

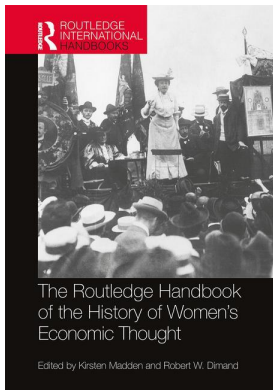
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## The Routledge Handbook of the History of Women's Economic Thought

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### Daughters of Commons

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## 12

## DAUGHTERS OF COMMONS

## Wisconsin women and Institutionalism

*Marianne Johnson***Introduction**

One of the top four programs in the United States throughout the first third of the 20th century (Froman 1942), Wisconsin was known for an Institutional approach that was “empirical, focused on institutions, and social control” (Rutherford 2006, 168). What distinguished Wisconsin Institutionalism was a commitment to Progressive reform, an emphasis on field research, historical case studies, and a focus on the larger cultural and legal environment. While having many contributors, the defining individual of Wisconsin Institutionalism was John R. Commons. Commons arrived at Wisconsin in 1904 and quickly became the epicenter of the department, overseeing an expansive research agenda and orchestrating nation-wide political advocacy for labor reforms including unemployment insurance, social security, and the minimum wage (Kato 2009; Kaufman 1993; Rutherford 2011; Tilman 2008). Commons “contributed in one way or another to practically every piece of social and labor legislation that has been enacted in the twentieth century” (Barbash 1993, 69). He was “the intellectual origin of the New Deal, of labor legislation, of social security, of the whole movement in the country toward a welfare state” (Boulding 1957, 7). His policy work was underpinned by a complicated and unwieldy theoretical structure, which he laid out in the *Legal Foundations of Capitalism* (1924) and *Institutional Economics* (1934).

Though an “illiberal reformer” who rationalized labor laws on eugenic grounds and embraced lower minimum wages for women and minorities (Leonard 2016), Commons was unusually supportive of female students at Wisconsin. During Commons’ tenure, Wisconsin ranked fourth in the production of women doctoral candidates, following only Columbia, Chicago and Harvard.<sup>1</sup> Compared to institutions where women were often “lone voyagers” (Joncich Clifford 1989), women at Wisconsin participated widely in department activities, including Commons’ famous “Friday Nighters”, a dinner and discussion group for students.<sup>2</sup> Women wrote papers and books; they contributed to collaborative research projects, including Commons’ vast labor histories. Women co-authored Institutional textbooks and engaged in field studies. They authored legislation and ran government agencies.

Women have received little attention by those writing the history of Wisconsin Institutionalism (Johnson 2011 and 2015; Kaufman 1993; Lampman 1993; Rutherford 2006 and 2011; Tilman 2008). Yet, the daughters of Commons made important contributions both to the body of work considered Wisconsin Institutionalism as well as to its diffusion. Rather than drawing conclusions

from individual cases and generalizing, I adopt a prosopographic approach, investigating the common characteristics of this historical group, whose individual biographies are often obscured. By examining typical Wisconsin women economists, we can develop a picture of their contributions to Institutionalism. This is done by collecting data on more than 40 women who matriculated at Wisconsin – PhDs, Master’s students, and undergraduates – and looking for phenomena that transcend individual experiences.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, two important themes emerge. By actively including women in his research program, Commons vastly expanded the army of people well-equipped to contribute to his social-political agenda. This allowed Wisconsin Institutionalism to achieve a much larger footprint than would have otherwise been possible, as women made significant contributions to the spread of Wisconsin Institutionalism through publications, teaching, and applications.

However, this is not just a story about the contributions of women to the Institutionalist tradition, but also about using their experiences to elucidate unresolved questions in the history of economic thought. Those that study Institutionalism have long sought to understand its rapid marginalization and decline in the post-war period (Backhouse 1998; Biddle 1998; Johnson 2015; Lampman 1993; Rutherford 2011 and 2015). The story of Wisconsin’s women economists illustrates how Wisconsin Institutionalism’s broadly defined approach to economics and economic research contributed to its decline. By embracing government work, statistical data collection without underlying theory, and multi-disciplinary studies, Wisconsin diluted its brand of economics until it was no longer clearly recognized as economic theory proper. This was particularly evident in the careers of Wisconsin-trained women economists who became practicing sociologists, social workers, government researchers and administrators of nonprofit organizations, lobbying groups, and government programs.

### **Wisconsin women economists as a historical group**

To understand the historical significance of Wisconsin’s women economists, it is important to first form a picture of their place in the department and to consider how Wisconsin compared to other leading institutions. The University of Wisconsin produced its first PhD in economics in 1893. Entering with the second class was Helen Page Bates who became the first woman to earn a PhD in economics in the United States (1896). She arrived with funding as a University Scholar; subsequent years were funded by fellowships and teaching (Hammond 1993). Bates was also the first woman to serve as a lecturer in economics at Wisconsin, hired by Richard T. Ely to satisfy the rapidly increasing demand for undergraduate economics courses.<sup>4</sup>

While the absolute number of women pursuing graduate education at Wisconsin was large, Wisconsin was typical in the percentage of women in economics graduate programs at the time (Libby 1990). Women represented 9.6 percent of PhDs and 21.4 percent of Master’s degrees granted at Wisconsin before 1940 (Table 12.1).<sup>5</sup> What was unusual is the extent to which these women were associated with Commons. Though a prolific advisor generally, Commons played an out-sized role in the education of women. During Commons’ tenure, Margaret Pryor Glicksman was the only woman to complete a dissertation in economics under another professor at Wisconsin.

Women were more likely than men to work on labor and social reform issues at Wisconsin. They were also more likely to undertake projects that involved empirical case studies and fieldwork.<sup>6</sup> For example, Helen Sumner Woodbury’s dissertation cum book of “two years’ study of suffrage in Colorado . . . gathered together a valuable collection of data from which important conclusions can be drawn as to the actual effects of equal suffrage upon politics, upon legislation” and which was based on statistical analysis of 1,200 questionnaires she developed (Nearing 1910, 259–260).

