed work while the keel was welded and ready for the superstructure" (_Courier_ 18 Mar. 1926). The schooner is seaworthy still, having been sighted in recent years in Lake Pontchartrain (_Courier_ 31 Jan. 1980)
physics at Organic than he did at the University of Alabama.\textsuperscript{107}

Arts and crafts was just as popular as manual training at the school and turned out its own share of local crafts people and noted professionals including ceramists, potters, wood and metalworkers. High school students commonly fired greenware in their own kiln, made their own class rings and eventually printed their own annual, the \textit{Cinagro}, on their own printing press.\textsuperscript{108} At various times, they also learned caning, tie-dying, basket weaving and once even had their own millinery department (\textit{Courier} 27 Jan. 1922). A surprisingly well-crafted assortment of furniture, pottery and jewelry items made by alumni of the Organic School are displayed at the Marietta Johnson Museum at Fairhope.

\textsuperscript{107} Claude was one the eight Arnold children who attended Organic all of whom graduated with the exception of one sister who quit school to join the war effort during World War II. Interviews with five of the brothers and sisters have been quoted in this text: Mary Emma Arnold Kreek, Grace Arnold King, Jacquelin Arnold McKean, Elsie Arnold Butgereit and Claude. Claude graduated from Organic in 1936, and received a degree in civil engineering from the University of Alabama. He has 14 children of his own, eight of whom have also attended Organic (Interview 5 Jan. 1992).

\textsuperscript{108} The kiln was first purchased in 1924 but was believed to be the culprit which caused a fire that destroyed the arts and crafts building in January of 1925. A new building was constructed and a new kiln purchased in 1925. The \textit{Cinagro} was first published in 1922 and continued with some interruption until 1961. It appears to have been published on the school's own printing press beginning in the 1928-1929 year and probably for several years thereafter.
Harold (Hal) Riegger is one of the most respected and well-known of the Organic Alumni in the field of ceramics and pottery. He entered the school in his second year of junior high as a boarding student from the east. Riegger's attitude and activities might have raised some serious eyebrows on any campus other than Organic. He found horseback riding, swimming in the bay, and exploring the southern woods more to his taste than attending school for his first two weeks with no apparent objections from the school. He was surprised not to have been caught and reprimanded but later came to the conclusion that he was being tested on the matter of self-discipline. After two weeks of truancy he found he was the only one not in school so he decided to find out what he was missing. He claims never to have missed school again. Riegger discovered early that "It's one thing that typifies what the Organic School stands for--our own initiative."

Later on, his penchant for self-expression took a more dangerous trend. He tells this tale of his junior year:

I became fascinated with fire . . . and would build little [kilns] out of bricks or . . . boxes or something just to build a fire and to watch the flames go up . . . and this went on all year. Some of them worked and some of them didn't but apparently it was perfectly all right . . . and I learned a lot and to the point that now, as a professional potter and teacher, there is no kiln or situation with ceramics involving fire but what I can understand it and cope with
it very well and it goes back to that year of experiment--being allowed to play with fire.\textsuperscript{109}

What Riegger called self-discipline was what some critics of ultra-liberal schooling may have called a dangerous and shocking surrender of adult authority, a less literal kind of "playing with fire." This was precisely the sort of undisciplined behavior that led to conservatives' anxiety about chaos and anarchy. And it was the reason why child-centered schools became the subject of vitriolic attacks by their contemporaries and the butt of jokes in later generations. In utopia, however, such seemingly bizarre antics were referred to as "learning by doing," and "meeting the needs of the unfolding organism." And, in one instance at least, "learning by doing" yielded at least one gifted professional. Judging from the above and other stories told by alumni, discipline was an almost non-existent feature of the school at utopia. Yet somehow anarchy was avoided and learning actually took place.

\textsuperscript{109} The narrative here was told by Hal Riegger to Dorothy Beiser Cain in a videotaped interview with Riegger (6 May 1992). Riegger graduated from the Organic School in 1931. He graduated \textit{cum laude} from the New York State College of Ceramics and went on to receive his Masters degree at Ohio State University. Riegger is now a well-known potter, sculptor and teacher whose work is represented in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum. He has been the recipient of many awards including one from The Museum of Modern Art (New York). Riegger has also taught and held workshops at many of the major institutions and colleges dedicated to his field and often works with the clays indigenous to the region where he is working (\textit{Ceramics Monthly} Sept. 1962).
Joe Johnston was another beneficiary of what some may have considered a lax approach to the serious business of education. After finishing eighth grade in California, Joe left home to find his fortune. Some time early in the thirties, at the depth of the depression, he found himself in Fairhope where his father was teaching shop at the Organic School. After some persuasion by his father and upon learning that he could skip the ninth, tenth and half of the eleventh grade altogether and enter the Organic School with his own age group, Joe went back to school. Fortunately for Joe, Mrs. Johnson was just as blasé about the value of accumulated knowledge as she was about the other formalities of education such as grades, tests and passing: "If a child of fourteen or fifteen has the social development and mental grasp of that age, he can do the work in the high school even if he has "failed" in every subject of the eighth grade!" (Thirty Years 91). Joe graduated from the school in 1935, having found his attitude toward school completely changed: "That system just worked. . . . School was the last thing I wanted to be associated with until I got into that school and education became a major factor for me." He even returned for six months to get more math. He went on to college and earned a master's degree in technical theatre at the University of Iowa, taught at Louisiana Tech for 19 years and wound up his career as a scenic artist for ABC.
television. Latent abilities were stirred to life when he came to the Organic School, and Joseph affectionately acknowledges a debt to Johnson and a "school system that worked" at least for him:

Well, I guess I wasn't real dumb because I studied and worked hard, you know, I studied and got along all right and developed an interest in learning something. Now that's what Marietta did. That's the type of thing she did. She would get people interested in learning. (Interview 27 Apr. 1994)

There were other Joseph Johnstons and Hal Rieggers at Organic where the hands-on curriculum and lack of structure seemed especially designed for boys who might otherwise have fallen through the cracks of the educational system. Another such young man was Kenneth Cain, whom Mrs. Johnson took under her wing in 1921 when he was 12 years old. Kenneth's mother was already in a sanitarium with tuberculosis when his father died in 1920 (Courier 30 Apr. 1920). Kenneth had been accused of theft and had become so troublesome that plans had been made to send him to a boys' reformatory. At that point Marietta Johnson intervened and demanded to be made his guardian against the advice of the city fathers who insisted that he was headed for trouble. But Mrs. Johnson prevailed, reminding them that there were no bad children, just bad environments. So Kenneth moved into the school home and became Johnson's foster son. At the Organic School, Kenneth found he had an ability for carpentry and the building crafts and he also became one of the school's
most proficient folk dancers. He married another Organic School student, Dorothy Beiser Cain, and in later years founded the See Coast Manufacturing Company in Fairhope which manufactures telescope viewers now used all over the world in public parks and atop skyscrapers. Kenneth and Dorothy Cain devoted recent years to the restoration of two original Organic campus buildings and the founding of the Marietta Johnson Museum.\textsuperscript{110}

The Artists

As one might imagine, teaching was more art than science at the Organic School. Nominally, Mrs. Johnson made only three requisites of teachers: they must love and understand children, be sufficiently scholarly, and be interested in matters of social welfare (\textit{Thirty Years} 123). Dorothy Beiser Cain remembers that she "would fix those brown eyes on you and look straight through you and she'd say, 'Do you love all children?' . . . and you'd better love them or you didn't stay long. They were really dedicated, dedicated teachers" (Interview 11-12 May 1993). Johnson did not often refer to degrees and lesson plans or suggest how teachers should arrange their

\textsuperscript{110} The facts of Kenneth’s life were given in an interview with his wife, Dorothy Beiser Cain (11-12 May 1993). Kenneth attended the University of Alabama for two years and taught at Johnson’s Port Washington school, the Edgewood School and the Fairhope School. Kenneth Cain passed away in 1991, remembered by all as a solid citizen of the community. Dorothy Beiser Cain still actively directs the work of the Marietta Johnson Museum.
schedules, but she usually spoke of the qualities she expected teachers to possess. Her teacher training course, her personal charisma and her own commitment enabled her teachers to assimilate the spirit of her philosophy while she allowed them a great deal of latitude in working out the letter. She was as generous with her teachers in the matter of classroom management as they were with their students.

The Johnson rhetoric reveals another, and somewhat puzzling, qualification demanded of the Organic School teacher. Puzzling, at least, in the light of Johnson’s commitment to self-expression. A teacher in the Organic School was a veritable paragon of selflessness who ministered to the child’s self-concern. In a letter to the editor of the Courier early in her Fairhope career Johnson wrote as follows:

The teacher’s work will be more passive and following, than active and leading, but the child will be as surely guided as though dominated, and still be left free enough for the highest and best development of the will--the individuality. (20 Aug. 1909)

It was the teacher’s job to meet the needs of the student "even to the point of self-effacement" while "teachers of strong personalities and great enthusiasm may do the greatest harm" (Thirty Years 4). Pronouncements such as the above in her books and other publications gave Johnson her well-deserved reputation as among the most radical of child-centered radicals. They also provided fuel for
those critics who read her writings but who had never set foot in her school thus missing part of the story.

Nevertheless, the Johnson model was recognizable in most child-centered schools where a teacher was commonly relegated to the background, a silent, vigilant partner who guided but never interfered. The following passage from Rugg and Shumaker's *The Child-Centered School* captures, in all of its superbly historical significance, the role of a child-centered teacher:

The artist-teacher is a listening teacher. The artisan rarely listens; she talks constantly. An exhibitionist on a platform in the front of the room, she is very much in evidence. She speaks; what she says goes; she organizes the thinking; she impresses her individuality and her ideas on the pupils. Domineering, authoritative, demanding her place in the schoolroom sun; every desk must converge toward her place at the front. The new teacher, however, is self-effacing, quietly observant, an unassuming subtle influence in the background. (321)

The child-centered teacher was expected to intuit what the child wanted to do yet never interfere by telling him/her how to do it. She must be a mediator, able to put herself in the position of the child in order to comprehend the needs of each unfolding organism, yet have the wisdom, experience and knowledge to adapt the child's interests to a legitimate human goal. She must have the vision to guide each one successfully, yet always unobtrusively, down his or her own unique path to fulfillment. Such a teacher must possess an extraordinary
combination of the artist's soul, the social scientist's mind and the clairvoyant's vision. As Cremin writes:

Progressivism cast the teacher in an almost impossible role: he was to be an artist of consummate skill, properly knowledgeable in his field, meticulously trained in the science of pedagogy, and thoroughly imbued with a burning zeal for social improvement. It need hardly be said that here, as elsewhere on the pedagogical scene of the nineties, the gap between real and ideal was appalling. (168)

Advocates of liberal education truly believed that by freeing the child, they had also freed the teacher. They congratulated themselves on this teacher whom they believed to be an improved version of the old nineteenth century school marm: the "blind, helpless cog in the great machine of enforced mass education" (Rugg and Shumaker 323). How fine it all seemed, how democratic it sounded to announce that the teacher in a child-centered school was as liberated from restraints and oppression as the children she taught! Johnson could have spoken for all child-centered schools when she wrote ingenuously:

The teacher must also feel free from external pressure. Personality, poise, resourcefulness and power—the qualities most essential to the good teacher—are often thwarted, stultified, throttled, prevented from developing by the harrowing, nerve-racking external pressure of the demands of the "system." (Thirty Years 70)

For some skeptics, however, liberated teachers were not necessarily the concomitant of liberated children. After his visit to the Organic School, the Supervisor of Rural Schools in Alabama expressed reservations about a
school where so much faith was invested in 1) the teacher's faculty for keeping in the background while putting the student in the foreground, and 2) teaching self-control by allowing [children] a maximum of self government (Courier 11 Sept. 1914).

If the child-centered teacher was no longer merely a cog in the wheel of a system which she served, a new and more subtle oppression was rearing its unpleasant head. The same teacher who had once wielded almost tyrannical control over more or less passive students was now finding her role reversed. The children, at least as some traditionalists saw it, were now the tyrants in control of the classroom while the teacher lurked powerlessly on the sidelines. Even other liberals were critical, namely the social reconstructionists who saw the role of teachers as that of strong agents for social change, rather than silent witnesses to the child's transcendence. Reconstructionists worried that without strong direction from a teacher, pupils would become pawns in the hands of the existing social system.

Finally, in recent history, feminist theorists have blasted any remaining doubts about the progressive female teacher's status. She was not only less than liberated, they argue, but her passivity was just another patriarchal strategy for keeping the self-sacrificing, self-effacing
mother, the "angel of mercy," in the house. Feminist Valerie Walkerdine, for example, has this to say:

Women teachers became caught, trapped inside a concept of nurturance which held them responsible for the freeing of each little individual, and therefore for the management of an idealist dream, an impossible fiction.

And who bears the cost of keeping such an impossible dream from becoming a fiction, she asks?

I suggest that the cost is borne by the teacher, like the mother. She is passive to the child’s active, she works to his play. She is the servant of the omnipotent child, whose needs she must meet at all times. . . . The servicing labour of women makes the child, the natural child, possible. (Walkderdine 19, 24)

In other words, women who once had been powerless servants of the system were still powerless, but now they served the self-interest of the child. Still, as brought out in an earlier chapter, some believe it was precisely that willingness to accept the role of human caretaker which gave women the power that they did wield in the progressive era since to do otherwise would have challenged male prerogatives and thus generated conflict.

While impossible fictions had a way of merging with reality at the Organic School, the truth is that women in the Organic School often did find their role difficult though there is no evidence that they analyzed it as a feminist issue. Progressive era educators were well aware of Freud, Jung and even Thorndike, and teachers were finding psychology among their normal school requirements,
but self-analysis was not yet in vogue except in the more avant garde eastern schools. Helen Porter Dyson, a student and later a teacher at the Organic School, and one of the few remaining teachers from Mrs. Johnson's era, found that, under the circumstances, analyzing one's self was a useless exercise anyhow: "We never had time to worry too much about it. Things had to be done and you'd better do them whether you wanted to or not." Yet she acknowledges that it was not easy to be an organic teacher (Interview 22 Feb. 1994). And Hazele Payne, as quoted earlier, even found teaching at the Organic School "darn hard sometimes." Elsie Butgereit, a student during Mrs. Johnson's tenure, is presently teaching at the Organic School in Fairhope. She also concedes that it was never easy to be an organic teacher and at present, it is "almost impossible to teach in the manner that Marietta Johnson wished her teachers to teach" (Interview, 21 Apr. 1994).

Even in utopia one finds that expectation often exceeded realization and there is some evidence of an uneven and transient faculty in a school which constantly teetered on the brink of financial collapse. While students do not recall discontinuities in the faculty and claim that the quality of teaching was consistent, teacher rosters published regularly by the Courier suggest that faculty changes were frequent and numerous. Nevertheless
there were a number of outstanding teachers who remained in Fairhope over a period of years and some of them were relatively permanent.

Several individuals whose names were later associated with other well-known progressive schools taught at the Organic School. Lillian Rifkin Blumenfeld, claims that Mrs. Johnson "expressed everything I had ever felt about the education of the child" (*Consider the Child* 2). Blumenfeld also taught at the Walden School and later at the Modern School, a libertarian school in Stelton, New Jersey. Paul Avrich writes that Lillian Rifkin and Sherwood Trask, who also taught at Fairhope, were two of the ablest teachers connected with Ferrer's Modern School (*The Modern School Movement* 56-7). Trask's fields were history and literature but, a devotee of sports, he also coached. He was a graduate of Dartmouth and, like Blumenfeld, later taught at Margaret Naumburg's Walden School and later at A. S. Neill's International School at Helleraue near Dresden (*Courier* 4 Nov. 1921). Grace Rotzel, who taught English and Third Life at the Fairhope school from 1921 until the 1927-1928 school year, later patterned her own school in Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, after the Organic School. Once situated at the Organic School in 1921. Blumenfeld gives that date in her book *Consider the Child* (2), and a *Courier* item places Trask's tenure in the 1921-1922 school year (4 Nov. 1921).
School, she found herself quite "astonished by the freedom and the openness," entered into her teaching there with enthusiasm, and "became convinced of the need for change in education and gained the confidence to work toward this end." Wharton Esherick, one of the foremost furniture makers and wood workers in America, joined the Organic School faculty in 1919 and remained into 1922. Esherick, who taught arts and crafts at the school, not only acquired his first set of carving tools while he was in Fairhope, but he also met Sherwood Anderson who became a life-long friend (The Wharton Esherick Museum: Studio and Collection 5). Clarence Darrow, the lawyer who defended Stokes in the sensational "Monkey Trial," sometimes held discussions with teachers and students at the school where his brother's two children attended (Courier 3 Mar. 1927). Other prominent educators and professionals visited and spoke to classes on occasion.

The Organic School faculty reflected a diversity and scholarship that was quite unheard of for a small southern town far from a university center or even a sizable city. A scan through the 1920 Couriers reveals a sampling of teachers who had graduated from Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Berkeley, Boston University, Oxford, the University of Chicago, Dartmouth, Yale, Harvard and not a few from

112 For complete texts of Grace Rotzel's comments, see her Foreword in Johnson's Thirty Years with an Idea viii; The School in Rose Valley ix.
Columbia. Also represented on the faculty were graduates from state universities, including the University of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and, of course, Alabama. It was not the salary that lured teachers to the school down south, for salaries were low and sometimes even non-existent. Helen Porter Dyson often taught without being paid and said she never minded doing so in the least (Interview 22 Feb. 1994). In 1925 a fund-raising appeal went out which reported that the school was being "kept open now by volunteer teachers who are teaching without any guarantee of salary, with the hope that during this year ways and means may be found of making the school self-supporting" (Courier 9 Jan. 1925). Financial crises continued throughout the entire life of the school and naturally grew more acute during the Great Depression.

What did lure teachers down south was the warm gulf breezes, warm waters and the scenic beauty of Mobile Bay. But once finding themselves in a congenial and lively intellectual climate, they often stayed on and found teaching in the Organic School a pleasant way to occupy their time. The school was relatively well-staffed even during the bleakest years of the depression when teachers on a pension were glad to spend the winter teaching in a warm climate where living was inexpensive. But it was the opportunity to work with Marietta Johnson that most frequently brought teachers to Fairhope. In the ensuing
years after Dewey's 1913 visit, she had become one of the country's most preeminent educators and lecturers in her field (Beck, Marietta Johnson 1). Adding to her prestige at the time was her 1919 co-founding, along with Stanwood Cobb, of the national organization known as the Progressive Education Association. The PEA, which will be discussed in the next chapter, became a powerful clearing-house and disseminator of liberal progressive information and ideas throughout the decade of the 1920's.

Of the exceptional, though lesser known, teachers who made Fairhope their home, was Willard (Bill) Edwards, a graduate of Dartmouth who taught the social sciences and geography; Professor Paul (Pop) Nichols, something of a backwoods genius who taught science and mathematics among other things; Irene Bell, an artist and potter of some renown, who taught arts and crafts for many years; and Charles Rabold, a voice and piano instructor from the music department of Yale, who taught folk dancing. These were the teachers whose names most frequently recurred in conversations with students.

Bill Edwards was by profession a geographer, social scientist and historian, but like many others of the Organic faculty, he was multi-faceted. In addition to his regular classes, he often conducted nature study classes and even taught music on occasion but was remembered best for his map-making and as the man who directed the
building of the schooner Osprey. In 1929, Edwards authored an article for The Survey which clearly enunciated the organic approach to economics and the social sciences. Students, as reported by Edwards, moved through political history as freshmen using poems, stories, geography and history to see how it all "fit together." The second-year students examined the history of economic life, scientific discoveries and inventions, geography and the world's historical struggle for raw materials. The juniors studied social life and institutions using Hart's Social Life and Institutions and Will and Ariel Durant's Story of Philosophy. The seniors focused on current events through magazine articles, novels and moving pictures on child study, civics, economics, education, ethics, aesthetics, political science and etc. This broad, multi-faceted organic approach to social science was believed to create associations which promoted comprehension, memory and synthesis. In the same article, Edwards discussed some of his much-remembered maps. He described a group of sixteen, "related narrative maps," which aimed to show "literally hundreds of links in the chain of history connected up, like the family automobile, ready for youth

---

113 Walter Hedden remembered Edwards as the orchestra leader who said that "you didn't have to be an expert, but you could learn any of these [music] skills on 20 minutes a day of concentrated practicing" (Interview Mar. 1989).
to take apart, put together again, understand and use" (15 Mar. 1929). These were among the "bright, beautiful maps" which "made history come alive!" and so delighted Helene Beiser Hunter. (Interview 7 Apr. 1994). Edwards' name is first associated with the school in 1924, and he remained a prominent figure there until 1933, when he and his family sailed off to Russia at the height of the Great Depression. He remained in Russia for the rest of his life and raved of working conditions there in a letter to the Courier. Among the many advantages he found in Russia, he reported approvingly that "the state gets the rental value of the land" (Courier 15 Feb. 1934).

Paul Nichol's tenure at the school was first reported by the Courier in 1920 and it continued with occasional interruptions until after Mrs. Johnson's death. George Dubrock said of him: "He was one of the most interesting speakers I believe I ever listened to. . . . I think he was really a brilliant person. . . . and, you know, he was studying all the time" (Interview 17 Apr. 1991). Nichols served as the principal, filling in as director during Mrs. Johnson's frequent absences and travels and thus providing needed stability. Irene Bell, educated in the New York School of Design and Liberal Arts, taught metal and jewelry work, leather craft and weaving and was a skilled ceramicist. Under her direction, the students made and fired their own greenware in the school kiln.
She is first mentioned in the *Courier* in 1918 and her faculty tenure continued with some irregularity until 1934.

