

At a Meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences on October 17, 2000, the following Minute was placed upon the records.

MARY INGRAHAM BUNTING-SMITH

Born: July 10, 1910

Died: January 21, 1998

Mary Ingraham Bunting-Smith, fifth president of Radcliffe College, was born to Henry A. and Mary Shotwell Ingraham in Brooklyn, New York, on July 10, 1910. Her family was comfortable, close-knit, unconventional, and engaged; her mother, an energetic activist, was for a time head of the national YWCA. She was trained as a microbiologist (AB Vassar 1931, Ph.D. 1934, Wisconsin) and before turning to administration as dean of Douglass College for Women at Rutgers in 1955, had taught at Bennington, Gaucher, Yale, and Wellesley. Her early papers (1939, 1940) on color variations in the bacterium *Serratia marcescens* were considered pioneering studies in the area of microbial genetics. She was named President of Radcliffe College in 1960.

Polly Bunting, as she was all but universally known, played an indispensable role in guiding Radcliffe through a turbulent 12 years, and in shaping its present configuration. Almost immediately after taking up her duties she established the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study, whose purpose was to allow talented women with family responsibilities to continue with their careers. She was a shining example of the type, having herself been widowed with four children, the oldest fourteen, while in her mid-forties; she told an interviewer for *Time Magazine*, on whose cover she appeared in 1961, that she was a “geneticist with nest-building experience.” The Institute was renamed in her honor in 1978, and is probably the accomplishment for which she will be best remembered by future generations.

But for her contemporaries in this Faculty her achievement of advancing the integration of Radcliffe within Harvard, now largely taken for granted, will always loom larger. She began this project, a major part of her attack on what she called a “climate of unexpectation for girls,” almost immediately upon arrival in Cambridge.

President Bunting began the series of transformations that culminated in last year’s Harvard-Radcliffe Agreement by obtaining Corporation approval for the admission of women to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (1961), ending Radcliffe’s graduate programs. This step revealed the scale of the legal and structural complexities that she was to face: the recently-dedicated Cronkhite Center for women graduate students was to be retained by Radcliffe, but women graduate students would be eligible for Harvard financial aid alongside men, and as of 1962-63 all degrees would be conferred by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. These were major steps, and they caused uneasiness in diverse quarters. But at each stage care was taken not to move too fast. Thus the announcement of this step in April, 1962, reassured readers that: “The only effect for undergraduates will be the award of a Harvard degree countersigned by Radcliffe rather than a Radcliffe degree countersigned by Harvard.”

President Bunting had already, in 1961, announced plans for the Radcliffe House system. At first this was just an aggregation of the existing Quadrangle buildings into North, South, and East

Houses, but it was followed by the building of Hilles Library in 1966, and of Currier House in 1970. From its beginning Hilles was open to men and women alike, in sharp contrast with the restrictive “men only” policy at Lamont. Mrs. Bunting’s farsighted vision is now realized in the fully integrated Pforzheimer, Cabot, and Currier Houses.

In those first years President Bunting moved with astonishing speed given the arcane political and structural nature of Harvard and Radcliffe. Her accomplishment was the greater for the fact that she found herself forced to pursue her goal of equality for women at Harvard — especially, but not only, for undergraduates — at a time when the University’s structures and policies were under passionate assault because of the tensions arising out of the Vietnam War, and when Radcliffe’s resources were stretched to the limit.

In the words of former President Bok: “Amid the hysteria, the anger, and the emotion that marked those turbulent times and moved so many people to acts and statements they would later regret, Polly remained with all her values intact — calm, good humored, and steady as a rock.”

Mrs. Bunting found herself having to confront radical students, angry trustees, recalcitrant University administrators, and garrulous members of this Faculty. She never wavered in her goal of equal access for women, nor did she fall for the temptation of easy rhetoric and harnessing the forces of protest for her own purposes.

Her motion asking the FAS to make recommendations on the proposed “merger” first came before the Faculty on April 8, 1969, just days before the dramatic occupation of University Hall.

Once passions had subsided, she pressed a motion for co-residential living, to begin in 1970-71. This Faculty’s vote to “exchange” 150 men for the same number of women on an experimental basis for one semester took place on December 9, 1969.

Mrs. Bunting met resistance not only among alumnae and students, but also in this Faculty. Her merger initiative engendered a lively debate on February 10, 1970, which ended in a characteristic motion to delay any action.

Momentum was regained in May, 1970, with the merger of the Administrative Boards of the two colleges, and in 1971 the complex and cumbersome merger agreement, by then nick-named the “non-merger merger,” was settled upon, providing for the merging of many duplicative functions and the designation of a number of “retained” Radcliffe activities and programs.

At the same time Mrs. Bunting became a member of this Faculty, though only briefly. In 1972, she became special assistant for co-education to the president of Princeton University, where she remained until 1975. In that year she returned to Cambridge to marry Dr. Clement Smith and, after his death in 1988, moved to New Hampshire.

Many honors had come to her during her career: she was named “Outstanding Woman of the Year” in the field of education by *Who’s Who*, and received the gold medal of the National Institute of Social Scientists in 1962. She was a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and was awarded over a dozen honorary degrees, including our own.

Mary Bunting-Smith died January 21, 1998 in Hanover, New Hampshire, leaving four children and four stepchildren, four grandchildren and four children-in-law.

Polly Bunting was without the vices of her many virtues. She always had a plan, but never schemed. She was totally dedicated to her goals, but never allowed her deep commitment to distort her judgment. She had grand ambitions for Radcliffe and for women, but was devoid of personal vanity. Possessed of prodigious energy, she was never impatient. She deftly out-manuevered students, alumnae, faculties, boards, and, on occasion, the undersigned, but made no enemies. She will be remembered as a quiet visionary and thoroughly admirable colleague.

Respectfully submitted,

Frederick H. Abernathy
Derek C. Bok
Giles Constable
John T. Dunlop
Edward L. Keenan, Chairman