Table 12.1 Wisconsin women economists\*

	PhDs granted to women (out of total)**	Master's degrees granted to women (out of total)**
Before 1900	1 (12)	3 (10)
1900–1910	5 (27)	4 (40)
1911–1920	0 (25)	13 (78)
1921–1930	7 (52)	24 (86)
1931–1940	5 (70)	20 (89)
Total	18 (186)	64 (303)

Notes

\*During some of this period, the Economics Department was also responsible for courses in Sociology, Social Work, Accounting, and Finance, complicating counting PhDs. For example, William Kiekhofer wrote to Teresa Schmid McMahon asking if she wanted to be listed as a sociologist or economist for the departmental records. “Although I am an economist now, I really was a sociologist in 1911” she responded (Schmid McMahon to Kiekhofer, 18 November 1930, Schmid McMahon Papers, University of Washington, Box 1, Folder 5).

\*\*University of Wisconsin Graduation Bulletins, 1892–1940.

In addition to the 18 women that completed PhDs at Wisconsin, eight more can be found in the *American Economic Review* list of doctoral candidates. While some pursued traditional topics in labor economics such as unpaid services or the labor conditions of a particular industry, half were at the intersection of eugenics and social policy.<sup>7</sup> Their titles reflect a national interest by Progressives during this period in eugenics as the basis of social reform (Leonard 2016).

Many of Commons’ Master’s students also made significant contributions to the dissemination of Wisconsin Institutionalism including Florence Peterson, Alice Shoemaker, Maud Swett, and Helen Witmer. Much like the PhD dissertations, the Masters theses completed by Wisconsin women emphasized field research and social reform. Swett wrote a *Summary of Labor Laws in Effect* (1909) for Commons; her thesis was funded by the American Association for Labor Legislation (A.A.L.L.). Ely’s daughter, Anna Ely Morehouse, based her 1919 thesis on undercover work in machine-works and canning factories in Milwaukee.<sup>8</sup> Peterson’s thesis relied on extensive data collection on the number of shoeworkers, unionization rates, and shoes produced in her *History of Shoe Works’ Organizations* in the Midwest (1930).

As apparent in Table 12.1, the number of graduate students increased dramatically throughout the first third of the 20th century, and Wisconsin, like many other schools, commonly accepted large numbers of students without providing funding. However, unlike at other institutions where women rarely received stipends or fellowships (Dzuback 2006), at Wisconsin, Commons actively worked to find paid employment opportunities for at least some of his female students. For example, Genevieve Townsend received a legislative scholarship in economics for graduate work. When that was exhausted, Commons secured a position for her as a research assistant to the Department of Economics paid by a grant from the Consumer Credit Institute of America. Helen Sumner Woodbury initially funded her graduate education by working as Ely’s secretary. After her first year, Commons had Sumner Woodbury appointed as an honorary fellow in political economy and then employed as a correspondence instructor. Margaret Pryor Glicksman and Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush eventually achieved professorships in economics at Wisconsin. Many other women were hired at the behest of Commons to university administrative work and as instructors in various extension programs.<sup>9</sup>

It would be misleading to focus exclusively on graduate students, as many of the women undergraduates who studied with Commons contributed to the spread of Wisconsin Institutionalism in

significant ways, particularly Irene Osgood Andrews with the A.A.L.L. and Katherine Lenroot at the Children's Bureau in Washington, D.C. There was a notable presence of women undergraduates from the earliest years, with a reasonable estimate that women made up approximately 16 percent of undergraduate degree earners in economics before 1940.<sup>10</sup> Several were supported by on-going scholarships, including Orphia Leavitt who received the Women's Club Scholarship for study in economics (1893). Helen Page Bates received the same scholarship the following year. Throughout this period, women earned honors for theses on economics subjects. Their theses reflected much the same interests of Wisconsin women graduate students, nearly all focusing on labor economics, economic issues of mothers and children, pensioning, women's paid work (e.g. laundries, canning factories), and women's unions. Some Wisconsin undergraduates chose to pursue graduate work at other centers of Institutionalism.<sup>11</sup>

The contributions of these women to Institutionalism through their publications, their teaching, and their policy work are considered in the next sections. Their stories indicate the extent to which women added to the body of Institutional thought and to its diffusion in the academy, in government, and to the broader public.

### Publishing Institutionalism

One way to consider the contribution of women to Wisconsin Institutionalism is by examining their publications. Publications have long conferred status, for authors and for their universities. Including the contributions by both faculty and PhDs of an institution, Roger Backhouse (1998) sampled publications in the *American Economic Review* (every volume), the *Journal of Political Economy* (every fifth volume), and the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (every fifth volume). Based on his sample estimates, he calculated that Wisconsin ranked seventh nationally for publications in top economics journals before 1940. Several women contributed to this ranking, including Ethel Dietrich, Constance Kiehl, Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, and Helen Witmer. Their well-cited publications appeared in the *American Economic Review*, the *Journal of Political Economy* and the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (Table 12.2).

The publications listed in Table 12.2 reflect a marked interest in policy analysis and social issues, consistent with Commons' labor reform agenda. Unlike women at other institutions, Wisconsin women did not contribute much to research on household management or consumer economics, instead focusing on issues that would now be classified as labor economics, industrial relations, and social work. Their work represented original contributions to economic thought. Wisconsin women employed the empirical Institutional methods of case study and legal-historical analysis supplemented by data collection and basic statistical analysis. None adopted the mathematical formalism popular at schools such as Chicago or Harvard. A review of Ethel Dietrich's *World Trade* (1939) emphasized her Institutional approach, noting she abandoned classical trade theory and instead "proceed[ed] immediately to a discussion of the role which governments play" and that "the factual material here presented needed to be accumulated, for there has not been a book of like subject matter during the past decade" (Phelps 1940, 460). Frequently canvassed topics included regulations on child labor, minimum wages, and unemployment insurance programs. Google Scholar provides a convenient method to benchmark the impact of a particular scholarly work. The numbers of identified citations are provided for books, journal articles, pamphlets, and studies, searchable either by title or by author name. In total, there are more than 2,000 Google Scholar citations to works listed in Table 12.2, of which sole-authored articles, books, and studies by Wisconsin women earned more than 700 Google Scholar citations.