Charles Rabold was the American disciple of English folk-dance expert, Cecil Sharpe. Rabold first entered the picture in 1919 at the Greenwich school summer session where he taught folk singing and dancing. By 1922 he was teaching music and folk dance at Mrs. Johnson's newly inaugurated Winter Course in Fairhope but began teaching full time at the school in 1927. Rabold was lured to Fairhope by a very persuasive Mrs. Johnson though he fully embraced her philosophy. He saw folk dancing as organic expression, not only because of its obvious body-building characteristics, but in its spirit-building ones as well. He also believed folk dancing to be one of the finest ways to bring people together socially. Moreover, it promoted cultural awareness and established a foundation for appreciating the works of the great masters of music. *(Courier 13 Feb. 1930).* While English folk dancing had been introduced at the school some years before Rabold, under his energetic leadership the reluctant young men in the school became expert in Old English country, Morris and sword dances.\(^{114}\)

\(^{114}\) Music and dancing were an integral part of Organic curriculum from the beginning but the emphasis on folk dancing appears to have surfaced in 1918 when a Miss Pilcher began conducting folk dance classes for the community in summer school. The "Organic School Notes" in
colleague Paul Nichols, "He was good at finding diamonds in refuse material" (Courier 6 Feb. 1930). Girls participated in all dances, but as one student noted, Rabold was a "purist" so when it came to exhibitions, only boys executed the Morris and sword dances (Arden Flagg, Interview 30 Sept. 1990). Rabold was a gregarious man, possessed of the kind of vitality and dynamism which brought even the most recalcitrant rustics out on the dance floor at folk dance parties. It was widely accepted that he would be Mrs. Johnson's successor when he and his assistant pianist, Hannah Bottstein, met a tragic death in a 1930 plane crash in California, the worst aviation disaster that had yet been recorded (Courier 23 Jan. 1930). But Rabold's legacy was so firmly in place that over the next ten years the Organic School folk dancers went on to gain something of a national reputation. In 1934, the school was soliciting the public for a bus chassis on which the shop could build a body for their folk dance travels (Courier 5 July 1934). As a result, the students were soon traveling on their own bus. Students gave exhibitions in cities throughout the United States during the 1930's, including the National Folk Dance Festival in Washington, D. C., the Chicago World's the Courier announced the classes as a "rare opportunity to study with a pupil of one of the leading teachers of the country" (14 June 1918).
Fair in 1933, the San Diego World's Fair and the Centennial Celebration in Dallas both in 1936 (Courier 9 Feb. 1933; 25 July 1935; 27 Feb. 1936; 19 Mar. 1936). While in California for the 1936 San Diego Fair, they were featured in a Fox newsreel, one of them photographed talking to President Hoover.

Lesser lights on the faculty, but still the mainstays of the school, were the local people. Most of them were women teachers who had taken Marietta Johnson's normal training course which had been conducted each year from the school's inception. Faculty rosters and photographs in the school annual, the Cinagro, reveal a corps of teachers composed roughly of 70 percent women and 30 percent men. The teaching was always and unquestionably along organic lines, and there never appeared to be any misunderstandings on that issue although Mrs. Johnson allowed her teachers a considerable degree of latitude. As Grace Arnold King commented: "I think that the teachers were more or less an extension of Mrs. Johnson . . . most all the teachers had been through her teacher's training and they knew her philosophy" (Interview 21 Apr. 1994). Teachers were considered friends and guides, not taskmasters, just as Mrs. Johnson wished. Hector Sutherland thought of the faculty as a "very unique and skilled group and, in retrospect, they did an excellent job of teaching and establishing an association with their
students which made them perhaps more of a friend. I felt that teaching was a very friendly, low-keyed proposition" (Interview 2 Mar. 1992). That sentiment is almost universal among students. Like Hector, George Dubrock found that "most of the teachers turned out to be lifelong friends" (Interview 17 Apr. 1991). Helen Porter Dyson summed it up this way: "I don't know what all that I got from those outstanding teachers except more of a feeling than straight knowledge some way or other" (Interview 22 Feb. 1994).

Part Two - Tensions as Theory Meets Practice

Overview

There were several dominant themes peculiar to organic education. First and central was the body, mind, spirit nexus, the organic motif around which all else revolved. Other themes surfaced only secondarily as theory was instantiated in practice. As her practice evolved, one of the more dominant of these became what might be called her socio-educational doctrine which amounted to an extended organicism addressing relationships among students as well as relationships between school and family and school and community. Among other dominant themes peculiar to the organic point of view were her views of discipline and play. As is the case with most theories, however, tensions and inconsistencies arose as they were put to the test of
practical application with human subjects in real-life circumstances. Though most of the themes which will be discussed here have been at least touched on in earlier chapters, the following section will consider some of these tensions and inconsistencies, how they were mediated, and how they were or were not resolved.

The Organic View: Learners and Learning

It needs no repeating that organic relationships were the very heart and core of Marietta Johnson’s ideology. While the industrial world around her was rolling steadily onward toward more standardization and more impersonalization and gathering speed as it went, the organic locomotive was headed in the other direction. And Johnson’s antipathy to systems was driving it, her homage to the individual organism and her refusal to accept divisions whether between mind and body or between people. Like other women reformers in the progressive era, she was intent on constructing a relational sub-text within a mechanistic narrative of separation and specialization.

And though she has never stated it explicitly in her writing, it is very likely that the organic idea was Marietta Johnson’s way of neutralizing the frictions of a mechanistic world. In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams describes organicism as that which is opposed to mechanism. The inner, or organic form, he believes, is what the artist perceives while the mechanic perceives the
external (138). Organic relationships and mechanical relationships represent two opposing poles of experience. One way to differentiate between the two is by comparing the organic to the internal and the mechanical to the external. Mechanical parts interact by pushing each other around but do not affect the nature of the structure, whereas organic parts grow together within the structure and are intrinsically affected by changes in the other parts. The mechanistic assumption is that everything can be understood by reduction to the most basic element of its structure. On the other hand, the organic view reverses the mechanistic view by insisting that things can only be understood in relation to each other.115

Marietta Johnson can be compared with William's artist who perceives the inner nature of the subject and commits that vision to the canvas. But she was an artist of children, one who perceived that learning had to do with the inner, or organic, nature of children. She constantly reverts in her writing to the theme of internal versus external, as in the following: "They [the school] should realize that education is growth--a gradual unfolding through happy, interested, wholesome activity" (Thirty Years 93). She was convinced that growth, a word

115 Some of the language and ideas on organicism and mechanism expressed in the preceding paragraph have been adapted from Bohm and Peat's Science, Order and Creativity.
she often used in place of education, was attained through a complex internal process where body, mind and spirit somehow coalesced. Almost without fail she was quoted in the press on the subject and the message hardly varied as, for example, in a *New York Times* article: "The test of everything we did was: Does it make the body stronger, the mind bigger and the soul sweeter? If it did we kept it up. If it did not, we dropped it" (16 Mar. 1913). This was the criterion of the Organic School, but readers are left in the dark as to just exactly what the standards might have been for testing stronger bodies, bigger minds and sweeter souls. It is also unclear how one could determine when a loss of equilibrium among the three might threaten to "arrest development." Yet Johnson repeats again and again that to do other than educate the entire organism is to risk the dreaded "arrested development," a condition she clearly believed dangerous not only to the child but to society: "It is the undeveloped person that throws the bomb. If we would have peaceful evolution instead of violent revolution, we must see to it that provision is made for even development for every child" (*Youth in a World of Men* 246).

"Even development" demanded more than the customary three R's and Johnson, accordingly, served up an ambitious curriculum smorgasbord that offered something for most tastes and occasions. In addition to academics, organic
education constituted an extraordinary array of creative activities and a liberal helping of participatory physical and social activities including everything from arts and crafts, music and dramatics, to folk dancing and manual training. Other schools, of course, were engaged in the same kinds of activities, but they were offered as extra-curricular activities, rather than focal points of the curriculum. Sidonie Matzner Gruenberg, in concluding her description of the Organic School curriculum for the "Scientific American Supplement," commented as follows:

All these things sound very much like what is being done in thousands of other schools in this country and abroad. But these things are done in other schools spasmodically and as features added to the traditional course of study. Here they constitute the very heart of the course of study. (14 Nov. 1914)

As viewed through the organic prism, one field of effort was just as valuable as another whether one chose to lead a life of contemplation or physical labor, whether one chose to be a gardener, poet or engineer. A young person might be unequally talented with respect to any one ability, but if Marietta Johnson was certain of anything, she was certain that each individual was a diamond in the rough, with multiple abilities and talents just waiting to be tapped. Grace Arnold King says of her:

She just made you feel like whatever field you excelled in was good enough--equal with everybody else. I think that’s what’s been the biggest help to me through the years. I’ve always felt that I was capable of doing anything I made up my mind to do even if I may not have
had the formal education for it. (Interview 5 May 1992)

Radical egalitarianism required that there be no grades, tests, marks, passing, rewards, criticism at the Organic School. Neither were students singled out for honors, recognition or praise. And, naturally, there were no "gifted and talented" among the students. The Deweys had taken note and liked what they saw:

The child who is slow mentally is not made to feel that he is disgraced. Attention is not called to him and he is not prodded, scolded, or "flunked." Unaware of his own weaknesses, he retains the moral support of confidence in himself; and his hand work and physical accomplishments frequently give him prestige among his fellows. "Schools of Tomorrow 27"

Dorothy Beiser Cain recalls a fellow student who earned his living by selling produce from door to door. But he did it with dignity, she said, and, what is more, he raised his orphaned niece and nephew on the proceeds (Interview 11-12 May 1993). The usually mild-spoken Johnson had strong words for categorizing children: "It is idiotic to talk about children being behind or ahead. Behind what? And ahead of what? The child is growing, and it is fair only to compare it with itself" (D. Edwards, New York Times). She responded as follows to an inquiry from C. M. Donnelly of the University of Alabama, presumably requesting information on her grading policy:

We could not make a report on attainment in subject matter since many children would fail after the most earnest effort, which would be manifestly unfair. We could not make a report
on attitudes, morals or social relations since that would also develop most undesirable self-consciousness; so throughout the twenty-nine years which we have been struggling with this problem we have never made out a report card.

We feel that to grade children on intellectual attainment is unfair and undemocratic. We feel that grading children on morals may develop hypocrisy. We feel that it is absolutely impossible to grade children on spiritual or social development, so there we are. We have fallen back on the beautiful scripture, "Judge not." (Excerpts 25 May 1930)

The organic view held that grades and all external pressures imposed by adults only drove children into underhanded, deceitful practices such as lying, cheating and shirking their duties. What is more, children were liable to be humiliated when they failed and egotistical when they succeeded. If the school constantly made external demands, then children came to believe that education was something attained when adult demands were satisfied (Thirty Years 93). As Dewey had once caustically noted, traditional education was noted for "overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under pressure" (Experience and Education 17). Children thus became course-passers rather than learners. An insincere desire to please adults amounted to no more than self-deception and such insincerity as Sartre called "bad faith." Though she was probably not acquainted with either Sartre or existentialism, Johnson fully subscribed to the existentialist view that individuals are responsible for their own destiny and must face squarely the implications
of their personal actions. Were children satisfied that they were doing their best? If so, it was enough. Some may have called it a perverse view of education when mere children were allowed to set their own standards, but standards, like everything else in organic education, were an individual, and subjective, affair. Johnson wanted her students to be happy, outgoing and engaged in activities that interested them. Moreover, she wanted them to break through conformity and the rituals of schooling and life and discover their own individuality, their own ways of thinking, doing and being.

The organic idea was, first of all, based upon a monistic foundation--the oneness of the individual child, the oneness of mind, body and spirit. This was at the very center of Johnson's educational theory with all else secondary. At another level, Johnson's organic child personified individualism in the Fairhopian model of "true cooperative individualism." There were two assumptions informing the organic idea as Marietta Johnson conceived it: first, that learning centered in and grew out of the child and, second, that the child is naturally good. Concentrating on the first assumption, one finds that Johnson came to see each child as a unique individual developing through a very complex, physical, mental and spiritual process of growth. It was not an adding-onto, or adhesive process, but an entirely internal process--an
alteration of the whole mass. It might be likened to the reaction which takes place when yeast is introduced to a mixture of ingredients. The yeast acts as a catalyst, initiating a chemical reaction that causes all of the ingredients to proceed together under different conditions, and once added it cannot be removed because the properties of the entire mass have been altered. The main goal of organic education, then, was introducing situations, ideas, possibilities and problems that would pique the child's own interests and act as catalysts to initiate learning, what Mrs. Johnson preferred to call "growth." To get at the essence of the idea one needs to erase the word "education" with all of its linguistic baggage entirely from one's vocabulary and replace it with the word "growth." Education carries with it the sense of something that is put in but growth is something that comes out of.

Traditional education had stressed intake almost entirely, but the organic idea was situated at the other end of the continuum, stressing outgo almost entirely. The goal of organic education was to stimulate growth, to nurture, encourage and foster, not to train or inform and never to prod. As Johnson understood it, education was definitely not a pouring-in process. But neither did she conceive of it as a drawing-out process: "We do not need to draw out, our job is to provide wholesome conditions
which will not check the pouring out, which will not arrest development or distort its direction to make a lopsided individual" (Courier 7 Feb. 1935). Learning, in this view, was a radically inward to outward movement on the part of the child and the teacher's goal was to avoid stifling the outpouring. Organic education, in the Johnson vocabulary, was almost entirely a matter of letting, allowing, providing and meeting, in other words removing any hindrances that might get in the way of the inner child striving to push out. As explained in an earlier chapter, Johnson believed it was most critical to provide experiences that would give young people enough self-confidence to manage subsequent experiences whatever they might be. This attitude is best understood by recalling the Dewey-Johnson view, also discussed earlier, that knowledge unfolds relative to time and place. It is, in other words, a function of environment or context. It should also be remembered that each child was considered a unique individual, so that what could be got from one child was likely to be quite different from what could be got from another. With both contexts and children so infinitely variable, precise and definite curricular objectives were quite impossible, and it is little wonder that an organic system was never devised. To do so would have undermined the organic idea itself.
A second assumption informing the organic idea was that the child is naturally good. This assumption was contingent upon and made necessary by the first. If it is desirable that learning should come from within the child, then what comes from within the child must necessarily be good. Johnson, like her fellow liberals, was certain that when provided with an environment rich in choices and with a minimum of coercion, children would naturally develop into happy, healthy, socially responsible and moral individuals. The same back-to-nature revival that had inspired the utopians proclaimed that if adults could only leave children alone, society could certainly return in a generation or two to the Garden of Eden. The failures of Adam and Eve and their progeny must have escaped their notice. Education was a preventative art among liberal progressives--mostly preventing vices and preserving the natural good in children. Johnson believed, as did her liberal comrades, that "Man must become a conscious agent in human evolution," but also that civilized humans must "cooperate with nature's forces" to achieve their ends (Youth 9). The apparent inconsistency between being a "conscious agent" of nature and cooperating with nature at the same time did not come to her attention, or if it did, she made no attempt to deal with it theoretically.

There was an ubiquitous use of the words "nature" and "laws of nature" in progressive lore without defining
exactly what they meant. "Nature" either implied some inherent quality, a self-determinative agency or divine "spirit in man," or it implied the embodied, accumulated history of the race. Moving beyond the rhetoric, one finds the question unanswered since liberal progressives were not given overmuch to definition. Dewey was characteristically ambiguous on the point though he once observed that there was "no spontaneous germination in the mental life," seeming to deny any spiritual essence ("Individuality and Experience" 154). Moreover, like many of his liberal comrades, Dewey dismissed heredity in favor of environment as causative so he might have preferred the cultural designation of "natural laws."

Liberals were not the only progressives whose dialogue resonated with talk of "natural laws." But conservatives accepted the harsher Darwinian view that through "natural laws" of selection a gifted educational proletariat was destined to rise to the top of the social order while the inferior masses settled in a heap at the bottom. This view of "natural laws" provided a convenient rationale for bureaucrats and administrators who proceeded to count, test, measure, tabulate and classify pupils in so-called scientifically determined and, therefore, supposedly inevitable, "natural" categories. Thus the word "natural," so seemingly innocuous in the hands of the
liberals, became a straitjacket from which students never escaped in the hands of conservatives.

Such a view could have hardly been more antithetical to the emancipatory education for democracy as advocated in the Johnson/Dewey plan. In the Johnsonian language, natural laws were not baneful laws summoned forth by some judgmental deity to separate the mediocre tares from the elite wheat. They were benevolent laws whereby the child found her/his rightful place in the universal scheme, doing exactly what nature had prepared her/him to do. As Johnson once declared, "Every living thing has a law of its development, a natural order of unfolding and coming to maturity" (Courier 2 Apr. 1909). She was insistent that goodness would somehow emerge when the right conditions were provided: "We should not try to make children good, provide the right conditions and they are good." Yet her insistence that goodness would emerge on its own was at least inconsistent since she frequently referred to the child as unmoral, or, in the current idiom, amoral—without any sense of morality at all, good or evil.116 It is well to remember that neither religion nor morals were taught at the Organic School except, of course, for the Henry George single tax doctrine which held land ownership and economic monopolies to be morally

116 For Johnson's views on morals, see Youth in a World of Men 179-98; Dewey, Schools of Tomorrow 25.
unjust. A stout single taxer, Johnson once declared her firm belief that the efforts to establish the single tax movement in Fairhope was itself a Christian work, "for it is seeking to establish conditions which make it possible for men to be Christians if they want to be, while the churches are simply aiming to make men Christians in an environment that compels un-Christian lives" (Courier 10 May 1907). Johnson thought religious training "positively immoral when it develops fear" or "a feeling of separation from others, or a spirit of criticism of others" (Youth 198, 184). Nor did right behavior in children necessarily indicate true morality but rather that the child was willing to go through the motions of good behavior to satisfy adults (Youth 180). For Johnson, that was no more than hypocrisy.

If children had no innate sense of morality, then the question of goodness seems not to be a matter of "nature," good or bad; therefore, how goodness could emerge in any environment becomes problematic. Here Johnson has equivocated, setting aside nature in favor of environment declaring that discrimination, judgment and morals are shaped through social interaction. She never confronted the nature/culture dilemma except obliquely. She did, however, sense that nature of its own volition might not capable of manifesting itself in good actions, and thus organic schooling as it evolved came to include a strong
emphasis on environment. By creating a rich pastiche of curriculum choices and an almost infinite reservoir of social experiences, Johnson uncritically supposed that good would of itself emerge.

Socialization

Thus is introduced a second important theme of organic education, yet one always subordinate to meeting the needs of each individual child, that is, the socialization of the child. Here, Johnson and Dewey found their most common denominator. And it was more than a happy coincidence that socialization served another purpose, functioning as the cooperative feature in an organic version of "true cooperative individualism."

Since Johnson was known among her fellows and critics as a radically pro-child educator, that great exponent of participatory democracy, John Dewey, must have been pleasantly surprised by what he found on his visit down south. Johnson resolved the dualisms between the individual and the social in her practice of schooling in a way that Dewey himself never had. Margaret Naumburg had once even accused Dewey of catering to herd instinct. A one-time student of Dewey's, she complained that in his laboratory school the "making and doing of things was always subordinated to a social plan, not related to the individual capacities and tastes of the children" (The Child and the World 50).
The social practices so evident in Johnson's school took to the background in her writing and lectures. She tended not to theorize them overmuch though she rigorously applied them. It is almost as though the need to bring the child into relationship with her/his immediate world was so innate in her philosophy that she thought it unnecessary to articulate it. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that many critics choose to ignore the large part that social activities played in Johnson's practice of schooling, from such activities as dramatics and folk dancing to providing tables rather than desks so that children could work together. Had contemporary critics and historians visited her school rather than heard her lectures and read what she wrote, they might have been less likely to think of her as being on the "radical edge, the fanatic fringe" as did her colleague Stanwood Cobb (Graham, Arcady 19n). But it's unlikely that the critics made many excursions to south Alabama.

Johnson introduced no doctrinaire position or theory of socialization, nevertheless, she practiced it in her school. Had she articulated her social theory, it might have been as follows: relationships between one's self and others give one a sense of proportion. But too much emphasis on relationships may tend also toward a dead level of mediocrity and thus deepen conformity. Attention to individuality, on the other hand, nurtures creative
potential while too much emphasis upon individuality leads to ego-centrism, an over-estimated sense of one's own importance and an inability to relate to others.

In practice, socialization in the Organic School was part of providing for the spiritual welfare of the child. And Johnson was as determinedly opposed to unjust social systems as she was to other kinds of systemization in schooling. The New York Times once quoted her as follows: "Any system through which one child flourishes while another unjustly languishes is most imperfect and breeds discontent within the social system which tolerates it" (13 Mar. 1913). Young people acquired social consciousness in the Organic School just as they acquired most everything else, by practical experience: "We cannot teach or train a social consciousness--it is a matter of growth through social experiences" (92). So from kindergarten through high school Organic School students worked, played and studied together because their leader believed that doing so developed "a most desirable interdependent spirit" (Thirty Years 92). Manual training, domestic science, arts and crafts and folk dancing were required participatory activities. No homework was expected of students until high school and, even then, there was no homework on weekends to interfere with family and social relations.
Also serving the interests of socialization, Johnson's Organic School, like Dewey's Laboratory School, used only large tables for groups of children rather than immovable desks lined up in geometric progression for individual children. Dewey tells a story of his difficulty in finding furniture suitable for the activities in his laboratory school. After a long search, one salesman finally got to the philosophical core of the problem: "I am afraid we have not what you want. You want something at which the children may work; these are all for listening" (The School and Society 31). The tables reflected the conviction of their respective founders that schools should be physically active environments. But more especially, they reflected their founders' underlying drive to keep everything in organic relation.

