

Margaret floy washburn essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Margaret Floy Washburn was born on July 25, 1871 in Harlem, New York City to Rev. Francis and Elizabeth Floy Washburn. She was an only child and did not attend school until the age of seven, although she could read and write long before that. Her first school was private and kept by the Misses Smuller. In private school she learned not only the rudiments of arithmetic, but also a foundation in French and German and the ability to read music and play all the major and minor scales from memory (Autobiography, 1930). It was not until the age of eleven that she entered public school.

She entered high school at the age of twelve and graduated in June of 1886 at the age of fifteen. The fall of 1886, she attended Vassar College where she studied Chemistry and French. She entered as a preparatory student because she lacked some Latin and had had no French since her earliest school days, but Miss Smuller had laid such a good foundation that she needed only one semester at Vassar to secure admission to freshman French (Autobiography, 1930). However, when she graduated in 1891 her interests had changed to Philosophy and Science.

In 1898, she also joined Mu Chapter, Phi Beta Kappa (Vassar Encyclopedia, n. d.). Even though Columbia University did not admit women graduate students, Washburn received special permission to attend and study under Cattell as a " hearer. " While waiting to find out if she would be accepted as a " hearer" she took the School of Mines course in quantitative chemical analysis at the Barnard laboratory where President Butler suggested she read Wundt's long article on psychological methods in the first volume of *Philosophische Studien*, which she did even after having only one year of German.

While at Columbia, she was assigned the experimental problem of finding whether Weber's Law held for the two-point threshold on the skin (Autobiography, 1930). At the end of one year, Cattell advised her to transfer to the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University, where she might receive not only a degree but also a scholarship. Therefore, in 1892, Washburn became Titchener's first, and for that year, only major graduate student. After a year at Cornell, Vassar College awarded her in 1893 her Masters degree in absentia for work done under Titchener.

A year later, in 1894, she obtained her doctorate from Cornell, the first Ph. D. that Titchener recommended; therefore making her the first woman to complete her Ph. D. training in the field of psychology. After leaving Cornell, Washburn held many teaching positions, including positions at Sage College, Wells College, and the University of Cincinnati before returning to her alma mater, Vassar College as an Associate Professor of Philosophy, in 1903 (GoodTherapy. org, 2007-2013).

Washburn taught at Wells College for six years with a beginning measly salary of three hundred dollars and a home and an ending salary of seven hundred dollars and a home while a man made fifteen hundred dollars and a home. She was Warden of Sage College for two years with a salary of fifteen hundred dollars and a home. She was offered and took an assistant professorship in full charge of psychology at the University of Cincinnati where she was the only woman of professorial rank on the faculty. (Autobiography, 1930).

“ At Vassar, she was the first woman in the country to establish a psychology laboratory. There she also mentored sixty-nine published studies with one hundred and seventy seven students” (Vassar Encyclopedia, n. d.). She spent her remaining professional career there. While teaching at Vassar College she spent every Sunday at home with her parents, who were living only sixteen miles away. In 1903 she was also included on Cottrell’s list of one thousand most important “ American Men of Science,” as one of three women to be included (Vassar Encyclopedia, n. d.).

“ Despite the heavy teaching load and inadequate research facilities that invariably accompany faculty life at small colleges, Washburn fashioned a remarkable career that included an American Psychological Association presidency in 1921, co-editorship of the American Journal of Psychology for more than a decade, and election to the prestigious National Academy of Sciences in 1931” (Goodwin, 2008). She also authored dozens of studies and edited academic journals.

“ In 1937 she started a faculty outcry on the Vassar campus opposing the demolition of Vassar Brothers Laboratory, where she had established her early Psychology Lab. President MacCracken had decreed that the building was unfit. Ashburn opposed the move because it would cause the department to be housed in Blodgett Hall of Euthenics, which had then just recently been built. As usual, her opposition was on principle, as she thought the discipline of euthenics would return women to the kitchen, from which they had been emancipated by Matthew Vassar.” (Vassar Encyclopedia, n. d.).

As a psychologist, Washburn is most noted for her work in comparative psychology, though she published also in the areas of perception, imagery, “social consciousness” (empathy but helping behavior), and developed a motor theory of consciousness. “ She contributed some original research (e. g. , on the perception of color in ? sh) and summarized the ? eld in her well-known text, *The Animal Mind*.

First published in 1908, it went through four editions (1917, 1926, 1936) and became the standard textbook of its day (Dewsbury, 1992). It was notable for its exclusion of evidence based solely on anecdotal data; Washburn included only the results of experimental research. As implied by the title, its focus was on the cognitive processes of perception, attention, and consciousness as exhibited by the behaviors of various species” (Goodwin, 2008).

Washburn believed that like humans, animals possessed both aspects of dualism, a body and a mind. Through her extensive animal studies, she was able to provide evidence of a definite mental process within the animal mind. Margaret Floy Washburn passed away in 1939, at only sixty-eight years old. However, she accomplished quite a bit in her life, much of which she was told could only be accomplished by a man. But, she never let anything stop her from accomplishing her dreams.