Table 12.2 Publications of Wisconsin women (all degree levels)<sup>12</sup>

Name (degree)	Notable books or reports	Publication impact*
Irene Osgood Andrews (AB)	<i>Women Workers in Milwaukee Tanneries</i> (1909); <i>Minimum Wage Legislation</i> (1914); <i>The Relation of Irregular Employment to the Living Wage for Women</i> (1915); <i>Economic Effects of the War upon Women and Children in Great Britain</i> (1918)	JSTOR hits: 11 Book reviews of Andrews' work: 4 Additionally dozens of articles in <i>American Labor Legislative Review</i> Google Scholar citations: 57
Ethel Dietrich (PhD)	<i>World Trade</i> (1939); <i>Far Eastern Trade of the United States</i> (1940)	JSTOR hits: 8 Articles: 4 (1 <i>JPE</i> , and 3 <i>AER</i> ) Book reviews written by Dietrich: 1 Book reviews of Dietrich's work: 3 Google Scholar citations: 46
Elsie Glück (PhD)	<i>John Mitchell, Miner, Labor's Bargain with the Gilded Age</i> (1929); <i>Labor Movement in the United States 1860–1895</i> (1929)	JSTOR hits: 7 Book reviews written by Glück: 1 Book reviews of Glück's work: 2 AEA conference program: 1 Google Scholar citations: 60
Constance Kiehel (PhD)	<i>Unemployment Insurance in Belgium</i> (1931)	JSTOR hits: 2 Articles: 1 ( <i>AER</i> ) Book reviews of Kiehel's work: 1 Google Scholar citations: 11
Katherine Lumpkin (PhD)	<i>The South in Progress</i> (1942); <i>Child Workers in America</i> (1936); <i>The Making of a Southerner</i> (1947)	JSTOR hits: 9 Articles: 1 ( <i>Phylon</i> ) Book reviews of Lumpkin's work: 5 Google Scholar citations: 2
Emma Lundberg (MA)	<i>Unto the Least of These: Social Services for Children</i> (1947)	JSTOR hits: 6 Articles: 1 ( <i>AAAPSS</i> ) Book reviews of Lundberg's work: 5 Google Scholar citations: 20
Theresa Schmid McMahon (PhD)	<i>Women and Economic Evolution</i> (1912); <i>Social and Economic Standards of Living</i> (1925)	JSTOR hits: 3 Book reviews of McMahon's work: 1 AEA conference program: 1 Google Scholar citations: 36
Elizabeth Paschal (PhD)	Education pedagogy publications, e.g., <i>Encouraging the Excellent</i> (1960) Paschal's thesis, <i>Worker's Equity in His Job</i> , was not published as a book.	JSTOR hits: 8 AEA conference program: 1 Google Scholar citations: 26
Florence Peterson (MA)	<i>Alleviation of Unemployment in Wisconsin</i> (1931) with Don Lescohier; <i>American Labor Unions</i> (1945); <i>Survey of Labor Economics</i> (1947)	JSTOR hits: 25 Book reviews by Peterson: 3 Book reviews of Peterson's work: 6 Google Scholar citations: 265
Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush (PhD)	Co-author of <i>History of Labor in the United States</i> (1935) with Don Lescohier; <i>Organized Labor and Protective Labor Legislation</i> (1957) Reports: <i>The Migrant Labor Problem in Wisconsin</i> (1962)	JSTOR hits: 6 Articles: 2 (1 <i>AER</i> ) Book reviews by Brandeis Raushenbush: 4 Book reviews of Brandeis Raushenbush: 2

(continued)

Table 12.2 (continued)

Name (degree)	Notable books or reports	Publication impact*
Raushenbush (cont.)		AEA Conference program: 1 Google Scholar citations: 29 Google Scholar citations to volumes of <i>History of Labor in the United States</i> co-authored by Brandeis Raushenbush: 137
Helen Leland Witmer (MA)	<i>The Field of Parent Education</i> (1936); <i>Social Work: An Analysis of a Social Institution</i> (1942); <i>Independent Adoptions</i> (1963)	JSTOR hits: 26 Articles: 6 (1 <i>QJE</i> ) Google Scholar citations > 400
Helen Sumner Woodbury (PhD)	<i>Equal Suffrage</i> (1909); “History of Women in Industry in the United States” (1910); co-author of <i>Documentary History of American Industrial Society with Commons</i> (1910); co-author of <i>History of Labor in the United States</i> (1918), <i>Working Children of Boston</i> (1922)	JSTOR hits: 22 Book reviews written by Sumner Woodbury: 2 Book reviews of Sumner Woodbury’s work: 10 Google Scholar citations to works sole-authored by Sumner Woodbury: 1 Google Scholar citations to volumes of <i>History of Labor in the United States</i> co-authored by Sumner Woodbury: 769 Google Scholar citations to volumes of <i>A Documentary History of American Industrial Society</i> co-authored by Sumner Woodbury: 233

## Notes

\*JSTOR hits refer to the records returned by the searchable academic database JSTOR when an author’s name is entered as the search criterion. JSTOR hits include journal publications, book reviews by, book reviews of, references to, and AEA annual conference participation (paper, discussant, or round table) in economics, political science, and sociology journals. *AER* indicates the *American Economic Review*. *JPE* indicates *Journal of Political Economy*. *QJE* indicates *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. *AAAPSS* is the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

Wisconsin women authored 11 book reviews, and their books, exclusive of the large joint projects discussed below, received 28 reviews in journals indexed by JSTOR (Table 12.2). That these women had more reviews of than reviews by indicates that they were considered authors in their own right, receiving disciplinary scrutiny. Nearly every review emphasized the strongly Institutional approach taken by Wisconsin women. For example, Amy Hughes wrote of Irene Osgood Andrews’ *Economic Effects of the War upon Women and Children in Great Britain* (1918) that “it takes the form of a documentary study of official and other sources of material . . . very naturally it is written from the author’s point of view as a person primarily interested in labor legislation” (Hughes 1919, 722). Theresa Schmid McMahon’s *Women and Economic Evolution* (1912) was “superficial” and full of typographical errors (*JPE* 1913, 876), Aaron Director found that “Elsie Glück is a very excellent example” of “the recent vogue in biographical literature” (1932, 424). Otherwise, the reviews were not particularly notable for being either unusually positive or negative.