Johnson's organicism, however, was most often expressed in its internal sense, the motivation to keep the individual child whole in body, mind and spirit, for example. Dewey, on the other hand, stressed the external experience rather than the internal experience of the child. His organicism was seen more often in an insistence that the subjects in the curriculum must connect with one another and to the real world as well as to the interests and activities of the home, neighborhood and community. But both Dewey and Johnson reflected a strong impulse away from a conservative progressive's
enthusiasm for efficiency-through-separation which included marching children from one room to another, from one teacher to another and separating children according to perceived ability in the belief that classrooms could be managed more economically and efficiently by teaching one subject and one intelligence level in isolation.

Like Dewey, Johnson was far more concerned with social consciousness than with intellectual capacity, and thus she rejected the grading system, grouping children strictly by age, calling her groups Life Classes. Johnson sadly regretted that "We still hear of pupils failing or being conditioned in subjects, but how often do we hear of pupils being retained because of undeveloped social or moral qualities?" (Thirty Years 7). She was strenuously opposed to failing any child on the grounds that no child should suffer such humiliation, but she was no less opposed to promoting the precocious child on the grounds that doing so created self-consciousness and egotism. Age classification, rather than intellectual classification, suited her purposes and she justified her choice as follows:

The precocious child may be given more work without being forced into the sex and social consciousness of older children; the backward child may work along at his own pace without being prodded or humiliated by odious comparisons or markings. (Thirty Years 31)

Oppenheim's edict that children should be allowed to grow at their own pace and Dewey's demand for a social
democracy within the curriculum found a very practical expression in Marietta Johnson's Life Classes.

Classification by age, however, was not without its difficulties. Classes were small, usually fifteen or fewer, but even then teachers found it quite difficult to attend to the needs of a wide range of ability levels. Compounding that problem was Mrs. Johnson's tendency to actively seek out mentally (and physically) challenged youngsters for her school. Hazele Payne, whose life and history were discussed earlier, vividly recalls the difficulties presented by age grouping over seventy-five years later:

You couldn't work with the whole room as a group. You had to meet the needs of the slow child as well as the one that was ahead. They all had to be kept in the same group of the same age to meet the same thing socially but also academically. It was left up to the teacher to keep the child happy and healthy and meet his needs . . . and it was darn hard sometimes. (Interview 17 Apr. 1991)

But Mrs. Johnson believed that the social conscience was developed through working together and work together they did. They studied together and helped one another at their tables, and participation in social activities was not optional. Everyone participated. And most, but not all, of the students found the arrangement salutary. Reed Myers said, "It was fun to help each other. . . . When one person would excel in one subject, they would help someone else in that subject where they might need help in another
area" (Interview 30 Dec. 1991). Grace Arnold King said one boy in her class was always behind, but one of the students would help him catch up "and there were always some people ahead of me. But it didn't matter" (Interview 21 Apr. 1994). On the other hand, Eleanor Coutant Nichols was not so approving of the practice, seeing it as a handicap to the ordinary student to be held back by those who could not do the work:

The class that I grew up with, everybody thought [two students would] never learn to read but they both turned out to be very good at math, [good] husbands and providers, but I often wondered if they ever learned to read. (Interview 30 Sept. 1990)

Nevertheless, the assumption prevailed at the Organic School that all elements could be mixed together with one harmonious result and all ills dissolved in the harmonious interaction between individuals. Amalgamation, it was believed, would somehow produce a better and higher concept rather than levelling to the lowest common denominator. Yet social engineering was anathema to Mrs. Johnson and she was entirely ignorant of the theoretical insights which furrow the brows of social scientists today. She understood that knowledge is socially constructed, but she never appears to have questioned whether or not such knowledge was real knowledge. And her writings do not interrogate the subject of subordination and oppression and how these, too, are socially constructed along with all the other complexities of
knowledge. She wanted her students to be shaped by their associations, never mind the skeptics who worried about oppression, relativism or mass behavior. Fortunately, few Organic students seemed to have gotten lost in the crowd, spared that fate by an equally pressing organic command to "meet the needs" of each individual child. Unlike Dewey, Mrs. Johnson did not subordinate everything to the social plan in her school. Her emphasis on creativity and individuality more than offset any emphasis on the herd.

Family and Community

Both Cremin and Graham speak of the tendency of the early liberal progressive schools to take the life of the surrounding community into account in their activities (Cremin 279; Graham, Arcady 148). It was one of the few similarities among schools in a movement marked by pluralism and contradiction. It should be remembered that community-centeredness ran counter to the prevailing conservative idea that schooling could be economically and efficiently managed best by large, centralized and impersonal bureaucracies. Caroline Pratt's Play School (later the City and Country School); Margaret Naumburg's Children's School (later Walden School), both in New York City's Greenwich Village; Jane Addams' Hull house in the heart of the Chicago slums; and Marietta Johnson's Organic School in Fairhope, Alabama, were liberal progressive schools that were successful as a direct result of filling
a niche in a particular community. Addams' school, as already discussed, accommodated immigrants and the poor in the slums of Chicago. Pratt's school, which stressed creative and imaginative play, came to fill a niche among the artists of Greenwich Village though she had not planned it so. Margaret Naumburg, who was concerned that "the entire world was filled with the urge to socialize the world by compulsion," emphasized emotional well-being and creative self-expression in a school where the avant garde intelligentsia of New York City sent their offspring (Naumburg, The Child and the World 115). Reading of these schools, one never doubts that they grew with and from the immediate needs of their surroundings as well as from the strong convictions of their founders. In that sense, they were as "organic" as Marietta Johnson's school though not as self-consciously so.

Marietta Johnson found an hospitable environment for her organic gospel down south where Henry George's single tax theory amounted to a community religion. Indeed, the Fairhope faith became woven so tightly into the organic idea that it became virtually impossible to separate one from the other. One citizen waxed quite ecstatic on the subject, declaring that Mrs. Johnson's "radiant spirit has so permeated the entire atmosphere that we have long since ceased to wonder whether the glow be hers or our own" (Courier 11 Mar. 1926). The individual and social
features of Mrs. Johnson's curriculum corresponded with E. B. Gaston's "cooperative individualism" and the single tax gospel was preached and taught in a school where dogmas were otherwise absent. The Organic School took its cues from the home and community and, in turn, family and community were drawn to and supported the school. The school was the hub of the community but it was so, in part, because the founder took her cues from the Fairhope faith and shaped her curriculum in accord with it.

As a result, one student, David King, found himself quite unable to separate school from family: "It's hard for me to separate whether I got certain things from my family or from Organic." Helene Beiser Hunter thought of school as an extension of family: "I felt that the school was an extension of my family which is a wonderful feeling. It's a secure feeling" (Interview 7 Apr. 1994). Elsie Arnold Butgereit said, "[The school] was where my sisters were; it was where my mother and my father came in and out; it was just my everyday existence."

---

117 David King is a second generation Organic School student. He is the son of Grace Arnold King and he attended the Organic School for the entire 12 years, graduating in 1977. His comments are from a videotaped interview (5 Jan. 1992).

118 Elsie Arnold Butgereit is another of the eight Arnold children who attended the Organic School. She was teaching folk dancing at the present Organic School when interviewed by the author. Her comments here were taken from that interview audiotaped at the Marietta Johnson Museum (21 Apr. 1994).
Without prompting, and with few exceptions, students point to the importance of their school as the center of the community. There was folk dancing for the whole community on Friday nights, young and old alike, with Mrs. Johnson herself often "leading out." The Courier noted one such occasion where there were "84 people on the floor at once, from kindergarten to great-grandfathers, all dancing with the greatest abandon and unselfconsciousness" (14 Mar. 1924). There were regular Wednesday noon luncheons for the community and wintering visitors at Comings Hall on the campus, sometimes including as many as 200 people (Courier 2 May 1924). The arts and crafts, manual training and folk dancing classes were often opened up to the town folk since, as Arden Flagg said, "you never really graduated" from Organic (Interview 30 Sept. 1990). There were celebrations and musicals and pageants, and there was the May Day "fete" complete with May pole dances, and there was Christmas when Mrs. Johnson, as was her custom, read Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. Students from the school regularly participated in community "Clean up Day" (Courier 11 Feb. 1911; 29 Mar. 1912; 9 Apr. 1915). Then there was Mrs. Johnson’s Winter Course for parents, teachers and social workers where the community and wintering visitors were also invited. Felix Beiser even closed the family business in order to attend the Johnson lectures. They were guaranteed to keep the
audience on the edge of their collective seats (Interview with Dorothy Beiser Cain 11-12 May 1993). And neither Mrs. Johnson or the community ever seemed to tire of her all-occasion talks on the "new education," whether planned or impromptu. Then there was an almost endless succession of plays and dramatic presentations at the Organic School which often involved the entire community in one way or another. One of the more ambitious of these presentations was described as a "Japanese Fete" given by 80 students who "donned Japanese costume and marched and gave plays and drilled and danced in truly Japanese Style." The geography department had devised the play and the English department had written it. The music department supplied selections from the Mikado while the art department arranged the drills, flowers and decorations and students in the shop made jinrikishas. A Courier writer painted a colorful and charming picture of the occasion:

The color scheme made one feel as if one had been suddenly transported to the orient and dropped in the midst of a real Japanese festival. Tea and rice cakes were served in oriental style, kite flying and other Japanese sports were played and a few Jinrikishas carried the more important princes and the Mikado. . . . The picture of the afternoon, however, was the little folks in costume sitting cross-legged and eating rice with chop sticks while they sipped the citrus fruit punch for genuine Japan tea, and ate rice cakes--real sure-nuff rice cakes, a-la Japanese. (17 Mar. 1916)

Presentations such as the above were not infrequent and served a variety of organic purposes. They promoted,
as Mrs. Johnson said, "a friendly attitude, [and] a kindly, sympathetic feeling" toward other cultures (Thirty Years 68-9). They were learning experiences, Mrs. Johnson would perhaps call them "growing" experiences, for students, conceived and executed by them with the teachers guiding and assisting. And they were grand opportunities for all kinds of social interaction among students, teachers, and townspeople.

Organic education as conceived by Marietta Johnson thus provided a neutral space between home and industry, between the child and the public world, where children could emerge gently from childhood into adulthood. The school was an extension of home and family. It was a place where family and community gathered freely and where their concerns were considered and addressed. Such has not always been the case among the institutions whom we trust with our children. One thinks especially of the present controversies over prayer in public schools and creationism versus evolution, book-banning efforts and the omnipresent calls for more multi-cultural history and language courses. The same controversies also raise other questions, not the least of which is just how far community standards should be permitted to control public schooling. Still, closed systems sometimes encourage uniformity and ultimately entropy. Whether Dewey and Johnson reflected on these problems is not known, but they
never withdrew from their faith in the socially interactive school and community as the best means of educating citizens for democracy. One thing is certain, the Organic School was vitally connected to the affairs of the life which flowed around it in an era when impersonal bureaucracies were casting a long shadow over American life.

Play

In Fairhope's utopia the spirit of spontaneous, creative play was never discouraged. Moreover, play was considered just as essential in high school as it had been in kindergarten, though Helen Dyson cautions that Johnson "was very exacting about when you worked you worked and when you played you played" (Interview 22 Feb. 1994).

One of the more well-theorized postulates of the Johnson philosophy was that of play. Work and play were not, in fact, discrete activities in the mind of the Organic School founder. The so-called work of learning became an incidental by-product of engaging in some creative activity hatched in the mind of a student or group of students. Johnson was certain, in fact, that work would become play if disabused of the notion that it was a duty rather than a pleasure: "There should be more recreation in work. We take life too seriously and we take ourselves too seriously. . . . It is the spirit that turns work into drudgery" (Youth 118). Furthermore,
Johnson firmly insisted that play was not just a human indulgence but a human necessity, and not just for children and young people but for everyone. Play was, in fact, the most important of educational experiences "absolutely necessary to the coordination and integration of the nervous system," she insisted (Youth 102). Children were free to be children in utopia's school whose founder often proclaimed that "prolonging childhood is the hope of the race, the longer the time from birth to maturity, the higher the organism" (Twenty Years 54; Youth 33).119

Other educators might believe if they liked that education should teach children to control so-called "natural" impulses for fun and behave like adults, but Marietta Johnson believed instead that adults should learn to be as spontaneous and fun-loving as children. The spirit of play should begin at the beginning of life and last throughout life, she insisted (Youth 119-20). She likewise believed that "The poise, coordination, intellectual power and social qualities developed in play are of inestimable human value. . . . The greatest minds are those able to use the play spirit in their work" (Thirty Years 29). The emphasis on arts and crafts in her school grew from the conviction that all poetry and art

119 The phrase is said to have originated with Rousseau.
were, in the highest sense, play and "all work of the true artist is play." Therefore, play should not be distinguished from work (Youth 109). Moreover, the play of intellect was no less important than physical play:

Free intellectual play for the child is to think about something and wonder how it got there; wonder what the thing is for; wonder how this or that was done and how he can make a similar thing, and how it will act if he does make it! Then he should be allowed to try out his experiment to get his answer. (Johnson, "The School and the Child" 10)

Johnson was by no means the first to perceive that play was not just a frivolous waste of time, but an absolute necessity in learning. Rousseau, and more particularly Froebel, had made their own pleas for self-prompted creative play many years before her. In The Education of Man, Froebel called play "the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage" (55). Nor is the notion that play enhances intellectual power confined to the history books or to educators. More recently, and in the realm of science, physicists David Bohm and E. David Peat, have argued that play is essential in "creative acts of perception" (68). They view creative thought itself as play since the mind does not know what it is looking for, cannot visualize it and only comes upon a new idea by accident through giving full rein to

---

120 See, for example, Dewey's chapter "Froebel's Educational Principles" in the University of Chicago Press Centennial Publication The School and Society, The Child and the Curriculum (116-31).
imagination, or, through the constant shift of similarities and differences that take place in thought:

New thoughts generally arise with a play of the mind, and the failure to appreciate this is actually one of the major blocks to creativity. Thought is generally considered to be a sober and weighty business. But here it is being suggested that creative play is an essential element in forming new hypotheses and ideas. Indeed, thought which tries to avoid play is in fact playing false with itself. Play, it appears is of the very essence of thought. (Science, Order and Creativity 48)

Marietta Johnson predated Bohm and Peat by many years in her conviction of the value of play to all ages.

Discipline

Hal Riegger's unhampered flirtation with arson and other hair-raising escapades related by Organic School students naturally beg the question of discipline, or rather, whether there was any at all in the Organic School. There was no inconsistency on the point in Marietta Johnson's theory: "All control must tend toward self-control" (Youth 166). Though discipline, as one might already suspect, should come from within, not without, organic education was not entirely impractical in its approach. As reported by John Dewey, Johnson advocated keeping a child occupied with "plenty of healthy activity" to avoid discipline problems. But when that failed, one should "not appeal to a sense which he has not got, but show him by a little pain if necessary" what his
actions mean to others (Schools 26). Johnson herself said:

Children do not know what is best for them. They have no basis for judgment. They need guidance, control, but this must really be for their good, not merely the convenience of the adult! Every effort is made to have this conformity merge into and become obedience. (Thirty Years 95)

Discipline as practiced in the Organic School was, like teaching, something of an art. It included a healthy respect for the headmistress mixed with a little benign neglect and supreme confidence that the natural goodness of the child would emerge in its own good time. The seemingly indulgent female founder was an imposing figure in her little kingdom. Students will never admit to downright fear, but something more like a cautious respect. Arden Flagg's word for Mrs. Johnson was "determined," adding that Johnson had "eyes that snapped and she was very positive about some things" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990). Claude Arnold insists that Johnson was "not stern, but firm." When Mrs. Johnson found Claude in the poolroom during school hours, she took him by the collar and sent him back to the campus but, according to Claude, that was the only reprimand he needed. "She made me want to please her, just want to please her," he said, adding that "the whole atmosphere of the school was cooperation" (Interview 21 Apr. 1994). In the same family group interview, Claude's sister Elsie said, "I felt like Mrs.
Johnson knew when I came onto the campus... And, I also felt like she knew if I was a little bit rude to Miss Helen. It wasn't as if I was afraid of her, you know, [but] I didn’t want her to know."

Johnson's laissez-faire pedagogical style, where permissiveness was expected to become self-discipline and good habits were the inevitable result of following nature, may have worked well for a teacher as skilled in her art as Marietta Johnson. Nevertheless, as Cremin wisely observes, "[O]ne still shudders at the thought of what it becomes under less capable sponsorship" (152). What worked well for a revered headmistress in a small, rural school where large families typically attended and parents customarily participated might have been an invitation to bedlam elsewhere. Lending some support to that conjecture is a reference to Johnson and her work in Lucy Sprague Mitchell's book. Johnson had once received a grant from Mitchell's Bank Street School to conduct an experiment in the organic method there. Mitchell's terse comment about the experiment was that Johnson seemed "unable to adapt her methods and curriculum to city conditions" (Mitchell 457, 575).

But Fairhope was not New York, and the Johnson plan was quite satisfactory there according to most accounts. The Arnold family for example—eight brothers and sisters who attended the Organic School—acknowledged in a family
interview that they were somehow persuaded to the method of self-discipline:

Claude: I don't know how to describe it except there was a matter of something about organic education that let the student know early on that they were responsible for their own actions. And, discover that as long as their actions are appropriate, there's no difficulty, no problem.

Elsie: The one thing that I think is real important is that--is this business of--somewhere it's gotten lost and I suppose it's our whole society set up right now--this business of being responsible for your own actions.

Grace: But, anyway, I think that it was a sense of freedom that we had here, but still we knew what was expected of us from Mrs. Johnson down through every teacher and on the campus. If you threw trash on the campus, and one of the teachers said, "Stop and pick that up," you didn't question their authority.

Jacqueline: Well, there you have what I think permeates organic education and I think it's all self-discipline. (Interviews 21 Apr. 1994)

Reflections: Beyond Utopia

Even the Garden of Eden had its snake and doubtless a few thorns and weeds as well. Nor was growing up in utopia and attending the Organic School without a few of its own thorns. Students venturing forth into the world beyond Fairhope often admit experiencing a rude awakening. They frequently found themselves prepared for a world which did not exist outside of utopia. It was a world which routinely measured, tested and quantified success. Not only were evaluation and competition out there but not a few instances of "arrested development," including all
of the insincerity, fear and pressure that Mrs. Johnson found so odious. And moral choices took on a different tone than those taught in the Organic School. In short, Organic students found they valued much of what the rest of the world considered irrelevant.

College was one of the first arenas requiring extensive re-adjustment. The Johnson-Dewey notion that all education was life and growth itself, not just preparation for life, ran counter to the prevailing view of education. College, students found, was preparation with a vengeance, with systems and bureaucracies the modus operandi. It is generally believed that the number of Organic students attending colleges and universities, including women, was higher than average, but there is no way of knowing since contacts with alumni have been lost and a fair number of those who attended the school, at times as many as a third, were out-of-state boarders. Of the alumni remaining in Fairhope, some claim they encountered no problems at all but most freely admit that they did. Eleanor Coutant Nichols remembered that some Organic School graduates did well in college but candidly admitted that "A number of them tried it and came home again--didn't do good" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990). Walter Hedden remembered his freshman placement test at a small eastern university as a "shocking experience," adding that "this was the very first written examination I had ever
seen and it was really an experience to go through." He had further problems with mathematics, as did many other graduates, but was able to adapt and complete a bachelor's degree in ceramic engineering. Hector Sutherland also found himself handicapped in that he "really did not understand the techniques of taking a test, the techniques of examinations. . . . But I pretty soon caught on to the system" (Interview 2 Mar. 1992). There were many similar stories told by alumni who, while they managed to persevere and succeed, found the first year or two of college rough going. And the Mayhew and Edwards' account indicates that Dewey's Laboratory School students suffered the same rude awakening to the larger society as did Organic School students (439).

The issue of cheating quite naturally never arose in the school where one learned for the love of learning, not for mere grades. Once in college, however, several students sometimes found their honesty misunderstood. One of Paul Gaston's first experiences in college is a case in point. He had missed the initial class of one course, was late for the next and found the teacher, unbeknown to him, was giving a test. Not knowing the answer to her question, he leaned over and got it from another classmate and was promptly rebuked by the teacher who accused him of cheating. When he explained his circumstances, the teacher asked did he not know it was a test and did he not
know he was cheating? The culprit ingenuously responded "Cheat? What do you mean cheat?" Gaston describes the experience as "a lovely affirmation" of the kind of teaching he had in the Organic School (Interview 28 Aug. 1993).

Not only did Organic students have some naïveté to overcome, but there were other doubts and difficulties from minor to serious. They found they had to learn some basic skills already familiar to others, for example how to take notes during lectures and how to study for exams where open books were not acceptable. And Claire Totten Gray admitted that having no grades left her not knowing where she stood: "It made me feel a little insecure that maybe I wasn't very bright" (Interview 30 Dec. 1993).

