

VERMONT HISTORY

Volume 91, No. 1 • Winter/Spring 2023



❖ One Mission, Two Pathways: Annette Parmelee and Lucy Daniels
in the Campaign for Woman Suffrage *Marilyn S. Blackwell*

❖ Renewal of Burlington in the Suburban Age *Brendan S. Keleher*

The journal of the
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



About the Covers

Katherine Fletcher's Graduation Dress

Katherine Fletcher grew up in Jeffersonville, Vermont, the daughter of a farmer. As a teenager, she was accepted into Johnson Normal School, graduating along with eighteen other boys and girls in 1888. There is no shortage of graduation dresses in the Vermont Historical Society collection, but few have as interesting a story as this one.

Its story starts in San Jose, California, where Ed Chester Smith was temporarily out of work with peritonitis. The illness cleared up on its own, with Ed going on to win an award for being the oldest Mason in Oregon; but it apparently forced him to close his store. This may be what prompted him to send a bolt of brown silk to his sister, Henrietta Smith Fletcher, in Jeffersonville, Vermont.

Like many mothers, instead of using the gift for herself, Henrietta used it for her daughter. While it is not known for certain whether Henrietta or Katherine constructed this dress, it is both exquisite and distinctly homemade. The construction stitches are tiny, the bodice is fully lined, and is fitted, boned, and supported in all the right places. However, at some point they must have run out brown thread because the seam finishes are all stitched in red, and the buttonholes are stitched in purple (front cover).

The most interesting construction quirk is at the bustle. In the 1880s, it was fashionable to have a noticeable rear bustle, with very little padding anywhere else. The fashion was prevalent enough to reach Jeffersonville, but the seamstress must not have peered inside any of the garments for construction clues. This skirt is constructed with a partially attached rear panel that ties around the wearer's waist like an apron worn backwards. This allows room for the bustle pad while still fitting tightly at the waist. Usually, this rear overskirt covers a slit or void that is hidden when the panel is secured. However, this one is over a complete skirt panel, meaning that Katherine would have had to wear her bustle pad on the outside of her skirt. (The impracticality of this may be why the dress shows almost no signs of wear.)



As the eldest child, and the first to get an education, Katherine's graduation was an exciting event for her family. So, silk from California was not enough. In preparation for her January graduation, Katherine wrote, "the lace and passementerie my dear old dad drove from Jeffersonville to Burlington that winter to get for that I might have as good a looking dress as the rest"¹

In the time before automobiles, the trip would have taken upward of seven hours each way. Katherine's father chose a machine-made lace of tan leaves embroidered on brown netting, perfectly matching the shade of the dress. He added some appliques of black glass beads, seen at the shoulders and cuffs (see back cover).

The week of graduation was busy for the students. They began by hearing a sermon on their duty for self-denial before going into two full days of written exams. On Wednesday, they demonstrated their teaching abilities by performing their oral exams in front of visitors. Finally, on Thursday, the largest class since the opening year of the school performed their ceremony, which included recitations of poetry. The *Morrisville News and Citizen* reported that over a hundred people were in attendance.² Katherine's mother could not attend as she had just given birth, and as the ceremony started, Katherine looked across the audience to find that her father was not in attendance either.

As Katherine's turn to perform her recitation came closer, she "was on the platform waiting and watching the door for [her father]." Finally, he arrived! "I can see him plainly as he entered the Normal Hall late for the exercises," Katherine wrote to her daughters more than thirty years later. "He heard me recite 'The Chimes of St. Nicholas,' and there was not another so proud a parent there."³

Every life, past or present, is filled with stories. From the outside, some stories, like this one, seem small or insignificant. They are easily eclipsed by bigger achievements or connections in a person's life. In Katherine's case, she was the mother of Consuelo Northrup Bailey (1899-1976), Vermont's and the nation's first female lieutenant

governor (1954-56). So, when her life is remembered, it is in relation to her place in the larger story of women in Vermont. But from the inside, this small story was one of Katherine's defining moments. She kept this dress, preserved in almost perfect condition, until the end of her life. In 1920, she wrote down its story, starting with, "I want my girlies to know." Like Katherine, we at the Vermont Historical Society also think the small, defining stories are worth preserving. Now, more than just her girlies will know this one.

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NOTES

¹ Katherine Northrup to Mary Wallis, Consuela Bailey, and Frederika Sargent, 1920, Vermont Historical Society, 1993.26.

² "The Normal School," *News and Citizen* (Morrisville, VT), 26 January 1888, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/403848810>.

³ Northrup to Mary Wallis, et al.



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