Women were collaborators on significant departmental projects. Irene Osgood Andrews, Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, and Helen Sumner Woodbury contributed to the multi-volume *History of Labor in the United States*, a project supervised by Commons and funded by the American Bureau of Industrial Research. Sumner Woodbury co-authored with Commons *Trade Unionism and Labor Problems* (1905) and parts of the ten-volume *Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (1910–1911). These projects garner more than 1,000 Google Scholar citations and were highly praised in contemporary reviews (Bogart 1910; Cross 1918; Johnson 1910). Though chiding Commons for “his usual modesty” and giving “his assistants . . . full and complete credit for those parts of which they had the writing,” Ira Cross appreciated that in “Dr. Helen Sumner’s” contribution, the data are more readily available and the story more focused (1918, 668–669). George Barnett (1919, 341) wrote that “Miss Sumner’s history of the period from 1827 to 1837 contains a definitive study of the rise and development of workingman’s parties – a chapter in the history of American labor hitherto only half written.”

Sumner Woodbury also co-authored the Institutionalist textbook *Labor Problems* (1905) with T.S. Adams. The book went through nine editions by 1920 and was the most popular labor economics textbook in the country. Determined an “excellent textbook” that covered women and child labor, immigration, poverty, unemployment, strikes, cooperatives, and labor laws, among its many topics (Cummings 1906, 396). *Labor Problems* did much to advance the Wisconsin Institutionalist position on labor reform by advocating for workday limits, minimum wages, and unemployment insurance. Florence Peterson provided an updated view of the Institutionalist approach in her *Survey of Labor Economics* (1947). By “historically and descriptively” treating the institutions of labor, the book was an “outstanding success” (Kirkaldy 1948, 200). Peterson’s book paved the way for the development of Industrial Relations as an independent field of study (Kaufman 1993).

The varied contributions by women to economic thought and Wisconsin Institutionalism were recognized and appreciated by their peers. Four Wisconsin women presented at the American Economic Association’s annual conference (Table 12.2). Another was chosen to serve on the committee to award the first E.A. Karlesen prize given by the American Economic Association for the best paper on a theme. The selection provides evidence of the esteem in which Irene Osgood Andrews was held by the profession, despite only holding a bachelor’s degree.<sup>13</sup>

### Teaching Institutionalism

Women made significant contributions to training the next generation of Wisconsin Institutionalists and to spreading Wisconsin Institutionalism beyond the boundaries of the state and the confines of the university. Of the 18 women who earned PhDs in economics at Wisconsin before 1940, ten held full-time faculty positions for at least part of their career (Appendix 12.1). Five women were associated with women’s colleges, including the prestigious institutions of Mount Holyoke and Bryn Mawr. Others found places in the large state universities of the Midwest and West, including at the University of Washington, Ohio State University, University of Iowa, University of Minnesota, UCLA, and the University of Wisconsin.

A leading figure of Wisconsin Institutionalism by any measure, Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush taught at Wisconsin for 42 years. As such, she was important in determining the direction of the department. She aligned herself firmly with the Institutionalist faction of Martin Glaeser, Harold Groves, Selig Perlman, and Edwin Witte. This group guaranteed that Wisconsin remained a center of Institutionalism long after Institutionalism had been marginalized in the profession more generally (Johnson 2015; Rutherford 2011).



As an instructor, Brandeis Raushenbush adopted Commons' teaching strategy, requiring students to "attend hearings and legislative sessions and follow the progress of bills dealing with labor issues" (Raushenbush and Brandeis Raushenbush 1979, 15).<sup>14</sup> She regularly offered courses in economic history, labor economics, and labor legislation, all from a distinctly Institutional perspective. The courses "focused on 'government action in relation to labor,' protective legislation and its constitutionality, collective bargaining and its legal status, and the work of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission" (Rutherford 2006, 167).

Teresa Schmid McMahan joined the faculty at the University of Washington after earning her PhD in 1909 for a dissertation completed under Commons and E.A. Ross. In Washington, she was a "thorn of Liberalism in the sides of a conservative U.W. administration" (Theresa Schmid McMahan Papers, Box 1, Folder 1). Schmid McMahan was deeply involved with the Progressive labor movement, including the Socialists Society and the Central Labor Council. In her teaching, she followed the Wisconsin model of having students engage directly in local labor and political activities (Theresa Schmid McMahan Papers, Box 1, Folder 1). Though offered a job at the University of Chicago by Paul Douglas, her lifelong interest in teaching labor activism led her to decline, since she "was never interested in being a theorist" (Howe 1989, 230 and 237). Schmid McMahan recommended several students to graduate work at Wisconsin, including Ewan Clague, who became the Commissioner of Labor Statistics for the U.S. Department of Labor (1946–1965).

Beyond traditional collegiate education, Wisconsin women played a significant role in educating the public on labor issues through worker and summer schools and community outreach programs. The University of Wisconsin Extension School for Workers was established by Commons as a collaboration between the YWCA and the University of Wisconsin to provide summer programs for women factory workers. The schools were designed both to educate workers in fundamentals such as reading and arithmetic and to foster a thorough knowledge of labor laws, unionization, and the rights of workers to agitate for reform. The school was run almost entirely by his female students. Both Genevieve Townsend and Alice Shoemaker administered the program and taught courses. They also worked as field agents, recruiting students and collecting data and information on various industries. The historical importance of the school and its close association with Institutionalism has long been recognized (Schwarztrauber 1950; Hoeveler 2016).

Conflating research, teaching and activism, many Wisconsin-trained women worked in community outreach including settlement houses where the data collected were used to argue for social reform and the inhabitants trained to advocate for change (Appendix 12.1). Wisconsin women were also active in the cooperative movement. Popular among Midwest farmers from the 1870s, the cooperative movement grew to include retail stores, dairies, and banks in the early part of the 20th century. The University of Wisconsin Credit Union emerged out of a line of investigative research conducted by Margaret Pryor Glicksman, particularly her work on the 1927 Uniform Small Loan Law and related legislation. Anna Campbell Davis, "one of the ablest students that have ever been in my [Commons'] classes" was also involved, as were Genevieve Townsend and Alice Shoemaker (University of Wisconsin Credit Union 2011). Women comprised four of nine board members and two of three members of the credit committee; all were Commons' students. Beyond banking services, the credit union provided financial education to the community.

### Applying Institutionalism

Institutionalism is defined more by its body of varied types of work – reports, legislation, legal-historical studies, advocacy, speeches – than by a handful of foundational documents.