Mrs. Johnson was apt to boast that her students had "almost without exception fulfilled her hopes of leading happy, well-adjusted lives" and that neither a student or teacher had suffered a nervous breakdown (New York Times 27 Mar. 1932). But that was not true for at least two students.¹²¹ And it is known that Mrs. Johnson's own son, Clifford Ernest, committed suicide in his later years, but why he did so is open to conjecture since he

¹²¹ A Johnson quote in the New York Times claimed, "We have never had a nervous breakdown in a pupil or a teacher" (27 Mar. 1932). The names of two pupils who did are withheld.
rarely returned to the town where he grew up even during his mother’s lifetime.

As the grandson of E. B. Gaston and an Organic student for 15 years of his life, Paul Gaston may be considered the quintessential Fairhoper. He describes his own resolution of the tensions and contradictions of the utopian experience with rare insight:

There is a down side of growing up in utopia. I feel that I grew up in sort of ideal circumstances. I grew up in a community where I felt nurtured and supported. I grew up in a school that I absolutely adored and I loved the sports. I loved the art work. I loved the classes. I liked the people and I believed I was in a special place--that I was in a school that had ideas that, if the rest of the world followed we’d be better off. . . . But when I got out in the world and expected everybody to accept me . . . I found people who were competitive, who were threatened. . . . I’ve gone through periods of confusion. I’ve come through it all, but it has been a struggle. (Interview 28 Aug. 1993)

Nevertheless, the same Paul Gaston remembered his Organic School years as "glorious years" and most, if not all, of his peers would agree. Johnson’s "messianic fervor" as Graham called it, lives in her students, affirmed in the daily lives and conversation of her students after many decades. Studies, ideas, teachers and quotations are just as present in their lives as their early craft work is present in their homes. Mrs. Johnson’s many maxims and slogans--"meeting the situation," "not what we know but how we grow"--the body, mind and spirit motif and verses such as the assembly
prayer and other verses have become a religion of sorts. Eleanor Coutant Nichols remarked that "everyone [who] went to that school felt her influence in after life" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990). And Dorothy Beiser Cain said, "There's seldom a day that passes without a memory from that time coming to mind. . . . I have no doubt or question that my four years at the Organic School were the most impressive and impressionable days of my life" (Interview 11-12 May 1993). Lyman Hedden spoke of learning what he learned "completely, fully, without worrying about what the other people around me were doing. I carried that philosophy with me right through my life" (Interview Mar. 1989). Lyman's sister, Gladys Hedden Hayes, has a particular Johnson quote that she too has carried with her throughout the years. She was a shy child from a large family whom Mrs. Johnson put at ease with a quotation from Edwin Markham's The Prophet: "He drew a circle that shut me out. Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win. We drew a circle and drew him in." "She would quote that," said Gladys, "and it meant a lot to me because I felt that I was included where I felt isolated more of the time."122

122 Gladys Hedden Hayes attended Eureka College in Eureka, Illinois, where she received her BA in Elementary Education after which she taught school for 27 years in Illinois, finally retiring in Fairhope as did many of her contemporaries. Her comments here are from a videotaped interview (14 Apr. 1994).
Reuben Rockwell, 98 years old when he was interviewed, said of his education at the Organic School: "Well, it's hard to define but it seemed like it was more, well, maybe more natural. I don't know. It relates itself to life. Almost every aspect of it is related or affected by life itself."\(^{123}\)

Did the school provide the right "conditions" for growth and did students become happy, socially responsible and morally upright are questions best judged by former students, and critics are hard to find. Suzanne Gilmore is a second generation Organic School graduate, the daughter of Helene Beiser Hunter. Suzanne studied early childhood education at Auburn and worked with disadvantaged children in eight states from 1974 until 1986. She has this to say:

One of the things that has been so good for me in my life is that it wasn't reading, writing and arithmetic. There was so much more to learning and education than just that. We got the chance to develop and grow through our music, through our art, through understanding each other and a tremendous deep appreciation for nature which I carry close to my heart to this very day because our classrooms were out of doors—even though we were studying English or studying poetry, we were also studying what was

\(^{123}\) The videotaped interview with Reuben Rockwell is on file at the Marietta Johnson Museum (20 May 1991). Reuben was one of the early settlers in Fairhope. The interview was videotaped when Reuben was about 98 years of age. His mental acumen is clearly evident in the interview. He worked as a farmer, a theater owner-operator and a railroad man. Reuben passed away in Fairhope in April of 1994 at nearly 101 years of age.
going on in our environment . . . that was very special--very special. (Interview 30 Dec. 1991)

Another interesting observation, perhaps more objective in that it comes from an "outsider," is given in Margaret Mead's autobiographical Blackberry Winter where she describes the reaction of her two younger sisters to the school in Fairhope:

Priscilla did not take to the program of "organic" freedom and soon rebelled. She insisted, "I am not organic and I want to go to a school where you learn something." So she was allowed to return to Philadelphia and go to school at Friends Central. She found it hard going but she did not complain: "You aren't meant to like school," she said, "and I am learning something." In 1928 she graduated with special honors.

Elizabeth, however, stayed on at Fairhope. . . . At Fairhope she learned practically nothing at all--except how to teach, how to waken children to enthusiasm, and how to treat each individual as a person. This she has carried through her life with her own gifted children, with the other children on the block where she lived in Greenwich Village, and with all her later pupils--crippled children, mothers at Vassar Summer Institutes, old ladies gathered in an experimental old-age group at Cold Spring and the terribly deprived children in Harlem high schools. (66)

The line of demarcation between traditional schooling and organic schooling is clearly drawn in these statements. And the message of organic education could not have been more clearly and eloquently stated than Margaret Mead has done in describing the experiences of

124 Margaret Mead's sister Elizabeth graduated from the Organic School in 1927. She and her sister Priscilla were brought to the Organic School by their grandmother (Blackberry Winter 66).
her two sisters. Whether organic education made a valid contribution to pedagogy and what the real purpose of education should be is left to each individual to determine.
Overview

Marietta Johnson was not inclined to provincialism. Her dream was a large one that envisioned no less than an educational movement on a national scale modeled after the Fairhope experiment. She did not condone the restriction of children and she did not restrict herself. She saw the whole nation as her prospective schoolroom. And because the organic principle was an idea rather than a doctrine or a system, its message had to be breathed in through inspiration. And Marietta Johnson's deep conviction combined with her personal magnetism made her the perfect medium for the message. Therefore, once her Fairhope experiment was firmly in place and had been favorably introduced to the public by the Deweys, she began to spread her new "gospel" of organic education to an eager world. There is plenty of evidence to support the claim that Johnson traveled more miles and delivered more lectures supporting educational reform than any other progressive reformer (Zappone 1). But organic education was not the only good word she was spreading. Along with her lectures on educational reform, Johnson was the best promoter of Fairhope and the single tax experiment that Ernest B. Gaston could have hoped for. Paul Gaston rightly credits Johnson with giving Fairhope "a dimension
and a destiny" that his grandfather had not imagined when he drew up the plans for his model community, adding that "much of its fame radiated from what she created there" (66).

Crusader, missionary and zealot are the terms most often used by historians when describing Marietta Johnson. And she was all of these. But she was not a religious zealot; she was, rather, a missionary for children. And she was deeply convicted of the immense importance of her cause. If others believed that religion or science would save the world, she believed that education would be its savior, and progressive audiences were receptive to her message. Furthermore, her own earnestness and conviction inspired many others who followed in her footsteps.¹²⁵

Many of the women who went into the field to establish and teach in progressive schools had caught their missionary

¹²⁵ Caroline Pratt, Margaret Naumburg, Elisabeth Irwin, Lillian Rifkin Blumenfeld and Grace Rotzel had all spent time either in Johnson's teacher training course or under her tutelage in either Greenwich or Fairhope. Marietta Johnson's name often appears in books written by these women and others whom she influenced. See, for example, Caroline Pratt's I Learn From Children (57). See also Agnes DeLima's The Little Red School House (5) and Our Enemy the Child (37, 124); Elisabeth A. Irwin's Fitting the School to the Child (viii); Grace Rotzel's The School in Rose Valley ( ix, 4); Lillian Rifkin Blumenfeld's Consider the Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers (Dedication, 2-7); and Lucy Sprague Mitchell's Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself (457, 575). Paul Avrich's The Modern School Movement points to the Organic School as the immediate precursor of the American Modern Schools, some 32 libertarian, or so-called "worker's" schools, located throughout the country (excluding the deep south) (56-7).
fervor from this educational maverick, either in her teacher training course or through teaching in her school. Incidental to spreading the word on behalf of children, the indefatigable Johnson was also founding and assisting in the founding of satellite schools from one end of the country to the other. And as the organic word spread, the world also came to her Fairhope door. Young people from every corner of the country and some from abroad made their way to her school and Fairhope became a mecca for visitors to the school and others eager to attend Mrs. Johnson's annual Winter Course. Organic alumni remember well the cosmopolitan flavor of their school. Fairhope was the center, though not the circumference, of Marietta Pierce Johnson's community. Her canvas was a large one.

Early Travels

Even before Dewey visited the Fairhope school in 1913, its founder had spread her wings beyond Fairhope, inspiring, founding and assisting in the founding of other satellite schools across the entire country from the east to the west, from New York to California. The most significant of these satellite schools would be the Edgewood School in Greenwich, Connecticut, which was founded by an altogether fortuitous accident. As she describes the event in Thirty Years, she had been invited to address a meeting of the Mothers' Congress in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. It was only after she was
underway on her train trip from Mobile to the east that she discovered she had rushed off without any cash. She tried in vain throughout the trip to find someone who would cash her check. Just before her arrival in Washington where she was to change trains for Williamsport, a businessman of Greenwich and New York overheard Mrs. Johnson explaining her dilemma to the conductor. Not only did the kindly gentleman come to her aid by cashing her check, but he insisted on buying her ticket to Williamsport and even invited her to breakfast. Having not eaten since she left home, Mrs. Johnson was happy to accept. As W. J. Hoggson and Marietta Johnson talked of her school and the principles upon which it was founded, the influential northerner fell victim to the Johnson mystique and for the rest of his life he remained one of her loyal supporters. In Thirty Years, she wrote gratefully of his generosity: "He made me believe for the first time in my life that it is possible for a businessman to be a Christian" (38). Johnson's socialist background appears to have created some mistrust of a businessman's motives.

126 W. J. Hoggson visited Fairhope at least twice. One of those occasions was observed in 1922 by the Courier: "Mrs. M. L. Johnson got home a few days ago and was joined here on Tuesday by Mr. W. J. Hoggson, of New York and Greenwich, Conn., who has been so ardent a friend of her and her educational methods as well as of Fairhope for many years" (12 May 1922).
But of all Mr. Hoggson's generosity to Mrs. Johnson, his best gift was that of inviting her to speak to a gathering at his home. The invitation set off a chain of events that would bring John Dewey to Fairhope, ensure a dependable source of financial support for the Fairhope school and launch her most important satellite school. It was at Mr. Hoggson's home that Marietta Johnson met Mrs. Charles Lanier, the daughter-in-law of poet Sidney Lanier and the woman who not only made the Greenwich school possible but who also introduced her to the social elite of Greenwich. And May Lanier had just started a school on the nearby Lanier estate which later became Marietta Johnson's Edgewood School, the school where Hazele Payne taught the Italians and "those poor little rich children" and where many women who later achieved prominence in progressive education were taught and inspired by Marietta Johnson (Brown xiv).127

Very shortly after the July 1913 article in the New York Times, a group of Greenwich women, then calling themselves "The United Workers of Greenwich," invited Marietta Johnson to come up from Fairhope and conduct a summer demonstration school. Always the crusader, Mrs. Johnson rarely refused a pulpit where she might spread the

127 May Lanier's Little School in the Woods, Greenwich, was succeeded by her Havemeyer School and then by the Edgewood School (Beck, "Progressive Education and Christian Socialism" 41).
gospel and was only too happy to oblige. And the publicity continued to flow. Later in July, another Times article reported that she was giving informal talks to Greenwich mothers and teachers on "the problems of fear and the dawning of sex" and their children were observed "rolling and tumbling around like so many puppies" on the school grounds ("New Ideas" 27 July 1913). The "informal talks" eventuated in an institution which endured for close to twenty years.\(^{128}\) The gentility of Greenwich embraced Mrs. Johnson's new ideas on education just as wholeheartedly as the common folk of Fairhope and quickly formed a "Fairhope League" with the express purpose of "supporting and developing the Organic School and of assisting in introducing the principles of the Fairhope Idea in the general education process."\(^{129}\) The League supported the activities of the Summer School at Greenwich, the Winter Course at Fairhope and became a reliable source of funds for the Fairhope Organic School.

\(^{128}\) For an interesting first-person account of the Summer School, see " Impressions of a student at the Fairhope Summer School" by Madalene D. Barnum. Barnum's account was published in the journal Progressive Education in 1931 (602-4). The last Courier reference to the Greenwich Summer School located by this writer was in the August 14, 1930 edition.

\(^{129}\) The quote used here is from a short history of the League in a booklet published by the Fairhope Educational Foundation in 1926. The title of the booklet is "The Fairhope Idea in Education" and its author is named as Marietta Johnson. The Fairhope League was renamed The Fairhope Educational Foundation in 1920 and became incorporated in the State of New York in 1924.
As proof that their interest lay in the selfless furtherance of a worthy cause, $1200 of the $1400 realized as a result of their first fund-raising effort was promptly mailed to the Fairhope school to "aid the work of Organic education" (Courier 15 Aug. 1913). The Fairhope League boasted 215 members by the end of the 1920's, half of whom lived in Greenwich and New York (P. Gaston, Women 109). Johnson's Greenwich Summer School became a yearly event that appears to have continued at least through 1931, outlasting her association with Edgewood School by several years.

Though the easterners would have preferred that she give up her school in Fairhope and devote all of her time to the one in Greenwich, Johnson would not. She believed that the simple environment of Fairhope and the fact that no tuition was charged to the people of the vicinity gave her the freedom she needed to work out her idea (Thirty Years 46). But the affluent women who made up the Fairhope League, later named the Fairhope Educational Foundation, were never deterred (Courier 11 Aug. 1916). They remained a source of financial support and encouragement for Johnson's work not only in Greenwich but in Fairhope well into the depression years of the 1930's (P. Gaston, Women 111). In fact, without May Lanier and the Greenwich women, the Fairhope School might not have continued to exist. A 1918 Courier plainly stated that
the school's financial support "has come chiefly from the North thru the 'Fairhope League' organized for that purpose" (7 June 1918). The Fairhope school was to remain financially strapped throughout its founder's lifetime with the result that Johnson was rarely compensated for her services there. But as directress of the Edgewood School, she did receive a salary that enabled her to work in the Fairhope school without compensation (Thirty Years 41). Even more important, she made influential contacts through the Greenwich women that resulted in lecture invitations which garnered more funds to keep her flagship school solvent (Thirty Years 46).

In later years, Johnson wrote that conducting two schools so far apart was "fraught with difficulties" and the responsibility would have been overwhelming had it not been for May Lanier: "It was the finest example of disinterested service, continued over many years, I have ever known" (Thirty Years 46). A warm friendship existed between the two throughout Johnson's lifetime and Johnson dedicated her first book, Youth in a World of Men, to her friend May Lanier. No group of women were more loyal to Marietta Johnson than May Lanier and the women of Greenwich. They might have been half a world apart economically, culturally and geographically from the women of Fairhope, but they became kindred spirits in their devotion to an obscure idea that had taken root on the
shores of Mobile Bay. Men such as Dewey, Fels and Henry Ford would make grand gestures on behalf of the organic idea, but it was the network of Greenwich and Fairhope women who stayed the course working quietly behind the scenes throughout many years to support Marietta Johnson and what they often referred to as her "Fairhope idea in education."

Even before Frank Johnson's death in 1919, his wife's lecture tours and the Edgewood School were demanding much of her time. As early as 1916, it was rumored that she would make Greenwich her headquarters (Courier 11 Aug. 1916). By the end of 1919, her husband and son were no longer in Fairhope to draw her back. Clifford Ernest had left Fairhope soon after graduating in 1919.\textsuperscript{130} Frank Johnson had first become ill in spring of the same year and had died in September. Very soon, the family's home on Magnolia Street was sold and the Courier found itself compelled to reassure Fairhopers not to "take this as meaning that Mrs. Johnson is to permanently sever her connections with Fairhope" (26 Sept. 1919). By 1920, finances in the Fairhope school had worsened to the point that much of her time was spent in the east raising funds as well as overseeing the Edgewood School and other

\begin{footnotes}
\item Clifford Ernest appears to have entered the University of Minnesota in the Fall of 1920 (Courier 11 Mar. 1921). He later married and engaged in the real estate business in New Jersey (Interview, Dorothy Beiser Cain 11-12 May 1993).
\end{footnotes}
satellite schools there. *Courier* accounts of Mrs. Johnson's activities were now infrequent and when they did appear, they referred to Johnson as being on a "visit." Fairhopers became positively alarmed. It was rumored once again that the school would close and the wealthy easterners were wondering if Fairhopers were doing their fair share to keep it open. A home-town fund-raising campaign was hastily arranged and the *Courier* sternly reminded the single taxers that "The people [the school] brings to the town and the money they spend here . . . are worth many thousands of dollars to us annually" (6 Aug. 1920). Fairhope was suddenly seized with concern for its most prominent citizen. Very shortly, a southern version of the Fairhope Educational Foundation was organized with the expressed intention of relieving Mrs. Johnson from "too heavy a burden" (*Courier* 6 Aug. 1920). The waters were pacified for the time being, the school opened as usual and presumably visitors continued to visit and spend their money in Fairhope.132

131 A Fairhope League South had been formed in 1915 to "support the Fairhope school and extend the idea of Organic Education" (*Courier* 12 Feb. 1915). A sense of urgency seemed lacking, however. In June 1915, a League financial report stated that $195 had been raised and $182.50 dispensed (*Courier* 18 June 1915). In the same *Courier*, the financial report of the Organic School showed a quarterly budget of approximately $7400.

132 The Fairhope Educational Foundation appears to have remained active only a short period of time. There followed a series of Fairhope groups with the express purpose of supporting the Fairhope Organic School,
The Courier editor, single taxer though he was, never showed any reluctance to advertise the value of the Organic School to Fairhope's economy. In 1928, an article entitled "The Economic Importance of Organic School to Fairhope" stated that the school had brought 30 families to Fairhope who, it was estimated, spent at least $150 per month. Added to the $25,000 per year spent by the school itself in Fairhope, the Courier guessed that the school brought at least $55,000 annually to the town (5 Apr. 1928).

Fairhope economics aside, Johnson's orbit of influence was growing rapidly. Speaking engagements multiplied, her lecture circuit widened and satellite schools were popping up here and there around the country. A roster of 15 satellite schools founded by Johnson from 1907 into the early 1930's is posted on the walls of the Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope. Nine of these were located in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York, three in Indiana, Missouri and Wisconsin and three others in the western states of Arizona, California and Oregon. The museum list, which is given in the attached Appendix, is however. For example, when the school home was built, the community set up a large thermometer in the middle of main street which "measured their loyalty in terms of dollars given" (Courier 2 Dec. 1937). There were also occasional efforts to establish a sustaining fund as in 1917 when the Fairhope League South made an unsuccessful attempt to secure pledges of $10,000 per year for ten years (Courier 2 Mar. 1917).
somewhat conjectural with respect to the degree of Johnson's involvement and authorship. Rugg and Shumaker's *The Child-Centered School* and Agnes DeLima's *Our Enemy the Child* have included lists of experimental progressive schools and their founders which seem to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Museum list. But whether Johnson founded all of the 15 schools herself or not, it is likely that she had a hand in founding all 15 and even a few more. Paul Avrich, as may be recalled, referenced Johnson's school as the "precursor" of Flexner's Modern Schools and there is no doubt that she inspired or assisted in the founding of many schools. Many of the schools, such as the Case's Hood River School in Oregon, were authored by teachers whom she had taught and inspired. Comments made by Grace Rotzel, Agnes DeLima and

She founded some of the schools, personally directed some and merely inspired others. In addition to the Edgewood School, she was very closely involved over a period of years with the Manhasset Bay School in Port Washington, Long Island and the Fairhope School of Montclair, New Jersey. A Rugg and Shumaker list corroborates Mrs. Johnson's founding of The Marietta Johnson School in Phoenix, Arizona, the Caldwell Country Day School in Caldwell, New Jersey, the Manhasset Bay School in Port Washington, Long Island, and, of course, the Edgewood and Fairhope schools. DeLima attributes the founding of both the Edgewood School and the Brookside School (also known as the Fairhope School), in Montclair, New Jersey, to the Fairhope League. The Unquowa School, the Manumit School, the Sunset Hill School and the Orchard School are also recognized by Rugg and Shumaker or by DeLima but without naming Johnson as the founder. (*The Child-Centered School* 48-53; *Our Enemy the Child* 263-271). For further information, see the attached Appendix and Paul Gaston's roster of schools in *Women of Fair Hope* (132).
Caroline Pratt are both instructive and typical. Before founding her own "School in Rose Valley," Grace Rotzel taught for five years in Fairhope and it was there that she, "like many others, acquired the inspiration and confidence I needed for carrying on the ideas in subsequent teaching" (Rotzel, Introduction viii). Agnes DeLima acknowledges a debt to Marietta Johnson for "her ideas on growth and her insistence that education must be related to the needs of growing children" (The Little Red School House 5). In I Learn From Children, Caroline Pratt credits Johnson with stirring up her own (Pratt's) thinking and throwing the entire educational world into "argumentative confusion" (57). And another prominent authority on progressive education, Margaret Naumburg, found the Montessori method which she had studied with Montessori herself "dull and unimaginative" while she determined to open a school of her own after a summer session with Johnson (Cremin 211). All of Johnson's satellite schools were private schools, but some of the Johnson students also carried the organic word into the public schools. A Fairhope woman by the name of Celina Minnich, for example, taught the organic way in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, public schools and Johnson sometimes included visits to Baton Rouge on her itinerary (Courier 31 Dec. 1920).
From 1913 until 1927, an increasing portion of Johnson's time was devoted to the Greenwich school. And by 1921, Fairhope's notable citizen was rarely present except for special occasions such as graduation, the Christmas holidays, her six week Winter Course and so on. Concern surfaced once again among Fairhopers that Mrs. Johnson would, in fact, desert their ranks and make Greenwich her center of operations. But their fears proved groundless when, in the late 1920's, she reclaimed Fairhope as her home base. An undated letter soliciting lecture engagements and signed by Johnson's secretary, Esther Pierce Frederick, announced cryptically that "Marietta Johnson's relationship to the Edgewood School was definitely severed in April 1927" (Marietta Johnson Scrapbook).\(^{134}\) The "definitely severed" wording suggests an unhappy climax and Johnson students believe that such was the case. Eleanor Coutant Williams believes that Johnson lost the school when a "very sagacious" young woman "managed to crowd Aunt Mettie out and take the school over" (Interview 30 Sept. 1990).

