

Appreciations and Acknowledgments ©

This extended essay is intended to serve only as an introduction to one of the most extraordinary New Yorkers of either gender and of any generation: Katharine Bement Davis.

In no way is this essay offered as the comprehensive or definitive statement on that individual who spent a half century blazing new trails in so many fields: higher education, urban sociology, penology, municipal government, sexual practices research, women's rights.

Against this background, her work at the Chicago world's fair and in Sicily after the earthquake — which in an ordinary lifetime might stand out as somewhat spectacular — pale to mere passing episodes. Studying her life is like wandering through the gardens, groves and glades of a great old estate, the kind where each turn in the path opens a different vista, some new setting worth exploring.

The nature of this introductory essay, and its context, precludes investigating many interesting issues involving Progressive era attitudes about female criminality in general and prostitution in particular, feeble-mindedness and human heredity, public health policy and social hygiene, government interventions and individual rights.

These and related questions of that era are being revisited by scholars doing critical analysis in the light of contemporary values. This is mentioned here to put on notice any aspiring Davis scholars. If they are not already aware of it, then they should be alerted that these sensitive subjects offer opportunity for fresh research and hopefully even fresher thinking, whether to validate or refute, whether to follow or to challenge this or that school of historical analysis. In brief, KBD history is not dead and buried but alive and kicking.

The essay was not written as a vehicle for the expression of viewpoints, but to the extent that viewpoints are reflected (history is hard to write without a starting viewpoint or two), they are perforce my own, as are any errors of fact or interpretation of fact. My admiration for Davis must be obvious to anyone who has read these pages. But that admiration, this biography and its display here should not be interpreted as blanket endorsements

of every Davis position on every issue of her times during her career of more than a half century.

Purpose and Process

Most of the research in libraries and among archives was done off-hours. Virtually all the actual writing was done at home evenings and weekends as was most of the HTML and DTP. Even some GIF graphics were created using my trusty handscanner at home. The author undertook this work, on his own initiative, with multiple purposes in mind: for an independent graduate study project, for a possible future book, for Department use in its newsletter, Web pages, and such other ways as it deems fit. The Department's support -- especially the encouragement of Deputy Commissioner for Public Information Thomas Antenen, Correction Officer Robert Montes for his photo of photos, and my other colleagues in the Public Information Office -- was important throughout and at critical junctures, a fact I gratefully acknowledge.

On a personal note, I want to thank my sons, Michael, the attorney/law school librarian, and Christopher, the math instructor/Ph.D. student, for their help with research, reference and books; and, lastly but never least, thank my wife, Antoinette Esq. who, when I told her about this "other woman" in my life, displayed disconcerting nonchalance: "She'd be 137 years old now if she hadn't died 62 years ago at age 75? I can handle this."

Original Davis Study Contributions

Some points covered in this essay will not be found in the other studies listed and may constitute, the author immodestly hopes, original contributions to the study of Katharine Bement Davis. The hedge word "may" is used lest there be some prior reference in a scholarly journal article or book somewhere in the field that he has not yet read.

Among the points in this essay that may be original in the field are:

—Davis' involvement through the St. Mary's Street Settlement in the DuBois study (sources: Settlement annual reports, response to inquiries at the Wharton School);

—Davis islands in Georgian Bay and other family matters. (sources: YWCA archives documents, the Ruth H. McCuaig book, the Davis family);

—Davis' apparently unprecedented statewide candidacy to spot-

light the cause of woman suffrage (sources: documents in the Rockefeller Archives Center and the Vassar College Library Special Collections and response to inquiries at the New York State Archives);

—Davis’ complete makeover of the Department of Correction annual report format (sources: annual reports at the New York Municipal Archives and DOC headquarters).

—Davis’ fund-raising for the chapel at the Alderson, West Virginia, federal prison for women (sources: documents at the Vassar College Libraries Special Collection, an unexplained photo illustrating Jean Henry Large’s article, and materials provided by the Alderson archivist.)

Davis’ review of DuBois’ book is mentioned by other listed writers but not how she and the Settlement House she headed were involved in his study.

The McCuaig’s delightful book is not a study of KBD but a history of Pointe au Baril in which “Katherine Davis” is mentioned in passing without any personal identification other than being the sister to early island purchaser Helen A. Davis and to Hamilton C. Davis, founder/owner of the island Ojibway Hotel resort. Neither Helen’s YWCA role or Katharine’s profession as penologist/social worker are mentioned at all. The two sisters simply were Baril area “islanders” or “cottagers.” The unspoken commandment in the resort community appears to have been: “Thou Shall Not Inquire About Nor Discuss Thy Neighbor’s Non-Baril Career, Business or Professional Life.”

Jean Henry Large’s essay on KBD appeared in the University of Chicago Magazine with a photo of a building that showed “KATHARINE B. DAVIS HALL” in big capital letters over the front door. The caption read simply “Davis Hall, Reception and Classification Building at Alderson, W.Va.” No other explanation for the use of the photo appears — not what Alderson is or how the hall came to be named for Davis.

Acknowledgments I

In addition to research primary sources in libraries and archives, the author also has utilized the few but excellent works of others who have researched her life too. He has been privileged to discuss, by phone and/or email, specific points of historical interest with some of them. They and others who provided help are listed below in public acknowledgment of the apprecia-

tion I already have expressed to them. Because this essay was written for general readership, the text is not annotated. In lieu of formal footnotes and bibliography, these lists provide useful information for those also studying the subject.

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Other published resources

- Sanford Bates, Director, Federal Bureau of Prisons, *Federal Industrial Institution for Women, Alderson, West Virginia*, undated booklet with photos.
- Vern L. Bullough, *Katharine Bement Davis, Sex research and the Rockefeller Foundation*, from a paper presented at the 59th annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine, Rochester, N.Y., April 30, 1986.
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- Marilyn D. McShane and Frank P. Williams, *Encyclopedia of American Prisons*, Garland, 1996.
- Gustavus Myers, *The History of Tammany Hall*, originally published in 1917 and republished by Dover Publications, New York, 1971.

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