As a school of thought, Institutionalism went beyond academics to deliberately engage politicians and the public to influence economic policy. Therefore, what constitutes contributions to Wisconsin Institutionalism must be broadly defined to include these applications (Rutherford 2006 and 2011). In doing so, the importance of Wisconsin women in building this body of work becomes apparent. The strong connection between research and political activism can be seen in the careers of many of Commons' female students. Their work for government agencies and for political organizations was thus an important way in which Institutionalism was diffused.

One implication of Commons' emphasis on practical experience and policy reform was "to the young Wisconsin Institutionalists . . . a position in government likely seemed more exciting and important than it would have seemed to a graduate student trained in a more orthodox program" (Biddle 1998, 113–114). Wisconsin graduates of all sexes were more likely than those from comparable schools to spend a portion of their early career years working for government (Biddle 1998). In Commons' obituary, it was reported that more than 30 former students became economists for the federal government (*Milwaukee Journal*, 13 May, 1945, 12). At the annual Commons birthday dinner in 1950, Witte listed some, including several prominent women:

Commons' students went everywhere and many of them made great contributions . . . [they] have made real contributions of a practical nature to human betterment . . . [including those] whose careers were mainly in the public service . . . Arthur Altmeyer, William Leiserson, Katherine Lenroot, Ewan Clague – and on a state level, Paul Rauschenbush, Maud Swett, and Meredith Givens.

*Genovese 1998, 116*

Their inclusion in the list is indicative of the depth to which women were integrated into the policymaking agenda of the Wisconsin Institutionalists.

Government was the primary employer of more than half of Wisconsin's female economists (Appendix 12.1), more than double the rate at which men from Wisconsin took jobs in government (Biddle 1998).<sup>15</sup> Many worked for the Women's and the Children's Bureaus in Washington, D.C., including Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, Elizabeth Paschal, Helen Witmer, and Marie Correll. Katherine Lenroot became the third Chief of the Children's Bureau and Witmer the Director of the Division of Research. Helen Sumner Woodbury conducted research for various federal government agencies as an independent contractor before joining the Children's Bureau as an industrial expert. She later became the assistant chief and chief investigator (Lobdell 2000). Paschal became the first female division chief at the Social Security Administration, overseeing the Program Planning Branch of the Bureau of Old Age and Survivors Insurance. Florence Peterson spent many years as the director of industrial relations at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Gertrude Schmidt Weiss was at the Department of Labor along with Ruth Scandrett, who was their senior industrial economist. Margaret Smith worked at the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics and for the Department of Agriculture; Margaret Purcell also worked for the Department of Agriculture. Wisconsin economists also had a high profile at the U.S. Department of Labor, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Social Security Administration as well as at the Industrial Commission of Wisconsin.<sup>16</sup>

In these positions, Wisconsin women used Institutional methods and insights to foster reform. The influence of Wisconsin Institutionalism can be seen in the studies conducted and the collection of expansive data sets. Many Wisconsin women, such as Elizabeth Paschal

and Helen Witmer, started their government careers as researchers, hired based on their field work experience at Wisconsin. Katherine Lenroot and Emma Lundberg oversaw extensive surveys on the juvenile court system for the Children's Bureau. Lundberg's *Public Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children* (1928) reported on data collected about the women and children in various government programs, identifying ages, locations, and programs used. She also looked at aid in relation to standards of living. She did a similar analysis for the state of New York. She also wrote a number of government handbooks (1927). Florence Peterson wrote a definitive history of strikes in the United States, chronicling more than 80 separate incidences for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1938). These projects were leveraged to influence policy makers and to underpin legislation (Rutherford 2011). Wisconsin women were almost exclusively responsible for the development and implementation of New Deal programs for women and children.<sup>17</sup>

Besides those working in government, many other Wisconsin women applied Institutionalism theory and methods by writing legislation. Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush was a co-author of the nation's first unemployment insurance program, the Wisconsin Unemployment Reserves Act (1934), and she assisted in drafting significant portions of the Social Security Act. Emma Lundberg later added the child welfare provisions to the Act. Katherine Lenroot made substantial contributions to the minimum wage law in Wisconsin and to Aid to Dependent Children (Title V and VI of the Social Security Act). Both Irene Osgood Andrews and Teresa Schmid McMahon contributed to state-level minimum wage legislation, limits to the working day, maternity policies, and labor law enforcement. As part of this, each served on state-level minimum wage boards.

Applications of Institutionalism came not only from within government but also from organizations attempting to change government. The academic research conducted by Wisconsin economists was meant to support labor reform, and the two often went hand-in-hand. Many women worked as contract researchers for the A.A.L.L., whose organizational brief was to craft progressive labor legislation on worker rights, worker safety, and unemployment and social insurance programs (Kaufman 2003; Leonard 2016). A major contributor, the A.A.L.L. relied on Irene Osgood Andrews as the long-time assistant secretary. Osgood Andrews wrote extensively on labor issues for *American Legislative Labor Review* as part of her job, directly influencing labor laws on maternity leave, minimum wages, factory inspections, and child labor.

Though only obliquely glimpsed, it is evident that while women lacked opportunities generally, Wisconsin was one place where there were a large number of women studying economics and where women were given real opportunities to practice economics. Commons' particular teaching and working methods meant that undergraduate and graduate students got experience in field research, writing legislation, and policy making. This created skills as well as opportunities, though primarily in government agencies. Whether government and organizations such as the A.A.L.L. were the preferred choices for employment by Wisconsin women, or became the choice because the opportunities in academics were few, is unknown.

### **Women and the decline of Wisconsin Institutionalism**

By the end of the Second World War, Wisconsin Institutionalism was in decline. Wisconsin had lost its position in the national departmental rankings (Lampman 1993). Wisconsin faculty dropped from seventh to eleventh in terms of the share of publications in the *American Economic*

Review; publications by Wisconsin PhDs in top journals fell precipitously (Backhouse 1998). Increasingly, Wisconsin was finding it difficult to place graduates in good positions (Johnson 2015; Lampman 1993; Rutherford 2011).<sup>18</sup> Rutherford (2011 and 2016) suggests that several factors were at play in Wisconsin's decline: the rise of Keynesianism and mathematical economics, Wisconsin Institutionalism's lack of a theoretical core, Wisconsin's tendency to hire their own students, and the central importance of Commons' personality. Others attribute competition from Sociology, Industrial Relations, and Social Work to siphoning off talent from the economics program (Kaufman 1993). That so many Wisconsin-trained economists chose government over academia has been cited as another reason for the decline of Wisconsin Institutionalism, as fewer academics were available to train subsequent generations (Backhouse 1998; Biddle 1998). The history of Wisconsin's women economists offers useful insights for understanding the relative importance of these various factors in explaining the decline of Wisconsin Institutionalism.