\(^{134}\) The word "severed" suggests violent separation but no explanation of the event is offered in the letter. Rugg and Shumaker also use the word "severed" in their 1928 book, stating that "Mrs. Johnson's connections with the Edgewood School are now severed" (The Child-Centered School 49n). Paul Gaston quotes from a letter written by Mrs. Johnson in the summer of 1931 concerning "the poor enrollment at Greenwich" (1984, 109). The "poor enrollment" probably referred to the Greenwich Summer School, which was active into the 1930's, and not the Edgewood School.
The Winter Course

Just as Marietta Johnson took the organic message to the world, she drew the world into her own circle, inviting all who would to share the Fairhope experience. Whether it was the balmy climate of Mobile Bay or the Johnson charisma that drew them, the world made its way to Fairhope's door. The official School Home Guest Book 1923-1937 registered 15 visitors in 1923, while 337 guests from dozens of states and a few foreign countries flocked to the little school on Mobile Bay in 1937. In 1924, for example, there were visitors from 30 cities in 17 states. Johnson's crusading spirit recognized no limitations though her schedule of activities might have exhausted a less hardy soul.

In 1921, a special Winter Course was inaugurated which showcased Johnson's talents to great advantage in her own home town. The Winter Course was a Fairhope version of Johnson's Greenwich Summer School which had been in place since 1913. It would become one of the most popular social and cultural events of the Fairhope Community.\footnote{Marietta Johnson states that the Winter Course began in 1921 and Paul Gaston also gives 1921 as the date (Thirty Years 40; Women 104). This writer found no Courier coverage of the event until January of 1922 (20 Jan. 1922; 27 Jan. 1922).} The course was launched during the period of time when it was feared that Johnson would abandon Fairhope in favor of the east. It was quickly and
vigorously advertised in the Fairhope Courier, causing one to suspect that the Fairhopers may have promoted it for the express purpose of luring their itinerant citizen back into their midst. The course was described by the New York Times as a "six week training course for parents, teachers and social workers in arts and crafts, manual training, folk dancing, singing and nature study," the purpose of which was to help adults prepare a "fit environment" for childhood (26 Apr. 1925). But in reality, the Winter Course also attracted educators, residents and wintering visitors, all of whom were exposed to readings and discussions on the new education and the new psychology. A newspaper account of unknown origin spoke in glowing terms of one Johnson lecture as a "Clear, coherent, convincing, thought-provoking . . . presentation which was roundly applauded by the 250 adult listeners" (Scrap Book 17 Mar. 1932). A typical program included as many as two lectures each day by the now-famous educator.

Visitors also took part in the regular Wednesday community luncheons at Comings Hall, another regular community event founded and sponsored by Mrs. Johnson (Courier 2 Feb. 1924). The community luncheons often featured talks by interesting visitors and local talent as well as by Mrs. Johnson. As early as 1922, 68 pupils had registered for the Winter Course and by 1930, the Courier
reported that students had arrived from 31 states as well as Canada and South Africa (Courier 18 Jan. 1922; 16 Jan. 1930). A token entry fee was charged, generating a small but steady income for the school. The benefits in goodwill that were generated can scarcely be calculated, however. And, of course, the Fairhope merchants also benefitted quite handsomely as the Winter Course became an increasingly popular cultural event in the area. Whether in the east on a lecture tour or supervising one of her schools, Johnson faithfully returned for six weeks every February to conduct her Fairhope Winter Course. Mrs. Johnson's health was failing by the summer of 1937 and the session in that year appears to have been her last.

**On the Road**

At the end of the twenties, reviewing *Youth in a World of Men* for *The Survey*, Agnes DeLima described Marietta Johnson as a "seasoned rebel" who had "carried [her] message by word of mouth from one end of the country to the other." Though DeLima expressed serious doubts about Johnson's writing ability, she confirmed that her friend was "Possessed also of a real gift for oratory and a rich and overflowing personality," a fact which was already apparent to those who knew her. When DeLima wrote her 1929 critique, Johnson was at the zenith of her career, very much a "seasoned rebel" whose message had captivated thousands on two continents. And it will be
remembered that another friend had very early recognized Johnson's ability to sway an audience though Marie Howland had always been critical of her friend's rapid-fire delivery.

Once her school was underway, even before it had been established on a sound footing, Johnson took to the road to spread her message to a waiting world. Historians Graham and Cremin, without ever having met Johnson, have managed to grasp the essence of her personality. They speak of her "messianic fervor," her "crusading spirit" and her "missionary zeal." These epitaphs were well-earned. Johnson was, first and foremost, an inspired teacher who knew how to capture the imagination of her pupils. She was possessed of a personal magnetism which at once charmed and convinced--even mesmerized--her audiences. The most compelling evidence in support of that claim is the fact that her audiences commonly reached for their wallets and pocketbooks and gave generously to support what was a very esoteric experiment being conducted in a school which they might never see located in a tiny southern village they had never heard of.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford and their son Edsel and his wife were among those in the audience at one of Johnson's lectures in 1922. After hearing her lecture, Mrs. Henry Ford offered the speaker $12,000 to give a series of 12 more of the same in the Detroit area and the Edsel Fords
also made their own contribution (Alyea and Alyea 157; Thirty Years 47; Courier 14 Apr. 1922, 8 Dec. 1922).\footnote{In Thirty Years, Mrs. Johnson writes that she unabashedly suggested a million dollars when the Fords offered to give a "large" contribution to her work (47).}

Even in the early 1930's, as the country suffered most severely from the ravages of the depression, Marietta Johnson continued to come home from lecture tours with money. Former student George Dubrock remembers it well: "People [were] only earning 50 cents a day in those days. . . . So, when she could go off and make a talk and come home with . . . enough to run the school a year or two you were really doing excellent" (Interview 17 Apr. 1991).\footnote{That there was ever funding to run the school for more than one year at a time is very doubtful. But the very fact that Mrs. Johnson was able to keep the school solvent merely by talking to people about educating children must have seemed an immense accomplishment during the Great Depression.}

Her lectures garnered rave reviews throughout the country as attested by many newspaper articles in her personal Scrap Book. Yet the few Johnson lectures still extant reveal nothing extraordinary in the way of content. As is often the case with charismatic speakers and preachers, it appears to have been Johnson's delivery which set her audiences on fire. Pressed to think of a word which describes it, her contemporaries will most often speak of her "presence" or sometimes her "charisma." She was not a skilled orator, she simply spoke from the heart. She
valued honesty and sincerity in her students and her own sincerity was apparent when she spoke. Though her students use the term "heavy-set" when referring to Johnson, she had a dignified bearing which commanded the respect of her audiences. Claire Totten Gray said, "She had a presence. She had a great posture and she always stood so erect" (Interview 30 Dec. 1993). And all agree that Johnson was possessed of enormous energy, optimism, enthusiasm and a sense of humor, all of which captivated and delighted her audiences. Helene Beiser Hunter's description of a Johnson performance at the school assembly illustrates the point and helps us visualize something of the Johnson dynamism:

I can remember her leading us in song at those assemblies and some of the songs that she would sing. . . . "There were three buzzing bumblebees, three buzzing bumblebees that buzzed around, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom. With a zoom, zoom here and a zoom, zoom, zoom there and a zoom, zoom, everywhere." And she--I can see her up there just doing like this [waving her arms]. She was terrific. (Interview 7 Apr. 1994).

As early as 1909, only two years after the founding of her school, Johnson was lecturing outside of Fairhope. In 1910, the Courier began to note her trips to the east. In September of 1910, Lydia Comings asked Johnson to replace her as a speaker at the Domestic Science Congress in New York City's Madison Square Garden. That auspicious engagement may well have sealed Johnson's fate as Fairhope's missionary to the world (Courier 16 Sept. 1910;
L. Comings, "An Intimate History" 4-5). By 1913, the Courier reported three trips to the east with at least 10 cities and a host of speaking engagements on her itinerary. On one of these, an extended trip of two months, she is reported to have returned "happy in the practical assurance . . . of support which will insure the maintenance of the Fairhope school" (Courier 11 Apr. 1913). Among those who attended her lectures on that successful trip were Nathan Oppenheim, John Dewey, Edwin Markham and the new first lady, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, who promptly invited Marietta Johnson to call her to discuss organic education (Courier 17 Jan. 1913; 11 Apr. 1913). In the early years, her most frequent and possibly her most sympathetic audiences were single tax groups in the northeast, such as the Manhattan Single Tax Club and the Woman's Henry George Club, both in New York City.

From 1914 through 1919, the after-affects of the Dewey visit were capitalized upon as Johnson gave 38 major public addresses in the east including in her itinerary gatherings at Carnegie Hall and prestigious audiences at Columbia Teachers College, the Colony Club in New York, the Woman's City Club in Boston and the Congressional Club in Washington. In May of 1914, she lectured in Washington, D.C., at the request of the Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell (Courier 20 May 1914). Meanwhile, she was feted at dinners and receptions, one of the latter at the
Throughout the "roaring twenties," the itinerant evangelist was criss-crossing the United States, extending her boundaries well beyond the east to the southern and western states and especially to the midwestern states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Illinois, galvanizing a variety of audiences in an astonishing number of cities. She addressed mass assemblies of as many as 3000 people (Courier 19 Jan. 1923). And among those who heard her were the distinguished and affluent, such as the Fords, the John Randolph Hearsts, and many other notables including congressmen and governors. One woman who had heard Johnson lecture in Atlanta was moved to write Fairhopers about the "splendid impression" their fellow citizen had made, asking whether they realized "what an asset they have in this remarkable woman and in her school?" (Courier 29 Mar. 1928). In 1932, Fairhopers were thrilled when she was featured in a "talking newsreel" for Pathé news which appeared in theaters throughout the country (Courier 4 Feb. 1932, 11 Feb. 1932). It was quite a coup for a country school marm. In 1933, a Mobile Register editor wrote that the south was justly proud of its "celebrated . . . pioneer leader in progressive education" who was to speak at the Chicago World's Fair where Organic School folk dancers would also demonstrate
their English folk dances. Johnson, they said, would deliver three lectures on "A Quarter Century of Progress in Education" (Mobile Register 27 May 1933). And when she was not on the road, Johnson was busy addressing audiences in Mobile, or Daphne or Bay Minette, Alabama, or at home where Fairhoppers were "always happy to have her brilliant personality about" (Courier 3 June 1926).

But neither the demands on her time nor the acclaim she received prevented her from trekking to such out-of-the-way spots as Bozeman, Montana, for a series of three lectures or speaking to a small Unitarian Church group. One audience was no less worthy than another and no effort seemed to great to reach as many listeners as possible. Johnson was rarely idle, or "one to sit with hands folded" as a Courier reporter correctly surmised (Courier 10 Oct. 1929). If she had a few extra hours to spare in any location, she contacted local colleges, churches, schools, parent-teacher associations or whoever would hear her message offering to expound the gospel of the new education, or the organic idea or Fairhope and the single tax. This, of course, was in addition to founding and assisting in the founding of the satellite schools which were henceforth regularly included in her traveling itinerary.

She also conducted a series of summer schools in addition to the Greenwich Summer School. One summer
school was held in the Chicago area, one in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, in connection with the State Teachers College there; and another six-week summer course at Tufts University continued for several years (Courier 2 June 1932, 31 May 1928). It is well to remember that all of Johnson's travels were taking place in the first decades of the century when a train trip from Mobile to New York might well consume two or more days depending on the number of intermediate stations. It is mind-numbing to think of the tedious hours that Johnson must have spent on trains, not to mention the added hours on a boat traveling to and from Mobile where she boarded the train. Had jet flights been available, one can only imagine how many miles she might have covered and the number of engagements she might have filled.

During the free-wheeling twenties, the peripatetic missionary from Mobile Bay not only carried her message across the North American continent, but she also carried it across an ocean. Her European field extended to England, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Ireland. Many Europeans were attuned to the progressive message which, after all, had its philosophic roots in the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel. Though the Johnson message was among the most liberal one might hear in America, some Europeans were also engaged in their own ultra-liberal educational experiments. After visiting a
series of schools in Europe, the well-known Winnetka Schools educator, Carleton Washburne, observed in an interview for Collier's magazine that "even Marietta Johnson . . . perhaps the most courageous of all our educational nonconformers, never went as far as Hamburg" ("Give 'em Time and They'll Turn to Books" 13-14). And by 1924, Johnson's reputation as a radical educator was already known in Europe. When Washburne wrote a Swiss acquaintance asking what schools in Europe he should visit, the gentleman is reported to have replied "And you are coming to Europe to study modern schools when you have Marietta Johnson in your own country?" (Courier 4 Jan. 1924).

Johnson's first trip to Europe was occasioned by an invitation to speak at a Girl Scout Conference in Cambridge, England. While in England, she wrote Lydia Comings that not only had she spent a weekend at "Hinchinbroke," the estate of the Earl of Sandwich, but that she had "climbed a lamp post last week and got a glimpse of the Prince and other members of the Royal family" (Courier 19 May 1922; 21 July 1922). Johnson was 58 years old at the time and a woman of considerable proportions. Next, in 1925, she attended a conference of the National Education Fellowship in Heidelberg, Germany, as a delegate for the PEA for whom she was assigned to do "missionary work" (Graham, Arcady 42; Courier 6 Mar. 1925,
20 Mar. 1925). An August 17, 1925, program for the "Third International Pedagogical Conference" in Heidelberg includes an item announcing "Dr." Marietta Johnson's lecture on "Education in Life." Martin Buber of Germany and Professor Carl Jung of the University of Zurich were among those listed as speakers (Scrap Book of Marietta Johnson). The Heidelberg trip on behalf of the PEA was a *coup de grace* for the Alabama educator that would be memorialized by many and for all time, by the *Courier* in 1924 as well as by Lawrence Cremin in 1964. It was the crowning jewel of her career, and, together with her Oppenheim-inspired conversion, is rarely omitted from any discussion which includes Marietta Johnson. After the Heidelberg trip, her career apparently faded into oblivion, at least where historians of the progressive movement are concerned. Neither Cremin or Graham refer to her or her school again.

Johnson herself, quite unaware of her consignment to historical obscurity, remained vigorously active. In the summer of 1926, she spoke before an imposing assemblage of the International Educational Conference at Locarno, Switzerland. From that launching pad she was off to Denmark, where she declared herself "delighted" with the schools and where she found a "general acquaintance with Fairhope" (22 Sept. 1927). It was during her speaking engagement at the Chicago World's Fair that she was
extended an invitation to Dublin, Ireland, to address several sessions of the Fifth Biennial Conference of the World Federation of Educational Associations (Courier 29 June 1933, 31 Aug. 1933). But her own country was in the grips of a severe depression and the July-August 1933 conference would be her fourth and final speaking engagement in Europe.

Finding Support

Throughout the founder's lifetime, her school had very little in the way of a guaranteed income excepting that from the boarding home. So it fell to her not only to administer her school, but to finance it. There was seldom a crisis or even a worry to cast a shadow over the idyllic climate of utopia's school with the exception of the omnipresent fiscal woes and all other concerns paled in significance to those. Complications peculiar to Fairhope's environment only added to the dilemma. While many of her contemporaries had the perspicacity to launch their experiments in cities where both wealth and numbers could add to their support base, Johnson had, perhaps

---

138 The colony and later the city of Fairhope furnished electricity and water without charge during the Johnson years (Johnson, Thirty Years 48). According to Gale Rowe, all donations to the Organic School were ceased in 1970 as a result of legal questions that arose. He also maintains that rent (what the single-tax colony referred to as "full rental value") was never paid by the Organic School to the single tax colony but neither was the colony required to pay state taxes on the property since non-profit institutions were exempt (Interview 25 Apr. 1994).
naively, chosen a small, rural community instead. The choice made it necessary to broaden her financial base by enlisting the support of outsiders. Fairhope claimed 853 citizens in 1920, and though the population had nearly doubled by 1930, it was still only a small community of 1,549 persons in 1930 (H. G. Brown, et al., Land Value Taxation 112). In the middle of the same decade, the annual Organic School budget was slightly over $25,000 (Courier 21 Oct. 1926). It was a large-scale budget for a small-scale fiscal neighborhood. While Fairhopers may have been rich in spirit, they were not rich in material wealth. Putting that $25,000 figure into perspective, a man's suit might have cost about $20, a shirt $1.50 and a Chevrolet or Ford sedan about $700.

Moreover, just as all Fairhopers were not single taxers, all Fairhopers were not united in full support of the Organic School. Almost from the first, Fairhope had a public school (see page 84) supported by public funds in addition to the Organic School which was not a public school yet tuition-free to Fairhope students who attended. The Organic School received perquisites from the colony and municipality for many years in the form of free property rental and utilities. The colony council budget also reveals monthly payments, usually quite small, made to the school in some years for an undesignated purpose. Hints of tension surfaced from time to time between
supporters of the public school and supporters of the Organic School, mostly with respect to public funding, support and donations. For all of the above reasons and more, fund-raising became a daunting responsibility and eventually an all-consuming one for Marietta Johnson.

Though Johnson's books are variously criticized as discursive, vague and unscholarly, they do reveal something of their author. The chapter "Finding Support" in Thirty Years is a most poignant reminder of Marietta Johnson's struggle to finance her school. While the press, and Johnson herself, usually cloaked her struggle in cheerful optimism and self-confidence, this chapter is witness to her self-doubt and sometimes her despair. She writes in Thirty Years of the "many times when discouragement and despair seemed to brood over me" but spoke of coming through it all with a "greater faith in mankind" (36). Because she refused to make her school an income-producing business, its success was only achieved at the expense of Marietta Johnson's own labor and self-sacrifice:

I usually spent the entire day at school, then after my housework was finished I continued--sometimes far into the night--writing letters to secure support. I have never been able to commercialize the work--have never been able to develop it into an income bearing project (Thirty Years 36).

Like many other women, in her own time and since, Marietta Johnson was willing to give of herself and her labors
freely, but she was reluctant to demand their full 
monetary value.

In spite of all of her efforts, there was never an 
endowment or little in the way of continuing support and 
she speaks in *Thirty Years* of being condemned for not 
building such a supporting organization (37). Yet filling 
the immediate needs of the school demanded all of her 
time: "We have had to work so hard for the immediate 
necessity, we have had no time or strength to give to 
planning for the future. . . . We have literally lived 
from hand to mouth" (*Thirty Years* 37). While the *Courier* 
sketches out an exciting, even glamorous, life of travel 
for their illustrious school marm, the tale had its darker 
side: "I have spent many hours at the telephone booth 
trying to make appointments, hoping to get help. Many 
people could not see that education needed to change its 
direction" (*Thirty Years* 41). But Johnson possessed the 
buoyant spirit of a true progressive and rarely allowed 
herself the luxury of self-pity. After a 1932 Parent’s 
Round Table meeting addressing the unhappy subject of 
finances and amidst the throes of the Great Depression, it 
was reported that "Mrs. Johnson’s treatment of [finances] 
was in such a happy vein that her remarks were often 
punctuated with laughter and applause" (*Courier* 13 Oct. 
1932).
By 1920, the school was growing rapidly. Recurring financial crises notwithstanding, an auditorium had been completed on campus by the spring of that year. Boasting seating for 1200, a regulation size indoor basketball court, a movable platform for theatrical performances and even dressing rooms, it was a remarkably ambitious project for what was then a community of 853 citizens (Courier 31 Oct. 1919; 30 Apr. 1920). But Comings Hall, named appropriately after Johnson’s first benefactors Lydia J. and Samuel H. Comings, served the same purpose that the old magnolia tree in the waterfront park had served in earlier years. It became the new gathering spot in a community which liked nothing better than gathering. Folk dancing and ballroom dancing, sports events, the popular Wednesday noon luncheons, and the Johnson Winter Course and lectures all took place in Comings Hall. Comings Hall even housed the first Fairhope moving picture theatre with the School Improvement Association sharing 25 percent of the admissions (Courier 12 Jan. 1917).

By 1921, plans were underway to form a $25,000 stock company with shares to be sold at $100 for the construction of a boarding home on the ten acre school campus (Courier 13 May 1921). In September of 1921, the home was completed and it was announced that Johnson would make her residence there (Courier 30 Sept. 1921). Hazele Payne was to be the house mother and there would be 12
boarders from Indiana, Wisconsin, New York City, Texas, Washington, D.C., and one from Mobile, Alabama. And just as Dewey had predicted, the boarding home provided a stable source of income throughout the Johnson years. It was also the most plentiful source of income other than the Johnson lectures.

In reality, there had been boarders from the school's first day when Johnson arrived from Mississippi with two children besides her own. Not only did she gather money on her lecture tours but, like the pied piper, she gathered children whose parents had fallen under the spell of organic magic. Throughout her traveling years, it was not in the least unusual for the Courier to announce that Mrs. Johnson had returned from a lecture tour with a child or two in tow. At first, boarders often stayed with the Johnsons, but as early as 1912 a "supervised boarding department" was officially announced. The full cost of board and room for a school term of eight months was given as $300 per child that year (Courier 20 July 1917, 20 Sept. 1912). In 1917, the "Home Department" was moved to a cottage called "The Anchorage," located on Fels Avenue west of the business district. At that time, parents of prospective boarders were reassured that the "best possible conditions will be provided" and that parents "need have no fear that their children will . . . have any
difficulty in entering higher institutions of learning as that has been thoroughly tested" (Courier 7 Sept. 1917).

In the latter years of the 1920's the school enrollment remained somewhere between 130 and 200. At the same time, the Organic School finance committee, composed of the secretary Esther Frederick and auditor C. A. Darrow, reported receipts of $25,290.15. Of that amount, $4,500 had come from the Fairhope Educational Foundation (North), $1,096 from the Winter Course, with $2,775 from donations. Board and tuition paid by boarders had produced $9,373 and $5,565 respectively. Together, the board and tuition totaled almost $15,000, or three-fifths of the total yearly receipts (Courier 21 Oct. 1926). Those years in the late 1920's saw the school at the height of its flower and its economic success. Then came the 1929 stock market crash. By 1932, although school enrollment was still increasing and nearing its limit of 250 students, income from boarders was sharply reduced (Courier 20 Oct. 1932). By 1934-1935, total enrollment figures from year to year are uncertain. Although the Courier often reported figures early in the school year, students appear to have arrived and departed rather frequently. In 1920, the Courier reported 150 students early in September, but in August of 1920, The New York Evening Post reported that school enrollment had grown to 240 in the 1919-1920 school year (21 Aug. 1920). In 1924 the school reported having 160 students. Even in the face of a threatened closure, there were 130 attendees in 1925 ("News of the Schools," Progressive Education 2: 49). By 1929, 211 pupils were reported to have enrolled early on in the school year (Courier 17 Oct. 1929).
school receipts had plunged to $9,654.61. Receipts from boarders had declined precipitously to $5612.29 (Courier 22 Nov. 1936). Donations remained steady at $2,752.91, the Winter Course garnered $191.82 and there were no further donations from the Fairhope League North. This ominous decline continued throughout the 1930’s.

The school was virtually never on sound financial ground even in its best years. Dorothy Beiser Cain recalled that it always existed "on a shoestring" and that its precarious financial condition was "very traumatic for the children" (Interview 11-12 May 1992). Rumors and announcements of the school’s imminent closure continued throughout Mrs. Johnson’s lifetime. In 1923, for example, a $6000 mortgage on the school home was called in but this time the Fairhope community rallied, raising $4500 to save their school, not to mention the increasing prosperity of their own businesses. In August of 1924, the Courier announced that the school would close. Then only a few weeks later, word was received from the traveling founder that it would open belatedly on September 15th (Courier 8 Aug. 1924, 5 Sept. 1924). Another closure was threatened in 1925 but again the school rallied.\(^{140}\) And once more, in 1932, Marietta Johnson issued an urgent appeal for

\(^{140}\) The threatened closure of 1925 was reported in "News of the Schools" in the journal of Progressive Education. The closure was warded off by a $10,000 loan without interest but the school buildings were held as security (2: 49).
funds via the Courier. Teachers' salaries had been reduced substantially that year, she announced, but "we still find ourselves with a very embarrassing deficit" for the previous year. But by 1933, the ever supportive New York Times was writing hopefully that through sacrifices made by teachers, volunteer services by residents and a "barter" arrangement with local merchants, Johnson had succeeded in keeping the school open. One loyal supporter was even doing the school laundry, according to the Times (2 Apr. 1923).

Though Mrs. Johnson strove mightily to support her school for over 30 years, its survival was virtually always in question. It was an unhappy irony that a woman who wanted more than anything else to spare her students from the pressures of life was never able to spare them from the fear that the school they loved might not open or that it would not have the money to continue. It was their greatest fear. Helene Beiser Hunter said, "That's the only fear because I never feared grades or what I looked like or how smart I was. I thought [school] was just wonderful" (Interview 7 Apr. 1994).

The Progressive Education Association

Marietta Johnson was already on her way to international repute when she became a co-founder in 1919 of the organization which propagated Progressive Education throughout the United States and Europe for over
four decades. For Johnson, The Progressive Education Association (PEA), was a dream come true. She had always wanted to establish an educational movement on a national scale modeled after her Fairhope experiment. Both Cremin and Robert Beck acknowledge Johnson as the "guiding spirit" behind the PEA (Cremin 153, 242-3; Beck, American Progressive Education 114). Kliebard also refers to the PEA as an organization "born in the mind of Marietta Johnson" (Kliebard 189; Cremin 242-3)).

Interestingly, she was the only leader of the early progressives who played a central role in its founding (Cremin 246).

As the story goes, Marietta Johnson approached Stanwood Cobb in 1918 with the idea of creating a national association to promulgate the ideas of "natural development" that were being carried out in her Fairhope school. Cobb and Johnson had become acquainted at a lecture which she gave in Baltimore. Already chafing at the old system, Cobb was then considering the possibility

141 Details of the PEA founding and Marietta Johnson's role in its founding are sometimes contradictory in the works consulted. For contrasting views, see Robert Holmes Beck, American Progressive Education, 1875-1930, 133-45; Patricia Albjerg Graham, Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe 17-38; Kleibard, The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958, 189-93; and Lawrence A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School 243-50.
of establishing an organic school of his own.\footnote{In 1919, at about the same time the PEA came into existence, Cobb did found his own private progressive school, the Chevy Chase Day School in Chevy Chase, Maryland (Cremin 278).}

Lawrence Cremin describes the event of the founding: "Mrs. Johnson, always the crusader, asked Cobb to form an educational association to back her work" (Cremin 242). Though Cobb was hesitant to form an association based upon one isolated experiment, his interest was piqued. Later, approached once again by Mrs. Johnson at one of her lectures in Baltimore, he agreed to establish an educational association devoted to promoting a variety of current "experiments" in education, and the Progressive Education Association was born (Cremin 242-3; Graham, *Arcady* 18-20).

On April 4, 1919, 100 persons gathered at the Washington, D. C., Public Library, officially launching the organization with an initial fund of 86 dollars representing one dollar memberships paid by most of those attending. According to Patricia Albjerg Graham's comprehensive and authoritative history of the association, Marietta Johnson was "on the dais" at this initial gathering (Graham, *Arcady* 17). Thereafter, as Cremin tells it, Marietta Johnson occasionally joined a small coterie of enthusiasts who met regularly at the Washington home of Mrs. Laura C. Williams during the
winter of 1918-19 to lay plans for the new association and to formulate a platform of principles which would guide it. Cobb would serve as its president from 1927 to 1930 but Johnson, perhaps owing to a strenuous lecture schedule and Fairhope's remoteness from Washington, never served as an officer. In 1937, however, the title of honorary vice-president of the PEA was bestowed upon her (Courier 25 Feb. 1937, 4 Mar. 1937).

Johnson's "body-mind-spirit" triad is articulated in the stated aim of the PEA, which was "the freest and fullest development of the individual, based upon the scientific study of his physical, mental, spiritual and social characteristics and needs" (Graham, Arcady 28). In 1920, the PEA officially adopted seven principles that were elaborated as follows:

1. Freedom to Develop Naturally
2. Interest the Motive of All Work
3. The Teacher a Guide, Not a Task-Master
4. Scientific Study of Pupil Development
5. Greater Attention to All That Affects the Child's Physical Development
6. Co-operation Between School and Home to Meet the Needs of Child-Life

The "enthusiasts" included the hostess, Mrs. Williams, and Stanwood Cobb; Eugene Randolph Smith, headmaster of the Park School in Baltimore; Anne E. George, directress of the Washington Montessori Schools; Hans Froelicher, a professor at Goucher College; May Libbey, a local kindergarten teacher; Mrs. A. J. Parsons, a Washington philanthropist; and Mrs. Milan V. Ayres, whose Washington school was modeled after Mrs. Johnson's Fairhope school (Cremin 240-3).
7. The Progressive School a Leader in Educational Movements

The official Seven Principles of the Progressive Education Association were supposedly a doctrinal synthesis of the ideas of Marietta Johnson and Eugene Randolph Smith although Marietta Johnson's hand is clearly evident in the first, second, third, fifth and sixth of the principles. Cremin posits Marietta Johnson and Eugene Randolph Smith as the formulators of the Seven Principles while Graham seems to refute the conclusion that Marietta Johnson was influential in their preparation. Graham bases her conclusion on the fact that the manifesto "avoids the tone of messianic fervor that sounds in Mrs. Johnson's Thirty Years With an Idea" (Cremin 243, Graham, Arcady 30). Had Graham cared to look beyond the missionary's profession of faith to the mission itself she might have made a different judgement. "Messianic fervor" aside, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Johnson had a hand in all but the fourth principle if one is at all aware of what she professed and what she practiced.

But the fourth principle, the "Scientific Study of Pupil Development," dealing with "both objective and subjective reports on those physical, mental, moral and

---

144 The Seven Principles are found in both Cremin and Graham where the text is more fully elaborated (Cremin 243; Graham 28-30).
social characteristics" of students was clearly reflective of Eugene Randolph Smith's interests. He was a devotee of intelligence and achievement tests who gave two chapters out of 12 in his 1924 *Education Moves Ahead* to scientific influences, IQ tests and methods of marking. Though, like Johnson, Smith believed that the child must be active in the learning process, his position with respect to testing and marking was not even remotely reflective of hers. For Marietta Johnson, tests were purely anathema, never more than another form of artificial categorizing which encouraged dishonesty.

After an initial introduction to Mrs. Johnson at the founding, her name is heard only infrequently in connection with PEA. She was a speaker at its 1920 convention where she delivered an address entitled "The School and the Child" and later she made the 1925 Heidelberg trip on behalf of the Association. After Heidelberg, however, her name virtually disappears in connection with the PEA, its "dreamer" curiously disassociated from the dream. The gifted lecturer and pioneer in child-centered pedagogy appears lost to the history of progressive education. The historical lacuna is especially odd in light of the fact that she was very well-known among the progressive pioneers and very

---

145 The speech was reprinted in Bulletin 2 of the Progressive Education Association in Convention, April 9 and 10, 1920 (7-16).
prominent among them. A serious reader of the histories must wonder what became of the woman who was acknowledged as "guiding spirit" behind the PEA. Having been cited as the inspiration for the PEA and the one who brought the project to fruition, Marietta Johnson has been relegated to the historical background along with other women, such as Mrs. A. J. Parsons and Queene Ferry Coonley as well as Mrs. Milan V. Ayres, May Libbey, Gertrude Hartman and many others who supported the organization both physically and philanthropically. Historians have chosen to concern themselves mostly with the theories, lives and careers of men such as Stanwood Cobb, G. Stanley Hall, and John Dewey. This unfortunate bias tends to foster an unbalanced view of women's involvement not only in the PEA but in the entire progressive movement. And it is also unfortunate that the women themselves have left very few written records of their work.

From its humble beginnings with 86 members in 1919 until 1938 when it boasted 10,000 members the PEA was a yeasty environment for an assorted group of radical innovations and experiments in education (Graham, Arcady 100). It quickly rose to prominence on the American scene during the 1920's, thoroughly permeated with a sense of high mission. In 1929, Stanwood Cobb had reminisced that the PEA had "aimed at nothing short of reforming the entire school system of America" (Cobb 68). It fell far
short of that goal, however. Creative self-expression never became anything like a universally accepted pedagogical credo and it had been carried to ridiculous extremes at times. As for the spirit of radical reform itself, it had begun a downward spiral as early as the 1920's. During the 1920's, pre-war progressivism lost much of its spirit of innovation and became largely an affair of private schools or public schools in well-to-do suburbs. In the early years, what might be called its "romantic period," the leaders of the PEA were laymen, teachers and private school administrators; whereas, in its later, and less passionate, years it was dominated by professional educators. Moreover, radical innovators did not often enter the arena of the public schools and, with a few notable exceptions, they were not whole-heartedly welcomed in working-class communities.146

---

146 A number of qualifications to this statement are indicated. The early period of progressive reform differed greatly from the later period. Early experimental reform in settlement houses such as that of Jane Addams in the slums of Chicago were common. But these were not traditional educational institutions in that they were conceived and structured expressly to meet the social needs of the community rather than the scholastic. Also, Felix Adler's very early progressive school, the "Workingman's School," later the "Ethical Culture School," was established in 1878 in the slums of New York City. For a short account of Adler's school see Robert Beck's "Progressive Education and American Progressivism" in Teachers College Record (77-89). The Manumit School (established 1924) in Pawling, New York, was primarily a school for the children of laborers as were Ferrer's Modern Schools, most of which were on the east coast. The history of the 21 Modern Schools and related schools in North America is traced in Paul
Throughout the 1930's the PEA became increasingly more paralyzed by the doctrinal divisions and factionalism which had begun as early as the 1920's. It had always been a clearing-house for educational innovations of every kind and was generally accused, along with the progressive movement and many of its adherents, of lacking philosophical coherency (Graham, *Arcady* 159). And Cremin seems to lay at least some of the blame for the failure of the PEA at the feet of Marietta Johnson. Almost by definition, the open-ended philosophy of child-centered schools was perceived as anti-system, and as Cremin points out, hers was easily the most child-centered of the early schools. As the PEA's "guiding spirit," Cremin suggests that it was Johnson's lack of clearly articulated pedagogical objectives which may have set the standards for the organization. And while he admits that her laissez-faire attitude (at least to him), might have worked well for an "artful" Mrs. Johnson way down in Fairhope, Cremin doubts its sufficiency in the larger world:

Avrich's *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States*. In the later years of the progressive movement, however, progressive schools were overwhelmingly middle-class. Caroline Pratt's experience was typical. Her efforts to enroll children of blue-collar families in her Greenwich Village Play School (established 1913) met with little success while the school became a mecca for the liberal avant garde of music, art and politics.
Ultimately, such theoretical unclarities might have mattered little had they confined themselves to Fairhope, but they were destined to take on incalculable significance when Mrs. Johnson became the guiding spirit behind the Progressive Education Association in the years immediately following World War I. (152-3)

At a Progressive Education Association convention in 1928, John Dewey began sounding an ominous note for reformism in education, speaking out against what he believed to be the excesses in (liberal) progressive schools. In reacting to formality and excessive rigidity in schooling, Dewey believed that they had become overly obsessed with individuality and overly hostile to developing a coherent program. He wondered whether the time had not arrived for them to undertake "a more constructively organized function" (Progressive Education and the Science of Education 175). But it was not until 1938 that Marietta Johnson's patron, and by then the acknowledged leader of the progressive movement, sounded what would become the death-knell for the institution already suffering its terminal throes. Dewey, usually a temperate man, censured even more sharply than previously the lack of a clear theoretical and intellectual rationale within the movement but, more especially, what he saw as reactionism to the old order, excessive individualism and

---

147 Ironically enough, Dewey had accepted the title of Honorary President of the PEA in 1927, a post which he held until his death in 1952 (Cremin 249).
a theoretically inchoate curriculum. "Any movement that thinks and acts in terms of an 'ism," he declared, "becomes so involved in reaction against other 'isms that it is unwittingly controlled by them" (Experience and Education 6). Originally a series of lectures, his criticism found its way into print in the widely read Experience and Education, his last and most concise book on education.

Although the PEA was not officially dismantled until 1955, it was already passé for all practical purposes by 1938. Very few of the original PEA contributors, including Johnson, were active through the thirties (Graham, Arcady 75). Doctrinal divisions had been growing since the 1920's and the 1930's depression would exact its toll, not only economically but ideologically. The depression left an indelible mark on progressive education by shifting the emphasis on the individual that had remained its leitmotif and unifying principle throughout its lifetime. By the 1930's, the child-centered theories of the daring and speculative twenties were viewed as egocentric and self-indulgent. Such theories were not ideologically acceptable to a public now disenchanted with Wall Street capitalism. George Counts' radical new social reconstructionism would guide the second generation liberals of the PEA.
It was probably inevitable that the passionate national reforms born out of the ubiquitous corruption and misery of the industrial revolution would result in a reactive swing of the pendulum sooner or later. But liberal, child-centered education had done its work and some of its older reforms were finding their way into the public school system in the way of more flexibility and creativity as well as more freedom for the individual child. The early grades were particularly affected.

And down in Fairhope Marietta Johnson never withdrew, either publicly or privately, from her commitment to progressive education. She did not shift her child-centered bias to accommodate the new social reconstructionism. Her school, after all, had always included and would continue to include its free-wheeling, open-ended and generic brand of social reconstructionism. Neither her attitude nor her child-centered philosophy changed and she continued to forward the liberal progressive platform herself just as she continued to tutor missionaries who carried the message of progressive education into both public and private schools.

Writing the Story

Johnson's first effort at gathering her lectures into written form was made in 1929 when she wrote *Youth in a World of Men*. Her second book, *Thirty Years With an Idea*, was a partial autobiography written in the last few years
of her life and published posthumously. Her writings reveal her as the utopian idealist that she was, a woman who insisted on the utmost freedom where children and young people were concerned. As discussed in an early chapter and throughout this writing, Johnson's books were not generally well-received by critics nor have they been well-received by historians. *Youth in a World of Men* came as a disappointment to friends and colleagues though it was favorably received in some circles. A *New York Times* reviewer, for example, deemed it "stimulating" and enlightening ("Child Training" 2 June 1929). It was also endorsed by the popular artist Rockwell Kent who designed its cover and by Columbia historian James Harvey Robinson who read it with "great enthusiasm and hearty approval" (*Courier* 6 June 1929). But Johnson's friend and fellow progressive, Agnes DeLima, anguished over *Youth*, calling it "quite naive and entirely innocent of expert or studied thinking" and regretted Johnson's "loosely slung-together notes" (*The Survey* 615). G. T. Buswell, a writer for *The Elementary School Journal* published by the University of Chicago Press, commended the book for its "general spirit" and recommended it for the reading list of those in sympathy with progressive education. But Buswell was quite doubtful that Johnson's proposals could be worked out in the public school system and found her book too dogmatic to suit his taste (232-3). Paul Gaston, among
Johnson's friendliest historians, ruefully acknowledges that the book lacks "historical perspective, scholarly context, and even the texture of experience" (Women 108). Her second book, Thirty Years With an Idea, was refused by publishers altogether and published posthumously only through the diligent efforts of student Dian Arnold, one of the later apostles of organic education.¹⁴⁸

In summary, it is unlikely that Marietta Johnson's books will ever take a place in the annals of great literature. Historians and critics alike have variously labeled them as vague, discursive, and unscholarly. Johnson makes sweeping statements which she does not qualify, amplify or explain, frequently emphasizing her points with exclamation marks. As previously noted, she oversimplifies and generalizes, blaming everything from war to crime and poverty on "arrested development." Her books lack the vitality and dynamism that her live audiences must have felt. They are, however, honest statements of her beliefs and understandable pieces of literature. She speaks self-confidently of what she knows and readers may be grateful that she made no attempt to mystify or overawe her audience. The writing is more

¹⁴⁸ Dian attended the Organic School from 1954 to 1956. She is now married to Claude Arnold and four of their six children have attended Organic School. Both are dedicated to the idea of organic education and Dian persuaded the University of Alabama Press to publish Thirty Years With an Idea in 1974. A new edition is currently underway.
instructional and descriptive than theory-based, responding to the felt needs of children, mothers, fathers and teachers. Moreover there is a quality about her writing that at once convinces and compels one to listen and pay heed. Her first book makes its points authoritatively and emphatically. Her last book emerges from a more profound experience and at times possesses an almost plaintive quality, particularly in the chapter "Finding Support," as described earlier. Reading between the lines of Thirty Years, written in her last years, one occasionally detects a wistful sadness though never any bitterness or cynicism.

Critics and academics may better judge this woman's writing in relation to how little leisure she enjoyed. Johnson wrote only in odd moments stolen from a relentless schedule of traveling, lecturing, fund-raising and directing her schools. Had she had the leisure and inclination, Johnson might have written as well as she taught or lectured. But she had little time or energy left for the contemplative life of an author since, very early in her career, she had devoted her entire attention to the less abstract requirements of her profession. There was nothing of the dabbler or dilettante about Marietta Johnson; she was as intransigent as an engine rolling down the track, looking neither to the right nor the left but always single-mindedly focused on one object-
-the welfare of her school. It was an extension of her--
it was her--her every thought and act was devoted to its
welfare.