As a preliminary step, it is necessary to consider why women came to study at Wisconsin in the first place. The women who enrolled at Wisconsin were much less likely to be local than their male counterparts, and hence chose to go to Wisconsin, not out of convenience, but for other reasons. Looming large was Commons' national reputation. Elizabeth Paschal stated that "that's really why I went to the University of Wisconsin, to do graduate study with John R. Commons" (1996, 103). Teresa Schmid McMahon, Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, and Jean Scobie Davis make the same claim (Lampman 1993; Davis 2014). New York socialite Evelyn Preston chose to pursue a Masters' degree at Wisconsin because of her interest in labor reform and the institution's association with Commons (Tamboukou 2017).

Commons provided the energy and central focus for the department for nearly 20 years, which was much missed following his retirement in 1933. Wisconsin Institutionalism correspondingly lost much of its identity and impetus for innovation. Reflective of these changes, the number of women doctoral students at Wisconsin dwindled to nearly zero, though the numbers at Columbia, Chicago, Harvard and other institutions grew. Between 1935 and 1940, the immediate period following Commons' retirement, Wisconsin reported three women doctoral candidates to the *AER* list. Columbia reported 79, Chicago reported 34, Harvard reported 35, and all other institutions combined reported 85 women doctoral candidates. That Wisconsin was no longer able to attract some of the great woman scholars of the era meant fewer publications and fewer qualified candidates for academic and high-level government positions over the next decade.

A second factor at the intersection of the story of Wisconsin women and the decline of Wisconsin Institutionalism was competition from newly established fields in Industrial Relations and Social Work (Kaufman 1993). While there was overlap between economics generally and these fields, the extent of the overlap of interest was much more strongly evident at Wisconsin than at other top programs. Formidable scholars and activists who had trained under Commons, including Helen Clarke, Helen Witmer, and Katherine Lumpkin became increasingly associated with Social Work, and Florence Peterson with Industrial Relations. In the process, their publications moved out of economic journals and into journals related to these new fields. Their books were reviewed in *Social Forces*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *British Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Journal of Educational Sociology*, and the *Journal of Health and Human Behavior*.

Compounding the problem, the University of Wisconsin established its School for Social Work in 1946, which was spun off from the Economics Department, taking faculty, students, and resources (Lampman 1993). Social Work doctoral degree candidates were entirely women

for the school's first decade. Whether this was by choice or by encouragement is unknown; but it is apparent from the Graduation Bulletins that women interested in topics at the intersection of economics, sociology, and social reform were matriculating in the School for Social Work rather than the Economics Department.

A third and more controversial explanation centers on the employment options for Wisconsin-trained women economists. Commons invested time and resources in the intellectual development of his women students. This paid off in their contributions to his research agenda and in terms of effecting labor and social reform in government. However, to carry on as a strong academic program, sufficient students must be placed in academia in economics departments. During this period, there were few opportunities for women to achieve good placements at ranking institutions that trained graduate students. Elizabeth Paschal, for example, was frustrated by the lack of opportunities for women in academia and thus went to work in government (Paschal 1996, 37–38). Even the women surveyed here who had opportunities at top-ranking institutions were often not teaching graduate students (Grace Zorbaugh, Katherine Lumpkin), did not supervise PhD students (Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, Theresa Schmid McMahan), or worked in departments other than economics (Katherine Lumpkin, Margaret Schaffner, Helen Witmer).

While evidence supporting the “failure to replicate” hypothesis is highly mixed for men (Biddle 1998), it is apparent that many talented women graduates went to work in government where they were less likely to publish in economics journals or to train new Institutionalists. As Elizabeth Paschal (1996, 126) noted: “I had a doctorate in labor economics and had worked for the American Federation of Labor. But I was not working as an economist particularly” at the U.S. Department of Labor.

## Conclusions

This chapter examines the contributions made by women economists to Wisconsin Institutionalism. They did so through their publications, their teaching, and their applications in government, legislative work, and social reform efforts. They also did so by disproportionately exhibiting many of the features used to distinguish Wisconsin Institutionalists – a focus on labor economics, empiricism, policy and legislative activism, as well as a tendency to be employed in government (Leonard 2016; Johnson 2015; Rutherford 2011). Thus, Wisconsin-trained women both reinforced perceptions of what Wisconsin Institutionalism was and played a pivotal role in diffusing the Institutional viewpoint.

Their story also uniquely contributes to our understanding of the reasons for the decline of Wisconsin Institutionalism in the post-war period. Lacking a theoretical core or a clearly defined methodology, Wisconsin Institutionalism's success was in the volume of work created under Commons and the ability of Commons and his students to motivate labor and social reforms. Once Commons retired, the central core of what could be defined as Wisconsin Institutionalism lacked his stabilizing influence and fragmented. Wisconsin's brand of economics became diluted until it was no longer clearly recognized as economic theory proper. While many factors played a role, the stories of Wisconsin's women economists illustrate the importance of Commons for recruiting students, the role competition from new fields of study played, and the impact of placing few students in academic jobs in economics on publications for the field of economics. The loss of these women thus both contributed to Wisconsin's decline and was reflective of it.