In the final analysis, Johnson's books, like the
facts and details of her public life, fail to satisfy a
feminist historian's yen to understand their author's
character in relation to her mission. They describe what
she calls her "point of view"--what others would refer to
as her philosophy or theory--and they are artifacts of the
progressive era, the historical context in which she
lived. But they reveal little of who she really was. We
know only that she was a woman who labored tirelessly to
free young people--"youth in a world of men"--from the
pressures imposed by an adult world. She was a woman who,
57 years after her death, is still spoken of with
reverence by those who knew her. And she is a woman whose
memory is still kept very much alive through her students.
But Marietta Johnson herself remains as one-dimensional as
her photographs on the museum walls.
CHAPTER 9

THE FINAL YEARS - TRIUMPH AND DESPAIR

The Organic School was at the height of its flower in the late 1920’s and its founder at the height of her success. The early 1930’s saw almost no cessation in her activities. Some believe that the tragic death of her assistant director and heir-apparent Charles Rabold dealt a blow to Marietta Johnson in 1930 from which she never recovered. But by that time another unpleasant reality had begun to cast its dark shadow even over utopia. In the end, the effects of the stock market debacle in October of 1929 had a far greater impact upon the Organic School than the loss of Charles Rabold. Single taxers found some comfort in blaming the Wall Street crash on the orgies of land speculation that had earlier gripped the expanding industrial nation (Courier 31 Oct. 1929).

Whatever the reason, the storm clouds gathered as an economic depression followed the crash and the ill-effects of an economic depression became increasingly apparent throughout the decade of the 1930’s.

On the surface, at least, Johnson seemed to have surmounted the great personal loss of Charles Rabold. She had overcome the disappointment of losing her most important satellite school in Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1927 along with much of the influential patronage and economic support she had received from its Fairhope League.
North. Yet in spite of everything she sailed on, maintaining an active fund-raising and lecture schedule as indicated by numerous items in the Fairhope Courier which never failed to note the arrivals and departures of their most esteemed citizen. In the first half of the decade, her travels to the east and her cross-continental excursions continued unabated. Some satellite schools, such as the Manhassett Bay School, were still included on her itinerary although, with one exception, no new schools appeared on the horizon. The exception was the Orchard School in Hood River, Oregon, founded in 1931 by her disciples, the Cases (Courier 14 May 1931).

that the school was one of the pioneers in dropping the old formalities of classroom drills, marks and grades (27 Mar. 1932). The variety in publications was not indicative of anything new in the Johnson philosophy, however. The "Fairhope idea in education" remained unchanged; nothing novel was offered to arouse or excite a world in the throes of an economic depression and a cultural upheaval which sent social scientist, map maker and captain of the Osprey, Willard Edwards, to Russia in 1933.

By mid-decade, however, Johnson's lecture engagements were coming much less frequently and her destinations were now closer to home. And her travels often combined business with relaxation. In 1935, for example, the Courier reported that she would enjoy a summer hiatus in St. Paul with relatives while speaking to colleges and educators in her native state (27 June 1935, 4 July 1935, 25 July 1935). Mrs. Johnson was in her early seventies and, whether it was her age or signs of declining health prompting their interest, the Courier began taking note of her well-being. For example, it was reported in August of 1935 that she had "returned home refreshed in body and spirit and full of enthusiasm for a bigger and better school for the year 1935-36 (29 Aug. 1935). Again, in September of 1936, she was reported to have "returned from her vacation several years younger and in the best of
health, and her boundless enthusiasm is even more pronounced than ever before" (10 Sept. 1936). If the Courier was protesting her good health too much, there were two extended trips to the east to reinforce their protestations. They included, just as in earlier days, speaking engagements in Virginia, Washington, Boston and New York, and she was also the honored guest at dinners and receptions in Boston, and Washington, D. C. The summer trip concluded in Greenwich where she met with the Greenwich mothers and supporters just as she had back in 1913. She had come full circle. The fall tour lasted six weeks and afterward Johnson reported to the Parent-Teacher Round Table that she had given 20 addresses declaring that never had her message "met so favorable a reception" (Courier 16 July 1936, 23 July 1936, 22 Oct. 1936, 3 Dec. 1936, 31 Dec. 1936). But there were no further eastern trips after 1936.

As the school entered the darkest years of depression from 1933 to 1935, both boarding revenue and funding from the east was declining steeply. How the school survived was no longer the question, but why it survived at all. In 1933, a bank holiday was declared in Fairhope, and by 1934 even public school funding was in jeopardy as the state and county finances were exhausted (Courier 2 Mar. 1933, 15 Feb. 1934). Johnson's correspondence reflected the dismal outlook. In 1935, she wrote to a former patron
that there were only 11 boarders and some of them part

time, adding that "The [school] plant is terribly run down

and much money is needed for restoration" (qtd. in P.

Gaston, Women 112). In the waning years of the 1930’s,

Johnson wrote of those dark hours when it seemed that the

school could not open but for the citizens of Fairhope.

The town fathers, businessmen, parents, teachers and

students had now pitched in, making every effort to keep

the school going. Only now it was not just Marietta

Johnson’s school for which they labored; it was their

school. It was an integral part of their lives; its fate

was their fate and the community rallied to support the

school as it never had before. Teachers came forward

willing to accept positions without pay and old friends

came to her aid. Cash donations were fewer and smaller

than those in earlier years but donations in time and

effort had never been so substantial. In lieu of cash,

parents canned food and did laundry for the school home;

high school boys took to the woods with axes and saws to

supply wood for the winter while the girls and faculty put

on aprons, cooked and served food to the laborers (Courier

2 Mar. 1933, 16 Nov. 1933). Everything from the annual

"Thanksgiving Showers" to "Bean Canning Bees" to

"Washington Day Balls" to organized Christmas food sales

to a "Dollar-a-Person Campaign" and even a dog show were

held as the community rallied to save its school (Courier

Such whole-hearted devotion to their school must have been particularly gratifying to its founder. But the dramatic struggle taking place in Fairhope was now for a school which had become a vital part of their own lives and families and businesses. Like Paul Gaston, describing his reaction to the death of Mrs. Johnson, the desolation he felt was only partly because of "this important person" in their lives, but mainly because he was "scared to death that this perfect place was going to close down" (Interview 28 Aug. 1993).

In the final years of her life, as the depression wore on, Johnson was still talking expectantly in Thirty Years of reinvigorating the boarding department and having a self-supporting school in the "not-distant future" (49). And she was making plans for a change in her own future. Late in 1936 she made a $750 deposit on a small two-story cottage near the school in the expectation that her foster son Kenneth Cain could make modifications that would allow her to live there with him and his wife. She had lived among the young people at the school home for 15 years now and one imagines that at 72 she might have yearned for the peace and privacy of a real home. But the only bedroom and bath in the cottage were upstairs and stair-climbing posed a problem for Johnson who had been suffering from a heart ailment for several years. In December, Clifford
Ernest paid a visit to his mother and was asked for money to make the necessary renovations to the home but he refused. Money was eventually found for materials and Kenneth began the renovations, but they came too late for Mrs. Johnson to make the move (Dorothy Beiser Cain, Interview 11-12 May 1993).

In February of 1937, Johnson traveled to St. Louis for the national convention of the PEA where she was honored for her "30 years service to educational improvement" by an honorary vice-presidency. In June of 1937, in its 30th anniversary year, the Organic School graduated an unusually large class of 20 seniors. Mrs. Johnson spoke on the occasion exhorting all to "renew their faith that this good experiment might continue for the good of education everywhere" (Courier 10 June 1937). In November the school anniversary was celebrated at the Christian Church in Fairhope.

Meanwhile, news of bank failures and soup kitchens no longer dominated the press as news makers became preoccupied with Hitler, Nazi Germany and the crash of the

---

149 Whether Johnson was asking for her own money that was invested by Clifford Ernest or whether she was asking him to make the investment in the way of a gift or a loan is unclear.

150 The Courier item reported that when Mrs. Johnson rose to speak, the 1000 educators present "arose and applauded enthusiastically, showing their appreciation of her wonderful courage and persistence in carrying on her demonstration here against such financial odds" (4 Mar. 1937).
zeppelin Hindenburg. The New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune were reporting in their headlines that Fairhope’s single tax experiment had "gone with the wind," a great source of amusement to at least one Fairhope citizen (Courier 20 May 1937). Meanwhile, the Courier reported that the community Red Cross drive had gone over the top and a fire had closed the new Ritz Theatre which had only recently featured "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" (28 Jan. 1937, 25 Mar. 1937). The "Organic School Notes," a weekly feature of the Courier for many years, continued full of news about school interests and activities bespeaking an institution which had taken on a life of its own.

On December 21st of 1937, Johnson’s stalwart friend and supporter, Ernest B. Gaston, died (Courier 23 Dec. 1937). Johnson had already suffered her first heart attack in the summer of that year and had been confined for some months. But by the summer of 1938, like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, she burst out of her malaise for two last missions on behalf of her school. She traveled to Birmingham in June for several lectures at Howard College, and again in August she spent a week at Auburn, addressing classes at the college summer school (Courier 23 June 1938, 11 Aug. 1938). In the same year she taught a course in her school once more. It was one she had taught many times in earlier years, that "great
classic of single tax, Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty,* which she taught to the Organic School seniors (Courier 31 Mar. 1938). It was a fitting finale to her Fairhope career.

Ernest Gaston had suffered mental deterioration prior to his death as had Marie Howland, another of Johnson’s old comrades-in-arms. And Johnson apparently feared the same fate (P. Gaston, Women 114). A woman who was then living at the school home heard Johnson pacing the floor muttering "I think I’m losing my mind. I think I’m losing my mind." And, indeed, Dorothy Beiser Cain occasionally observed bizarre and uncharacteristic behavior during her frequent visits with Mrs. Johnson (Dorothy Beiser Cain Interview, 11-12 May 1993). That these three mentally active, strong-willed and independent thinkers should be stricken with the same misfortune was a most ironic twist of fate.

In November of 1938, the Organic Alumni Association, presided over by her foster son Kenneth Cain, extended an invitation to the Fairhope public to attend a dinner honoring Marietta Johnson (Courier 24 Nov. 1938). Tributes poured in from the prominent, the faithful and the lowly, but the guest of honor was unable to attend; her overworked heart seemed spent. In her absence, words of appreciation were heaped upon her as friends and colleagues far and near "poured out a flood of admiration
and respect." Among the tributes, one loyal admirer wrote, "In any given century, God gives to this earth only a few of his chosen leaders. We are fortunate that he had placed in the person of Marietta Johnson, such a one in our midst. We do ourselves honor by honoring her" (G. Brown xv).

Marietta Johnson died in a home-made bed in the school home two days before Christmas in 1938 with Clifford Ernest at her side. She died in the school for which she had lived. Her death came almost one year to the day after that of her friend Ernest B. Gaston.\(^{151}\) Her funeral service was held in Comings Hall surrounded by a gathering which taxed the hall to its capacity in spite of the day's heavy downpour (Courier 29 Dec. 1938). Music for the occasion included her favorite hymns, Christmas carols and the song "Fairhope" with which she had always closed her own programs at the school.

Did Marietta Johnson die a "sad and scared" woman, forgotten by all but a few "dogged disciples," as Laura Elizabeth Smith gloomily supposed? And was she "on the radical edge," even the "fanatic fringe," as her old colleague Stanwood Cobb cynically described her in later years? And had she, as he also claimed, "lapsed into one

\(^{151}\) Clara Gaston, wife of E. B., and Lydia Comings, two of the six women with whom Johnson had incorporated the Organic School, were still living (Courier 11 Nov. 1937).
of the also-rans?" These are momentous questions to ask of a woman whose entire life was invested in her profession. Certainly she suffered ill health in her last years and there were moments of despondency and desperation when it seemed her school would not survive. But it is unthinkable that "sad and scared" could describe a woman who had lived so courageously, who just as Cobb had claimed, lived on the "radical edge," some might even say the "fanatic fringe," for most of her life. Robert Beck has rightly placed Marietta Johnson among the most courageous of progressive reformers. As he has said so well, she was one of the "real pioneers; in courage, wisdom, and spiritual quality, she led the way" (American Progressive Education 114).

The "also-ran" designation, too, requires qualification if not refutation. True, Marietta Johnson is among the largely forgotten women of progressivism, unknelled, uncoffined and unknown. True, the great heart of liberal progressivism, like Johnson's own heart, had all but given out and the spirit of radical progressive reform was moribund even before 1938. The nation was entering a new era and new reactionaries were responding to new crises as the depression continued to ebb and flow and another World War loomed. Change is indeed infinite and inevitable, just as Johnson and Dewey knew it to be. Yet the radicals of one generation are the luminaries who
light the way for the next generation. The leaven of liberal progressivism was already in the meal and working its alchemy. When Marietta Johnson died in 1938, schools of the nation were only beginning to feel the transforming influence of those daring liberal progressive practitioners such as Johnson, Margaret Naumburg, Queene Ferry Coonley, Grace Rotzel, Lillian Rifkin Blumenfeld, John Dewey and many others. And their legacy continues its work in classrooms even today. Furthermore and most decidedly, Marietta Johnson is anything but an also-ran in the hearts of those "dogged disciples" such as Sam and Helen Dyson who are still "meeting the situation," still fighting to keep her school alive while those of her contemporaries are long since dead. And more than sixty years after her death, a museum has been founded by Kenneth and Dorothy Beiser Cain, dedicated to Johnson's memory and to the furtherance of her educational idea. When Marietta Johnson ended her career in 1938, her work was taken up by her disciples in Fairhope who have earnestly and faithfully carried it forward.

The center of Marietta Johnson's life work was indeed located in Fairhope but its circumference was the world. To paraphrase Markham, she drew her circle and took the whole world in. And her work did not end with her death. As Helene Beiser Hunter said: "When I look back and think about it--I think about it as a wheel, a wagon wheel with
a center. Here we are at the center, the hub, and all the spokes going out. There's no beginning and no end."
CHAPTER 10
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This story has followed one individual's life but it has been a story about relationships and about community. Personal historical narratives are marked by their historical contexts, the times, places and people and the possibilities for interaction among them. These powerful historical forces change individual lives and shape communities. This particular story took place in Fairhope, Alabama, at the beginning of this century in the midst of the American industrial revolution.

Progressivism was a unique and dynamic period manifesting itself in late nineteenth and early twentieth century history as a response to the American Industrial Revolution. Progressives, as the name implies, looked forward optimistically to indefinite and open-ended progress which they believed would inevitably follow in the wake of revolutionary advances in the sciences. Yet many Americans suffered a profound sense of loss as the great shift from farm to factory, village to city became apparent in the nation-at-large and a new scientific age of rationalism and impersonalism, of disassociation from others and from the natural world took place. Not only did they grieve for the loss of community and the close personal relationships they had valued, but they mourned the loss of control over their lives and fortunes. The
Fairhoper were among them. The founding of the Fairhope community was thus a negative response to the harsh realities of industrial age capitalism. It was a direct result of the continuing economic, social and political crises facing a nation engaged in profound metamorphosis from an agrarian to an industrial economy.

The architects of the Fairhope community were visionaries who sought an escape from the wretched conditions of industrial age capitalism and fashioned a colony based upon the single tax philosophy of Henry George. They believed that their theory, which they referred to as "true cooperative individualism," offered a ideological balance between pure capitalism and pure socialism which would eliminate the worst features of both. They did not reject technology in favor of rural living; instead they were idealists yearning for a return to a simpler, more just and more humane society.

Even before Marietta Johnson ventured onto the scene, Fairhope was a novel socio-political laboratory experiment in "true cooperative individualism." It was an island community, insulated in many respects from the harsh realities of the period. Adding richness and texture to the community in the early days was a continual inflow of creative and talented visitors. It was a wintering place but one with a difference--its visitors were seeking something more than pleasure and relief from freezing
temperatures--they were seeking an intellectually stimulating climate as well. The influx of outsiders kept the community vital in its formative years, else it might well have suffered mental incest that has often afflicted other small communities of like-minded individuals.

Once it had been conceived, the Fairhopers took their utopian experiment away from the industrial north and into the rural south, into their own, though not quite idyllic, Garden of Eden. That was in 1894. And not many years hence, in 1901, Marietta Johnson also arrived on the shores of Mobile Bay with her own revolutionary theory in gestation--a pedagogical theory rather than a social and economic theory. She founded her Organic School in 1907. Johnson's theory evolved from a synthesis of the ideas of physician Nathan Oppenheim, C. Hanford Henderson, John Dewey and other minor figures who recognized childhood as a discrete period separate from adulthood which required an educational environment sensitive to the child's physical and mental needs. The organic idea posited the child as an irreducible fusion of body, mind and spirit. An emphasis upon any one of the three to the exclusion of the others, Johnson insisted, would result in atrophy of the others. Moreover, the organic idea viewed each child as an individual distinct and separate from any other. In an era rushing toward efficiency, emphasizing repetition and mass-production, each individual child made a
difference in organic education. The Organic School became one of the most radical versions of child-centered pedagogy and the only one in the deep south. With Johnson's organic experiment grafted upon it, few cities could claim to equal Fairhope as an idiosyncratic, experimental community. As time passed, the Organic School and the Fairhope community became so closely entwined that they became virtually inseparable in their effects upon community life.

The Organic School was successful in its own era, but its environment within a utopian experimental community was unique and the school was well-suited to its environment in the early years of the century. As Marietta Johnson shaped her school, her school was in turn shaped by the community around her. And the marriage between school and community was a congenial one, though seemingly coincidental. As a community school, it upheld and honored the traditions of the Fairhope founders. And it also took advantage of the unique character of the area as a wintering place by providing opportunities for visitors to share the Fairhope experience.

Adding to the unusual character of the school was that it was conceptualized, founded, administered, maintained, controlled and financed by a woman--one woman. No board of directors, governmental entity, advisory body, foundation or individual ever dictated the terms of
Marietta Johnson’s school during her lifetime. It was a matriarchal institution in concept and function and, therefore, a significant and useful example of its type, suggesting what a school so founded and organized might look like. Though Marietta Johnson never lost sight of the value of the individual, what her Fairhope school looked like from the outset and what it increasingly became, was a school founded on commonality of interest and purpose. From the organic concept of body, mind and spirit to her classroom structure and activities, to her attitude toward family, community and outsiders, Marietta Johnson’s story, like her school, was a celebration of connections.

How can Marietta Johnson’s role within the progressive movement be defined? She was a woman who both struggled against and acquiesced to the old perceptions, an enigmatic and dichotomous woman. To begin, she was one of the great army of progressive women in the vanguard of the early campaigns for reform. A particularly curious phenomenon of the progressive period was the deluge of women emerging from the home into public life, often situating themselves at the forefront of social and political reforms. Women banded together to do battle for other women, for children and the poor, to sweep the community clean of political corruption, and to improve conditions in the slums. Community-building can be seen
as a major contribution of progressive women. At first, they articulated their role as that of "public housekeepers." But there was latent power in the role, however obscured it might have been under the guise of "public housekeeping." Progressive women reformers took hold of the popular slogan "Woman's place is in the home," used it to their own advantage, and used it well, as an advertisement which disguised and understated their claims to power. As the progressive period advanced, however, some women, such as Margaret Sanger, Jane Addams and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, became less willing to see themselves in terms of public housekeepers. While a strong spirit of community and cooperation remained one of their most defining characteristics, women became more combative and aggressive in their quest for reform. They demanded voting rights, birth control and an equal voice with men. Suffragists warmed to the battle all through the early years of the century, lobbying congress and picketing the White House until the nineteenth amendment was finally enacted by in 1920.

As the question of women's control of their own lives, bodies and political fates, became the dominant issue, the struggle escalated. Though women had gotten their foot in the political door by claiming to be public domestic workers, when they cast off that ambiguous role, they discovered that their exercise of power and control
was unacceptable. As English linguistic theorist, Deborah Cameron has written, "men can only be men if women are unambiguously women" (155-6). And even in the supposedly enlightened, so-called "progressive," era, the public world was still a man's world.

Nevertheless, an erosion of male prerogatives threatened in the field of public education as women's demands for reform of the system gained momentum throughout the first two decades of the century. Women educators were becoming less content to obediently serve the self-interests of the system; now they insisted on reforming it. Not only were they less content to serve the system, but the child-centered reforms they most often demanded caused no little anxiety among conservatives who were mainly white, middle-class males. Child-centered education was seen as too indulgent, effeminate and too inefficient to suit conservative taste. Moreover, child-centered educators were too emotional, too sentimentalizing and too radical for conservatives.

It was at this critical juncture that systems management was discovered. Systems management through hierarchical arrangements was at least conveniently, if not conspiratorially, constructed to manage schools from a distance. Hierarchies, of course, were dominated by trained professional males at the top controlling female teachers and the curriculum of schools at the bottom, an
arrangement which essentially continues today. Systems management was ostensibly conceived as a means of making schools more efficient and aiding teachers, but in reality it robotized them. Stripped of their prerogatives, their reforms scorned, women at the forefront of educational reform either withdrew or were forced back, taking themselves and their reforms into private schools where they remained. In the transition, women lost much of their power to work in and change the world, a loss deemed by some as a great human tragedy.

Just as Marietta Johnson was one in the large army of reforming progressive women, she was also part of smaller, more elite group of liberal child-centered reformers. As a radically child-centered educator, she was utopian; she imagined an ideal egalitarian and non-competitive world, a world which could never exist in an era which worshipped science, efficiency and rationalism. As a liberal female in a movement dominated by conservative males, she subverted mainstream progressivism. Moving beyond her career as a school teacher into a career as founder, administrator and fund-raiser for her school, Johnson moved beyond the boundaries stereotypically defined as appropriate for women. As she did so, she found it necessary to negotiate the middle-ground between the feminine private world and the masculine public world. Though sometimes instinctively, and always cautiously, she
somehow managed to sail her educational ship quite skillfully through those uncharted waters between the Scylla and Charybdis of gendered identity for many years. She was a theorist, though theory was a male prerogative; yet she was a child-centered educator/practitioner, a female prerogative. Like many other child-centered women educators, she constructed an actual practice to test her theorem and then founded a school where it could be showcased and judged, an undertaking rarely attempted by a male theorist. She took on the male role of bread-winner for her family and for her school, but only as an advocate for children, a sphere of activity reserved as women's work. Calling the wisdom of experience rather than the cultivation of intellect the goal of education, and calling cooperation rather than competition the means of education, she undermined male traditions.

Johnson was a woman who single-handedly administered and financed a school, and who, in moments of crisis stood like a rock. She spoke so passionately in public on the subject of children that she is best remembered by her peers and historians for her missionary zeal. Yet, like any well-socialized male, she kept her emotional struggles from the eyes of the world. When her small son was killed and her husband died, she "took it like a man," she suppressed her grief and went on with her work. If she
felt anger as a result of the continual financial burdens placed almost exclusively on her shoulders, for having been required to live "from hand to mouth," she kept it to herself (Thirty Years 37). Displays of emotion were considered irrational and unmanly and therefore out of place in the public world, as feminist Carolyn Heilbrun has theorized: "Although feminists early discovered that the private is the public, women's exercise of power and control, and the admission and expression of anger necessary to that exercise," were declared "unacceptable" (Heilbrun 17). Marietta Johnson concealed the struggle, the emotions, the grief and anger to fulfill her mission on behalf of children. In doing so, she acquiesced to the patriarchal system. Her life suggests how she sacrificed part of her female self and instincts in order to accommodate the public world because she was determined that her utopian mission on behalf of children would not fail.

Johnson wrote a brief account of her life in her last book, Thirty Years with an Idea. But, like her public persona, Johnson's real biography lies in what her account did not say--the not-saying. She did not say she struggled; she did not say she had to sacrifice a personal life; she never said "I was weary" or "I was angry" or even "I was sad," though some of her anguish does appear, however obliquely, in her chapter innocuously titled
"Finding Support." Recalling the Fels' donation, she says, "But one thousand dollars a year was not enough to support the school, and so the raising of funds was added to my duties" (35). This was a monumental understatement of fact. Fund-raising became her life. This teacher and teacher of teachers, whose great ambition was to have her own school and to liberate children, became an itinerant fund-raiser, absent from home and family and her school for virtually the rest of her life. She speaks also of the "many dark hours" associated with fund-raising, of spending the entire day at school, doing her housework in the evening and then writing letters far into the night begging for support.

And she speaks of spending hours in telephone booths while traveling, trying to make appointments, hoping to get help for her school (41). As if that were not enough, she tells of being "condemned for not 'building up' a supporting organization," yet not having "time or strength to give to planning for the future." Was she angry, defensive or despondent? On the surface at least, it would appear that she was not. Instead, she humbly acknowledges her gratitude: "I have always been most grateful for the privilege of working at it" (37).

Forbidden from expressing their anger in the public world, women were similarly forbidden to tell their (true) stories. If anything, it was less possible for women to
tell their true stories than it was to publicly express their emotions. Biography and autobiography were hardly possible for women in those years when the only language was that of white, middle-class males. Women found it quite difficult to express their feelings in a language made by men to express theirs. Much of feminist theory in recent years has concentrated on the inadequacy of androcentric language to express women's subjectivities. In *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun discusses the "old genre of female autobiography" which intentionally conspired to idealize life, conceal pain, even find beauty in it, and to "transform rage into spiritual acceptance."

These were, in general, the only autobiographies possible for women prior to the 1970's. And, as Johnson's writing reveals, it was the only autobiography available to her. That genre did not disappear, says Heilbrun, until the late 1960's. Even then, the public expression of anger, she acknowledges, "has always been a terrible hurdle for women to overcome" (25). Literary tradition validated the "virtues" of the manly text, calmness, objectivity and, above all, rationality.

Yet what excellent stories the anger and struggles of women such as Marietta Johnson might have made. As it is, one can only imagine the complex woman who lived at the heart of her text. Of her deeper dimensions we know very little indeed. We do know that she was a strong, a
radical, eccentric, intense and opinionated woman in matters relating to pedagogy. We also know that she deplored dishonesty in children. Yet, as the progressive woman, she was dishonest to herself, a dissimulator, a pretender and she was so because women were even forbidden the power to control their own lives and circumstances, they were forbidden to express emotions, forbidden and without the language to tell their true stories. Yet what Marietta Johnson was able to do, and to do with great genius, was to write her stories upon children's lives. Children were her texts and Marietta Johnson's words are indelibly etched upon the pages of every one of their lives from a shy little girl to a university professor.

Returning to the discussion of Johnson's place within progressivism, the most salient feature of her theory, the organic idea itself, was profoundly at odds with scientific rationalism, the conservative male paradigm which came to dominate American progressive thought. The organic idea and her rejection of systems reflected her most deeply held belief that no individual can fit into any system without a preliminary and correlative reduction. Even in calculus, this is a truism. In Johnsonian organicism, this meant that if the intellect was educated to the exclusion of body and mind, the latter two would necessarily undergo an accompanying qualitative reduction. Johnson's refusal to grade, categorize and
pigeon-hole students reflected the same belief, that humans cannot be effectively reduced to conform to any system. To restate the point already made, Marietta Johnson was a contradictory and paradoxical figure within industrial age progressivism, itself a paradoxical and contradictory phenomenon. She was a powerful woman but ambiguously so. Cameron's point on ambiguous women is well-founded. Had Johnson not been a champion of children, lived in Fairhope and remained subversively ambiguous, she could not have gotten away with it. In other words, had Johnson not become the ambiguous woman, like other progressive women reformers, she might have been denied the possibility to work in and change the world. As progressivism wore on, however, Marietta Johnson's claim to power in the public world, though not in Fairhope, was extinguished, along with that of her fellow women reformers. Progressive women were able to seize their moment in the sun and impose many lasting reforms on America's political, social and educational institutions. And, in doing so, they left a deep and indelible imprint on the nation's consciousness. But, in the end, the movement which promised a future bright with possibilities for women, which promised to open doors for them, took back its promises. The doors were closed once again and the conservative patriarchal tradition reasserted itself.
One last question remains to be considered. Could the organic idea have found an hospital environment in another place or at another time? Perhaps, but it is not likely. First of all, privately financed free schools open to the public are a rarity in any period. They are particularly rare as a pure expression of one individual's philosophy, founded, administered, controlled and financed by the same individual. Financing for the school, which appeared to students to have fallen in from the street, was gotten only at a great price to the founder. The school's egalitarian thrust and its emphasis on educating the whole organism rather than the intellect alone, was at odds with the system. A school where every individual was deemed equal to every other, where grading, testing, gifted programs and evaluations of all kinds were summarily dismissed as harmful competitive strategies, was at odds with a system which became, and remains, dominated by competition and evaluation. In sum, the anti-system bias of the organic idea contradicts everything that American education became, and has remained, in these final years of the twentieth century. In spite of his obvious hostility and ill-will, Stanwood Cobb was not very far from wrong when he accused Marietta Johnson of being on the "radical edge," and he might have been just as right when he contended that such a system as hers is "only appropriate for a utopia" (Graham, Arcady 19n).
For all of the above reasons and more, a public school modeled after the organic idea would require a profound re-thinking and re-shaping of education as we know it. It would require a re-examination of what education means—whether it means educating the intellect alone or educating the whole organism. But the organic idea itself is not a completely impossible dream. In its purest sense it is about community and relevancy, about the interrelatedness of the human organism, about relationships between one's self and others, one's relationship with nature and the environment. It is about relevancy within contexts not isolation from contexts.

And other women besides Marietta Johnson have imagined, and still imagine, their own "organic" ideas. Sylvia Ashton-Warner developed her own "organic theory," a model quite similar to Johnson's, and successfully taught Maori children in the remote regions of New Zealand during the 1930's. She describes her exciting experience in Teacher, first published in 1963. American women in our own decade, such as Nel Noddings of Stanford University, are also asking us to seriously reconsider our rituals of schooling and suggesting their own radical new ways to restructure education. In her The Challenge to Care in the Schools, Noddings suggests that all course work in the schools should be structured around the theme of caring rather than competition. For Noddings, this includes
caring for one's self, the earth, animals, close and distant others and caring for ideas themselves. A utopian dream is never impossible while visionaries such as Marietta Johnson, Sylvia Ashton-Warner and Nel Noddings have voices and pens.

In conclusion, it is hoped that further historical inquiry and research into the subject of Marietta Johnson, her school, other progressive women, and progressive women educators will be forthcoming. Suggestions for such research would include; 1) historical research which encompasses the entire history of Marietta Johnson's School of Organic Education as a still viable and active phenomenon of twentieth century education; 2) the recovery of histories of progressive women such as Marie Howland; 3) the recovery of the histories of other progressive educators such as Margaret Naumburg, Caroline Pratt, and Elisabeth Irwin; 4) a feminist project which would include the exploration and evaluation of the whole spectrum of child-centered schools as women's institutions and artifacts of progressive era reformism. A rich harvest of women's history still remains to be gathered.
EPILOGUE

Marietta Johnson's school no longer occupies a place in the center of the Fairhope community, either physically or psychically. Now renamed The Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education, it is a small, collection of efficient, air-conditioned, modern buildings located on the southernmost margins of Fairhope. Its marginal geographic location in relation to the town is symptomatic of its marginal importance in a town now devoted to tourism and often listed among the top locations for retirement in the country. The Faulkner Junior College campus now occupies the site adjacent to the business district and Fairhope Avenue. Two of the original Organic School structures, the Bell Building and the Dahlgren Building (the old high school) remain intact. They have been restored through the efforts of Kenneth and Dorothy Beiser Cain.

Lacking the dynamism of its radical founder, the school which once welcomed students in the community to

152 See, for example, the 1994 edition of Money Guide, published by Money magazine, which offers this enthusiastic endorsement of Fairhope: "Newcomers are heartily welcomed to this balmy town, where flowers bloom in window boxes year round and crime is practically nonexistent." Money ranks Fairhope as the second among twenty "best" places to retire selecting criterion such as proximity to cultural and educational activities and good health care (62-73).

153 One wing of the Bell Building now houses the Marietta Johnson Museum and the two wings at the front are soon to be occupied by a Fairhope Museum.
attend free of tuition, has become a good private school. The high school has been eliminated and the school has not always been able to maintain the shop, the crafts and the emphasis on folk dancing that distinguished its curriculum in the early years. Though often through perilous waters, it has been kept afloat since Mrs. Johnson’s death in 1938 by her ardent disciples, many at eighty and ninety years of age, yet still firmly committed to the idea that there is no better way than the organic way to educate children.

Though now vastly changed from the early days, the Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education, can still be considered a success when measured by the standards of other private schools. Moreover, if length of life may be used to quantify success, the Organic School, at nearly 90 years of age, is remarkably successful since most of its peers have long since vanished. Yet the story of the Organic School in Fairhope is not necessarily an argument for more schools like it or even for the organic idea itself. In point of fact, even the other satellite schools founded and directed by Johnson failed long ago and many alumni of the Fairhope school doubt that their own school could have succeeded elsewhere. If the story of the Organic School argues for anything, it may be that it argues for community schools, for schools which have the flexibility to adapt to and meet the needs of the communities surrounding them and schools which are
sensitive and free to respond to changes in their communities, changing as their communities change.

Like the Organic School, the Fairhope single tax community lives on though changed in form. Though still a palpable presence in the life of Fairhope, the vision of the founders and shapers of the impossible dream has become clouded over the years. The importance of the single-tax colony as a viable entity has steadily diminished since the city of Fairhope was incorporated in 1908. However, it is still believed to be the oldest, largest and most successful single tax colony in the nation, owning approximately 2400 acres of land within the city limits of Fairhope and a total of somewhat over 4300 acres of land including that within the city and unincorporated parts of the county.154 In terms of landholding and ownership of utilities, the colony is still cooperative today. The gathering places, Comings Hall and the old Magnolia tree are gone. Fairhope citizens are more politically conservative, wealthier, more satisfied, comfortable and more sophisticated, but less curious, more inward-looking and less tolerant of diversity than in those early days. The pioneer spirit,

---

154 The information given here was provided by Gale Rowe, the present secretary of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation (Interview 25 Apr. 1994). In a telephone conversation of January 12, 1996, Rowe stated that 128 acres of land had been added only recently. Rowe also gave the present number of Single Tax Corporation members as 174.
the dynamism, the single-minded purpose and the ferment for reform is gone. Only a fraction of the 1800 lessees on Colony land are members of the Single Tax Corporation. In the words of E. B. Gaston's grandson, Paul Gaston, the "guts of the place" are gone.

Yet Fairhope is a charming and gracious city which has been preserved from the worst effects of industrial age commercialism. The park stretching along the bluffs, preserved by the foresight of its the early citizens, still provides a spectacular and unrestricted view of beautiful Mobile Bay and the beach below. And Fairhope is still a lightning rod for the creative and talented. It is still a mecca for wintering visitors seeking the warm gulf breezes as well as a stimulating cultural and intellectual environment. And there is an unmistakable aura about Fairhope still, almost as if it were keeping a good secret. If the "guts of the place" are gone, most Fairhopeners might agree with their fellow Fairhoper, Mary Lois Adshead, who thinks "it still has its soul intact."

For one brief moment in history, utopia did exist and it exists today in the hearts and minds of some of its citizens.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Articles:

"Alabama School Uses Sides of Gully as Blackboard." 

Barnum, Madalene D. "Impressions of a Student at the 
Fairhope Winter School." Progressive Education n.v. 

1933, sec. 8: 4.

Bennett, Helen Christine. "Mrs. Marietta L. Johnson." 
American Magazine 76 (July 1913): 31-32.

Buswell, G. T. "An Experiment in Progressive Education." 
Rev. of Youth in a World of Men by Marietta Johnson. 

"Child Training." Rev. of Youth in a World of Men by 
Marietta Johnson. New York Times 2 June 1929, 
sec. 4: 22.

Cobb, Stanwood. "The Romance of Beginnings." Progressive 
Education 6 (1929): 66-73.

DeLima, Agnes. "For the New Schools." Rev. of Youth in a 
World of Men by Marietta Johnson. The Survey n.v. 
(Sept. 1929): 614.

magazine article, Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, 
AL.

---. "Individuality, Equality, and Superiority." The New 

---. "How Much Freedom in New Schools?" The New 
Republic, 63 (July 1930): 204-6.

---. "The Psychological Aspect of the School Curriculum." 

Edwards, Davis. "Founder of Organic Education Tells of 


---. "Education as Natural Development." Natural History 27 (1927): 360-6.


---. "Fitting the School to the Child." Literary Digest 49 (1914): 1118-9.


Washburne, Carleton W. "Give 'Em Time and They'll Turn to Books." Colliers 22 Dec. 1923: 13-14.


Books:


---. "Individuality and Experience." Archambault 149-56.


Foster, Mary D. Who's Who Among Minnesota Women.


Interviews:


Beaty, Franklin. Interview. 11 Nov. 1991. Videotape at Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.


Frederick, Paul, III. Interview. 1988. Videotape at Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

Frederick, Pierce. Interview. 1988. Videotape at Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.


King, David, Grace Arnold King and Mary Emma Arnold Kreek. Interview. 5 Jan. 1992. Videotape at Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

King, Grace Arnold, Mary Emma Arnold Kreek and David King. Interview. 5 Jan. 1992. Videotape at Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

Kreek, Mary Emma Arnold, David King and Grace Arnold King. Interview. 5 Jan. 1992. Videotape at Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.


Other:


Caldwell, Daisy. "It was a Wild Night's Boat Ride." Unidentified newspaper article. Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.


Frederick, Esther Pierce. "Marietta Louise Pierce Johnson." ts., 1971. Private Collection, Dr. Pierce Frederick, Fairhope, AL.


"Historic Baldwin County." Pamphlet by Baldwin Country Historical Development Commission, n.d.


---. "Every School-Room Should be a Health Center."
Lecture ts., n.d. Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

---. The Fairhope Idea in Education. Pamphlet. New
York: The Fairhope Educational Foundation, 1926.

Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

---. "What Fundamental Differences are Evident Among
Progressive Schools." Lecture ts., 1932. Marietta
Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

Lee, Mary Heath. "Gleanings from the Fairhope Courier
Relating to Mrs. Marietta Johnson 1903-1938."
Collected for Mrs. Loyd. Dated ms. of newspaper
items. May 1951. Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

Ogle, Dora G. "A Philosophic Phantasy in Honor of the
Memory of Marietta Johnson." Fairhope: privately
printed, 1929. Pamphlet, Marietta Johnson Museum,
Fairhope, AL.

Marietta Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

Pierce, Rhoda Morton (Mrs. Clarence DeSackett). "Account
of a Trip from Illinois to St. Paul, Minnesota in

Record Book 1917-1923. School of Organic Education,
Fairhope, AL.

Record Book 1923-1936. School of Organic Education,
Fairhope, AL.

Record Book 1936-1945. School of Organic Education,
Fairhope, AL.

School Home Guest Book 1923-1937. School of Organic
Education, Fairhope, AL.

School of Organic Education. New York: Office of School
of Organic Education, [ca. 1925]. Pamphlet, Marietta
Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.

School of Organic Education. New York: The Fairhope
Educational Foundation, n.d. Pamphlet, Marietta
Johnson Museum, Fairhope, AL.
The Scrap Book of Marietta Johnson. Collection of clippings, pamphlets, and brochures mainly from 1920's pertaining to Marietta Johnson and the School of Organic Education. School of Organic Education, Fairhope, AL.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Articles and Other:


---. "The Public Schools of Minneapolis and Others." The Forum 15 (1893) 363-76.


Washburne, Carleton W. "Give 'Em time and They'll Turn to Books." Collier's 22 Dec. 1923: 13-14.

Books:


Schweickert, Patrocinio P. 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." Flynn and Schweickert 31-63.


APPENDIX

Schools founded by Marietta Johnson per information provided by Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope, Alabama:

School of Organic Education - Fairhope, Alabama - founded 1907
Edgewood School - Greenwich, Connecticut - founded 1913
Caldwell Country Day School, Caldwell, New Jersey - founded 1924
Manhassett Bay School - Port Washington, Long Island
Unquowa School - Bridgeport, Connecticut - founded 1917
Manumit School - Pawling, New York - founded 1924
Peninsula School of Creative Education - Menlo Park, California
Fairhope [Brookside?] School - [Upper] Montclair, New Jersey
West Orange - West Orange, New Jersey
Orchard School - Indianapolis, Indiana
Fairhope Country School - Ridgefield, Connecticut
Marietta Johnson School - Phoenix, Arizona
Hood River [Orchard?] School - Hood River, Oregon
State Teacher's College [School?] - LaCrosse, Wisconsin - founded 1932
Sunset Hill School - Kansas City, Missouri

* Fairhope Courier items from 1918 through 1934 note Mrs. Johnson's close association with eight schools in addition to the Greenwich and Fairhope Schools. They were the West Orange, New Jersey school; the Fairhope or Brookside School in Upper Montclair, New Jersey; the Orchard School in Indianapolis, Indiana; the Caldwell Country Day School in Caldwell, New Jersey; the Manhassett Bay School in Port Washington, New York and the Marietta Johnson School in Phoenix, Arizona. The Hood River School, according to the Courier, was founded by the Cases, with Mrs. Johnson acting as "godmother" and was called the Orchard School. And it appears that there was a summer school conducted around 1915 in Oak Park, Illinois (Courier 22 Oct. 1915, 28 Sept. 1917, 7 June 1918, 19 Jan. 1923, 6 Mar. 1925, 17 Nov. 1927, 7 Feb. 1929, 14 Mar. 1929, 28 Nov. 1929, 15 Jan. 1931, 5 Feb. 1931, 14 May 1931, 26 Nov. 1931, 7 June 1934).
VITA

Janet McGrath was born in Carroll, Iowa, the daughter of Esther and Alton P. Bonneson. She lived in Iowa and Michigan, graduating from high school in Manning, Iowa, in 1951. From 1951 until 1959, she worked for Mutual of Omaha and married her husband Robert McGrath in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1952. A daughter, Robbin, was born in 1959. Robert was employed in the Portland cement industry and was transferred frequently. During the years of moving from one city and state to another, Janet took courses at the universities and colleges nearby. She began work on her bachelor's degree at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, continued at the University of Montevallo in Montevallo, Alabama, and completed the degree in English at Lamar University, graduating summa cum laude in 1978.

Transferred to Birmingham, Alabama, for a second time, Janet began work on the doctoral degree in Montevallo, Alabama, continued at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and has been attending Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, since moving to Louisiana in 1986. The McGraths are members of the First Church of Christ Scientist in Baton Rouge and Robert has now retired. Daughter Robbin is married to James Mills and the two are now living in Houston, Texas. They have two children, Robert aged six and John aged 2.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Janet Ruie McGrath

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Dissertation: A School for Utopia: Marietta Johnson and the Organic Idea

Approved:

[Signatures]
Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:
February 16, 1996