Appendix 12.1 Summary of contributions by women to Wisconsin Institutionalism

Name Degree and date	Dissertation title Number of publications listed in Google Scholar	Government and legislative work	Applications and activism	Academic or related positions
Irene Osgood Andrews (1879–1963) AB 1905	— 11 She wrote extensively for the <i>American Labor Legislative Review</i>	National Industrial Commission With the A.A.L.: minimum wages, working conditions, factory inspections, maternity policies	Associated Charities in Minneapolis, Red Cross, Northwestern Settlement, University Settlement House in Milwaukee	—
Helen Page Bates (1870–1933) PhD 1896	State Irrigation in the Australian Colonies 1	—	Hull House, Goodrich House	Lecturer at Wisconsin, Professor of Economics at Rockford College, Librarian for Dept. of Economics, UC Berkeley
Anna Campbell Davis (1896–1991) PhD 1927	Law and Economics in the Commodity Transaction —	District Supervisor Family Relief Agency in Illinois, Women's Division of Wisconsin Civil Works, Wisconsin Committee on Women's Employment	Women's suffrage movement, YWCA, ACLU, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Madison Consumer's Cooperative, University of Wisconsin Credit Union	—
Jean Scobie Davis (1892–1985) PhD 1929	Labor Management in Southern Cotton Mills —	New York State Correctional Facility, Board of Visitors to the New York State Reformatory for Women	Settlement houses in NYC, summer camp for low- wage workers, field work on the development of professional social work in the south and investigator of prison conditions in the U.K., Russia and Finland Unknown	Professor of Economics at Wells College; also instructor/ assistant professor at Agnes Scott College, Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, Vassar College, Piece College and the American Women's College in Beirut Professor of Economics at Mount Holyoke
Ethel Dietrich (1891– unknown) PhD 1921	Collective Bargaining in the Book and Job Printing Industry 13	Unknown	Unknown	—

(continued)



Appendix 12.1 (continued)

Name Degree and date	Dissertation title Number of publications listed in Google Scholar	Government and legislative work	Applications and activism	Academic or related positions
Margaret Pryor Glicksman (1894–1972) PhD 1927	Place of Consumption in Economic Theory 1	War Industry Commission Research and report to support the 1927 Uniform Small Loan Law, resulted in state bills in 1931	First board member and director for University of Wisconsin Credit Union, Madison League of Women Voters	Instructor of Economics at Wisconsin (until 1936 when forced to retire due to anti- nepotism laws)
Elsie Glück (1908–1997) PhD 1929	John Mitchell, Mimer: Labor's Bargain with the Gilded Age 8	Works Progress Administration	International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, other women's trade unions	Part-time instructor at the New School for Social Research
Constance Kiehel (unknown) PhD 1935	Unemployment Insurance in Belgium 11	Division of Research and Statistics, Social Security Board	Unknown	—
Katherine Lenroot (1896–1984) BA 1912	— 30 Primarily Children's Bureau Reports and articles on Children's health, education, and safety	WI State Industrial Commission, Children's Bureau (including Chief), Advisory Committee of Social Questions, League of Nations, consultant to the United Nations	President of the National Conference of Social Work, various positions with the League of Nations on children's welfare, created the United Nations	—
Katherine Lumpkin (1897–1988) PhD in Sociology in 1928 (Commons on Committee)	Social Situations and Girl Delinquency: A Study of the Commitments to the Wisconsin Industrial School 2	WI Minimum Wage, Reform of Juvenile Care, Children's Welfare, developed Aid to Dependent Children (Title V and VI of Social Security) State Board of Directors for Justice	YWCA National Student Secretary, activist against racial oppression, League of Women Voters	Instructor Mount Holyoke, post-doctoral research fellow at Social Science Research Council, Research Director of the Council of Industrial Studies of Smith College, Professor of Sociology at Wells College, extension instructor University of Virginia



Emma Octavia Lundberg (1881–1954) MA 1914	— 20	Industrial Commission of Wisconsin, Director of the Social Services Division of the Children's Bureau, Director of Research and Statistics at the New York Temporary Emergency Relief Administration Social Security Act (children welfare provisions)	Children's Welfare League of America	—
Theresa Schmid McMahon (1878–1963) PhD 1909	— 4	WA Minimum Wage Board, National Advisory Board on Social Security WA state minimum wage, 8-hour work day, women's labor rights	Hull House	Professor of Economics, University of Washington
Jane Newell (unknown) PhD 1908	— 2	—	—	Professor of Economics at Wellesley College
Elizabeth Paschal (1903–1997?) PhD 1933	3	Worker's Equity in His Job	Ford Foundation	Occasional Professor, Marietta College, Eureka College, New Jersey College for Women
Florence Peterson (1881–1968) MA 1930	— 3	Economist at the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Social Security Administration Wisconsin State Industrial Commission, Bureau of Labor Statistics	—	—

(continued)

Appendix 12.1 (continued)

Name Degree and date	Dissertation title Number of publications listed in Google Scholar	Government and legislative work	Applications and activism	Academic or related positions
Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush (1896–1984) PhD 1928	Wage Earner and the Common Rule 11	Minimum Wage Board, Wisconsin State Industrial Commission, Social Security Board, Migratory Labor in WI, Labor Department's Advisory Committee on Young Workers WI state unemployment insurance law; national unemployment insurance, Social Security law	—	Lecturer then Professor of Economics at Wisconsin
Margaret Schaffner (unknown) PhD 1902	Labor Contract with Collective Bargaining 2	—	—	Instructor of Economics and Sociology at the University of Iowa
Alice Shoemaker (1892–1973) MA 1927	— —	US Department of Labor Women's labor rights, women's education	First volunteer member of the University of Wisconsin Union's Credit Committee, YWCA	Wisconsin Extension School for Workers, Summer Schools for Working Women/ Industrial Workers, Director of Program
Maude Swett (1895–1964) MA 1912	— 1	Director of the Women and Child Division of the Wisconsin State Industrial Commission Children's welfare laws, family welfare laws	—	—

Genevieve Townsend (1901–1966) MA 1933 (?)	— 1	Supervisor of the Public Welfare Departments	Study of small money loans in Wisconsin, including investigative field work on banks, employer's plans, pawnbrokers, etc. Industrial Secretary YWCA, Secretary-Treasurer of Local Union 223 of the American Federation of Teachers	Research Assistant for Wisconsin Department of Economics, Summer School for Industrial Workers
Jennie Turner (unknown) PhD 1922	4	Supervisor of Teacher Training for the State Board of Education in Wisconsin	Women's rights, apprentice education	Courses for the State Board of Vocational and Adult Education
Gertrude Schmidt Weiss (unknown) PhD 1933	—	U.S. Department of Labor & Bureau of Home Economics Extensive government reports on family income and expenditures	—	—
Helen Witmer (1898–1979) MA 1925	— 78	Massachusetts Division of Corrections, Director of Research for the United State Children's Bureau	Director of fact-finding for the White House Conference on Children and Youth	Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Minnesota, Director of Research at the Smith College School for Social Work, UCLA
Helen Sumner Woodbury (1876–1933) PhD 1908	28	Contract Government Work, Children's Bureau	—	—
Grace M. Zorbaugh (dates unknown) PhD 1926	5	—	Industrial investigations, credit unions, employment cooperatives	Associate Professor of Economics and Dean of Women, The Ohio State University

## Notes

- 1 An estimate of the absolute numbers of women pursuing doctoral degrees in economics across institutions can be made from the *American Economic Review's* (*AER*) "Lists of Doctoral Dissertations in Political Economy in Progress in American Universities and Colleges." Between 1910 and 1932, Wisconsin had 25 women doctoral candidates in economics. Columbia had 72, Chicago had 57 and Harvard/Radcliffe had 42. Only 71 women pursued PhDs at all other institutions combined.
- 2 Elizabeth Paschal remembered "Commons was, of course, a very unusual man. He had his graduate students come to his house about once a week for dinner, all the graduate students . . . [it was] a very inspiring and interesting situation" (1996, 30).
- 3 Twenty-five of these women are detailed in Appendix 12.1.
- 4 Helen Stuart Campbell's experience at Wisconsin is illustrative of the difficulties faced by women in this early period. A social reformer, popular lecturer, and activist in the settlement house movement, evidences many of the interests of the Wisconsin Institutionalists.  
 Stuart Campbell came to study at Wisconsin with Ely in 1893. During this time, Ely wrote the introduction to her book, *Women Wage-Earners* (1893), which had previously won the AEA essay competition in 1891. Ely persuaded the university regents to invite Campbell to give a series of lectures, which she did in the spring of 1895. These were published as *Household Economics* (1897). However, despite Ely's efforts, the university did not offer Stuart Campbell a permanent position. See Davis (2000) for details.
- 5 In addition to the 17 PhDs listed by Lampman (1993), I identify Jane Newell from the University of Wisconsin Graduation Bulletin for 1908. Kirsten Madden (2002) reports Wisconsin granted 26 PhDs to women with dissertation titles associated with economic concepts between 1900 and 1940. Some of the difference is likely attributable to degrees issued by related departments such as Sociology, Social Work, Business or Home Economics.
- 6 Out of the 48 dissertations overseen by Commons (42 percent of the total at Wisconsin during this period), 30 dealt directly with labor issues. Ten of these were produced by women (out of 12 by women in total).
- 7 These include Caroline MacGill on unpaid services (1910), Roberta Pritchard on heredity in relation to the control of defectives (1910), Rhonda White (Wisconsin AB) on the morality of the city population (1910), Emma Lundberg (Wisconsin BA, MA) on personal inefficiency as related to family and social conditions (1911), Roberta Hodgson (Wisconsin BA) on types and traits of Negroes of Athens, Georgia (1911), Katherine Lumpkin on social situations and girl delinquency (1928), Marie Correll on the paper industry in its technological business and labor aspects (1930), and Ruth Dunham (Wisconsin BA, MA) on the relation between tobacco cultivation and western land speculation (1940). The last three were listed as completed by *AER* but were not listed in the University of Wisconsin Graduation Bulletin.
- 8 Ely reported that his daughter was studying for a PhD in economics (Ely 1938, 205), but it was apparently not completed. Ely Morehouse became a notable proponent of racial justice and, as part of her activities, published a revised version of *Social Problems, A Study of Present Day Conditions* (1931) with Ezra Thayer Towne.
- 9 Additional women trained by Commons and holding Master's or undergraduate degrees who taught economics courses at Wisconsin include Alma Bridgeman, Mary Shine Peterson, Miriam Frye, Irene Hensey, and Helen Clarke (Lampman 1993, 292). It should be noted that women were much more likely to be placed in secretarial and administrative-assistant jobs and less likely to be recommended to the NBER or to receive grant funding.
- 10 It is difficult to achieve good estimates of the number of women earning undergraduate degrees in economics at Wisconsin because the university did not list students by major in the graduation bulletins until 1921 and then only sporadically thereafter.
- 11 Rosalind Tough (BA and MA from Wisconsin 1924, 1925) earned her PhD at Northwestern. Frieda Figelman and Nina Miller earned their undergraduate degrees from Wisconsin (1909, 1915) and their PhDs from Columbia (1915, 1921).
- 12 Grace Zorbaugh and Gertrude Schmidt Weiss each had two hits, one reference for their dissertation and one for AEA membership. Jean Scobie Davis had her dissertation listed. Margaret Schaffner had one publication in the *AAAPSS*.
- 13 The prize was established to offer \$1,500 for the best essay on the subject of "What can a man afford?" Somewhat ironically, the first award was shared by Paul and Dorothy Douglas (Fetter 1921, v-vi). Osgood Andrews served on the committee with James Tufts, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago, and Frank Fetter, Professor of Political Economy at Princeton.

- 14 Commons required undergraduates in his labor economics course to conduct research in support of new legislation and to testify in local or state hearings as part of the course requirements. Katherine Lenroot believed that her experience preparing a minimum wage brief and testifying before the state legislature led to her first job with the Wisconsin State Industrial Commission (Biographical Note, Katherine Lenroot Papers).
- 15 One difficulty with chronicling the careers of women economists is that they were more likely to be part-time or engaged in contract work than men during this period. Many of the women trained at Wisconsin held multiple and sometimes overlapping jobs. For example, Elsie Glück not only worked for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), she also taught courses in Labor and Contemporary American Economics for the New School for Social Research.
- 16 Elizabeth Paschal credited her first position to the Wisconsin network in D.C. “I suppose someone from the University of Wisconsin recommended me for it. There were a number of people in the Bureau of Labor Statistics who had graduated from Wisconsin” (1996, 45).
- 17 Details on the development and adoption of such programs can be found in Leonard (2016).
- 18 Martin Bronfenbrenner placed some of the blame on Alma Bridgeman, a Wisconsin MA and the department secretary, for recommending “inferior graduate students to good places” (in Lampman 1993, 136). Another loyal Commons supporter, Bridgeman played a significant role in assigning teaching assistantships, allocating fellowships, and recommending graduate students for employment outside the university. Bronfenbrenner’s claim is representative of his personal antipathy to Bridgman and his general dislike of Institutionalism (Johnson 2015).

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